

# Seminar Abstracts

Doug Arrell

The Repertory System as Practiced by the Admiral's Men, 1594–97

The practice of offering a different play every day of the week was an incredibly demanding one for the Admiral's Men, but they stuck with it with great tenacity. The modern reasons for using the repertory system, including giving the actors a break between performances or providing a variety of offerings for tourists, do not seem to explain the much more extreme version used in the 1590s. It seems that the best explanation for the practice is that the company is seeking to entice a habitu  audience to see again plays they have already seen, spacing them to minimize overfamiliarity. This audience consisted of perhaps one to two thousand people, and the evidence suggests that they were mainly gentry. This group must have played a central role in the development of art of the theatre in the 1590s.

Roberta Barker

Birth of a Tragedy Queen: Richard Robinson and the Repertory of the King's Men, 1610–11

In his 2004 essay, "The Sharer and His Boy," Scott McMillin hypothesized that what he called "restricted roles" in early modern English drama, in which female characters take cue lines only from a small group of other characters, were produced by moments when "a new generation of leading boy actors was being trained and rehearsed by their masters" (240). He argued that the year 1610 was likely one such moment, citing the fact that *Othello* and *The Alchemist*, two plays that feature "restricted roles," were performed in repertory together in Oxford in that year (Jackson 2002). McMillin believed that we could not know the names of the boys who played the leading female roles in Oxford or whether they really were in training in the year 1610. Thanks to David Kathman's ground-breaking work on the boys of King's Men, however, we can now guess that their names may have been Richard Robinson and George Birch, and that, if so, they *were* new to the company at this time. Building on McMillin's arguments, my paper will apply his hypothesis to two new plays that entered the King's Men's repertory around 1610, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, asking how they might have interacted with plays like *Othello* within the company's repertory to shape the training of Robinson as its new leading tragic boy. By

examining the parts of Hermione and Aspatia as “restricted roles,” we can learn more about how repertory playing contributed not only to the enskillment of this early modern boy actor, but also to the making of his popular reputation.

## Meredith Beales

### Sequels, Sequelitis, and Genre: The Completion Problem

Contemporary Shakespeare productions, especially in theatre festivals, tend to highlight the obvious advantages of the repertory approach when playing sequels in rep: the 2016 Stratford Festival production of the second tetralogy, for example, cast the same actors in the same parts in each play (while also collapsing four plays into two). But a festival that follows this approach promptly encounters another set of problems: should all plays in a series be given the same weight? Is the story ‘complete’ if only some of the story is played out onstage—if, for example, the play ends before King Henry has defeated the French, or even been crowned king? This focus on the “completeness” of each story-cycle elides the much more chaotic circumstances of their early modern production: it’s not at all clear, for example, that Shakespeare planned the second tetralogy as a four-play cycle, let alone that Marlowe wrote *Tamburlaine* with an eye to the two-play arc. Recent work on repertories suggests, instead, that they allowed play companies to respond to audience tastes in a nimble and even contingent fashion. This paper will suggest that foregrounding that contingency should alter our understanding of the relationship between ostensible sequels, series, and history-cycles in early modern play repertories.

## Paul Brown

### The Economics of Collaborative Drama in Repertory

Different early modern acting companies staged co-authored drama at vastly different rates. In a theatrical world where one in four plays were co-authored, companies deviated from this average. For instance, about half the plays the Admiral’s men, as best we can tell, were co-authored, whereas one in five plays put on by the Chamberlain’s/King’s men were collaboratively written. Around 40% of the Lady Elizabeth’s men’s plays were co-authored, but none of the 60 plays known to have been staged by Queen Henrietta Maria’s men were co-authored. We do not know what caused such a deviation along company lines. One place to

begin to look for an answer is in the economics of a company's repertory. Specifically, we can ask, how popular were co-authored plays in the company's repertory? Was this a driver for the amount of co-authored plays a company produced? This paper does just that. Much of this work must be concerned with the records left to us in what we now call Philip Henslowe's diary. Neil Carson's companion to the diary got close to looking at this issue in seeing what percentage of plays staged in given seasons were co-authored. More recently, Elizabeth Tavares has looked wholesale at the diary's financial records and given us mounds of new information. This paper borrows from the approach of both and extends their work by asking just what repertory records can tell us about a company's rate of co authored versus sole authored drama.

## Catriona Fallow

In Rep or Out of Step?: New Writing and Contemporary Repertory at the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe

The Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) and Shakespeare's Globe's explicit commitment to exploring and staging Shakespeare's works has, for the most part, dominated critical and popular understandings of both institutions and their primary cultural function. While not unwarranted, this focus risks obscuring another significant strand of both institutions' repertoires: new work by contemporary playwrights and practitioners. Typically framed as a reciprocal, mutually beneficial 'exchange' between past and present, canon and contemporary, these new works form a distinct corpus of plays that deploy a range of different dramaturgical, conceptual or formal approaches to navigating their position in rep with the work of Shakespeare. In order to interrogate the ideology of reciprocity that frames the work of contemporary playwrights at the RSC and the Globe, this paper focuses on the potential dissonance or challenge that these new plays might represent within these institutional contexts. In so doing, it explores how the repertory system is a key agent in sustaining the "cross-fertilisation" (Chambers 2004) between classical and contemporary works, while also offering a useful framework within which to question its limitations.

## Peter Kirwan

Artist Development and Collective Therapy in the Repertory: The Case of *After Edward*

Modern repertory systems allow for the enhancement of both audience pleasure, tracing actors across multiple productions, and development of metatheatrical artistic purpose, especially in

thematic casting that creates connections between productions. But the repertory approach, especially when combined with a single ensemble, can also enhance artist development by granting resources to ensemble members to develop agency through collaboration. This paper takes the case of Tom Stuart's *After Edward*, performed at Shakespeare's Globe in 2019, as a case study of a major theatre using its repertory system for political purpose through artist development. Stuart, who played the role of Edward II in the company's concurrent production of Marlowe's play, was invited to write a response play that reflected on his own experience of rehearsing for the role as a gay man. Performed by the same ensemble in repertory with *Edward II*, *After Edward* enacted a praxis of artist development by turning over the human and physical resources of the theatre to a personal narrative of self-discovery. In so doing, the dual productions modelled a practice that depended on asynchronous viewing and investment in the actors' own process, utilising repertory as a means of exploring solidarity in the face of homophobia.

## Roslyn Knutson

Bulk Acquisitions: The Admiral's Men and Pembroke's Plays, 1597–98

In the late summer of 1597, the Admiral's men acquired plays and players from the company of Pembroke's men who had recently been performing at the Swan playhouse. This moment in adult company business is the most clearly documented example of repertorial assimilation by one company of another's playbooks. It is therefore an opportunity to ask questions about the repertorial practices of the Admiral's men specifically and the market value of secondhand plays generally: for example, what might the Admiral's men have been thinking in acquiring these particular plays, given the repertory they were currently offering? How did these acquisitions factor into their offerings at the Rose right away and long term? Does this one moment in one company's business suggest useful conclusions about the repertorial practices across the adult-company industry in the last decades of the Elizabethan period?

## Emily MacLeod

"You shall see me do the Moor": The Blackfriars Children Performing Race in *Poetaster*

The popularity of "foreign" locales and figures in the adult companies' repertory finds its way into the children's repertory with references to *Tamburlaine*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, and *The Spanish Tragedy*. Characters like Quicksilver in the Children of the Queen's Revels play

*Eastward Ho* (c. 1605) repeatedly quote famous lines from these plays. In Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (c. 1601), a boy player performs a scene from *Alcazar* as "the Moor" while sitting on another boy's shoulders. These parodies of adult performances in the children's repertory are not only instructive in regards to the language of playing style and physicality, but also because they are specifically linked to styles of performing racialized otherness and "foreignness" on the early modern stage. The Blackfriars children's repertory, especially in the early seventeenth century, did not include many racially "othered" characters. I argue that the parodies of these characters allowed for showcasing of playing skill only associated up to this point on the professional stage with adult actors. By loading these plays with intertheatrical references to racialized characters, the Children of the Queen's Revels were using racial impersonation in a self-conscious, parodic way to highlight their own skills and appeal to audience taste.

## Kevin Quarmby

### Who Micro-Managed Performance in the Early Modern Repertory?

The Shakespeare aficionado's first port of cultural call has, of course, to be CBS television's *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. Rubbing shoulders with nearly seven million YouTube subscribers, the serious early modern academic learns much about contemporary Shakespeare production and the powerful hold of micro-managing directors. In October 2019, for example, Colbert's guest, the actor Andrew Scott (who played Hamlet in the 2017 Almeida Theatre London production) expressed his dismay that Shakespeare's text is ever edited to shorten its performance time. "I don't think you need to cut it down," Scott opined, adding that, "we binge-watch TV, you know, we watch five hours of television if it's exciting, so the idea is, don't cut it down, just make it four hours of really exciting play." Principal culprit accused of cutting down binge-worthy Bard-play is that arch villain, the theater director. Not content, as David Hare recently argued, with over-aestheticizing contemporary theatrical endeavor, directors are blamed for cutting and editing plays prior to public presentation either to make them more palatable, or to accommodate mid-performance breaks to maximize theater bar takings. Fortunately, as we academics are regularly reminded, this same meddling director was, in the early modern repertory system, nowhere to be seen. Performance-oriented editorial decision-making must, we are told, have rested firmly in the ink-stained hands of the authors and/or the ego-stained memorizing brains of the actors. This paper seeks to interrogate our understanding of editorial agency in the early modern repertory, while inviting alternative appraisals of "cut it down" performance needs in London's playhouses.

## Andy Reilly

Hamlet, Lovemore, Dorimant, and Wildair: Theatrical Ghosts in Robert Wilks' Performances at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 1711–16

While William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Thomas Betterton's *The Amorous Widow*, and George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* are rarely, if ever, read in comparison with each other nowadays, the archive shows that, between 1711 and 1716, they were frequently staged in close temporal proximity with each other at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. In these performances, the actor-manager Robert Wilks, most famous for his role as Sir Harry Wildair in George Farquhar's *The Constant Couple*, played the central roles of Hamlet, Lovemore, and Dorimant, respectively. Making use of Marvin Carlson's concept of "ghosting", this paper argues that contemporary audiences would have been influenced in their interpretation of Hamlet by their experience of seeing Wilks perform in his other rakish roles. By reading these characters side by side, we can begin to uncover some aspects of early eighteenth century understandings of the role. Using quantitative methods of linguistic analysis, this paper suggests that the honorific "madam", in particular, may have evoked the ghosts of Wilks' other roles and introduced elements of those characters into audience interpretations of Hamlet and his relationship with Gertrude.

## Charlene V. Smith

The Henriad in Rep

During 2020 and 2021 Brave Spirits Theatre in Alexandria, VA, will present Shakespeare's eight history plays in repertory. Though major history cycles have been presented in the past, most of them have reduced the number of plays performed, making a full eight-play repertory a rare event. This paper explores the progress and the process of the first year of this undertaking, from casting to the rehearsal and performance of *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. The Brave Spirits' project will also mark the first time a non-equity company has tackled this feat. This paper will consider how such a rehearsal schedule, limited to nights and weekends, impacted the actors' work with each other and on these plays. Brave Spirits has completed several two-show repertories in past seasons, but what are the differences caused by the multiplication of such an effort? Can the effort of play in repertory in a modern theatre, in conditions wholly unlike that of the early modern repertory, still tell us something

about the early modern stage? Finally the paper asks what lessons the company can draw from the first year of the project and bring into year two, as we prepare to stage *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*.