

SAAABSTRACTS FOR CONFERENCE 2020

SHAKESPEARE AND CLASS (Seminar Leader: Chris Fitter)

Jessica Apolloni (Christopher Newport University)

Social Identity and legal performance in Shakespeare's Constables

This paper examines class dynamics within popular representations of local legal officials. I connect rogue literature such as cony-catching tales to Shakespearean constables like Dogberry and Elbow in order to demonstrate how such depictions speak to changes occurring in the English legal system – especially as power transferred from local to centralized authority. The range of critical portrayals of local law enforcement—from cony-catchers who can easily impersonate corrupt constables to the bumbling officials of Shakespeare's plays—highlights the emerging importance of class within the *performance* of the law. As legal professions became increasingly tied to central power and court positions, these popular portrayals illustrate the significance placed on local officials' social identity and performance (rather than communal connections or effectual enforcement) within the shifting legal landscape of early modern England.

Paul Budra (Simon Fraser University)

Affective Strategies of the Subordinate Classes on the Elizabethan Stage

James C. Scott notes, in his description of class resistance among Malaysian peasants, that most forms of class struggle avoid outright defiance in favour of “foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on.” There are many examples of such resistance represented on the early modern stage — for example, when a commoner responds to a query from his social superior with a purposely circuitous answer (eg. *JC* 1.1.9-21). But such encounters are complicated when the lower classes are soliciting remuneration for service. They must strike a balance in their affect between deference and expectation. These exchanges are especially fraught when the expected payment is for a display of wit as opposed to physical labour. Sprezzatura masks material need; the soliciting agent must entertain while displaying social subservience, embodying in miniature the cultural position of the early modern theatrical practitioner. Using Feste's exchange with Orsino in 5.1 of *Twelfth Night* as a test case, I will explore the affective strategies of the subordinate classes in such class-defined social exchanges.

Jeff Doty (University of North Texas)

Status and Networks in *Arden of Faversham*

While official pronouncements from the early modern English regime and church insisted on a timeless and fixed hierarchy, some plays at its public theaters pressed into view the turbulence at the lived experience of social status. No early modern play dramatizes the microdynamics of status as carefully as *Arden of Faversham*. This essay builds on Frank Whigham and Michael Neill's analysis of status in the play, focusing less on the

moment-by-moment contestations for respect evident in characters' language choices than on the broader social ties they try to work for advantage. I use a series of network maps to bring into focus *Arden's* strategies for representing the social world of Reformation-era England. Whereas Franco Moretti uses network mapping to produce data that by which to calculate the "center" of a plot, my interest is in how such graphs might help us visualize status (and the friction it produces between characters) as well as how its plot works (by unfolding new social networks in dramatic time). That it is hard to know where to place some characters, including Alice and Arden, is precisely the point – indeed, our reaction to the play largely depends on where we understand how these characters fit into the social hierarchy that the post-Henrician land market has put in flux. I argue that one aspect of *Arden of Faversham's* brilliance comes from how the playwrights embed the murder in a precise local environment while also showing Faversham and its residents imbricated in England's larger social and political networks.

Eric Dunnum (Campbell University)

Disguise, Class Essentialism and Local Politics in *As You Like It*

At times, Shakespeare seems to portray and reify a particular form of classist ideology – class essentialism, the belief that no matter one's upbringing or current situation, class will tell. In *As You Like It*, this viewpoint is expressed by Orlando when he correctly guesses Rosalind's class position even though he doesn't seem to recognize her gender. And yet, at other times, Shakespeare seems to mock this very idea, as he does in *I Henry IV*. This paper attempts to understand these differing representations of class essentialism through the lens of local politics. That is, instead of trying to trace Shakespeare's shifting positions on class to national or even global events, I will attempt to show that he is responding to a specific political concern of vital interest to the theaters, in this case the increasing political power of the apprentice class and the threat they posed to the theaters. Orlando's character and his views on class essentialism is carefully calibrated to placate and potentially neutralize the threat the apprentices posed to the playhouses. In this play, Shakespeare isn't just representing national politics, he is also doing local politics.

Laurie Ellinghausen (University of Missouri at Kansas City)

"certain condolences, certain veils": *Pericles* and the Counterdiscourse of Labor

"One very obvious feature of romance," writes Northrop Frye, "is its pervasive social snobbery." Much criticism of Shakespeare's late romances confirms that bias by describing the plays as engagements with the culture and politics of the Jacobean court. Alternatively, other scholars have attended to elements of the "popular" in the romances, lighting on such characters as Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* and the fishermen of *Pericles*. Yet both critical strands, while valuable, tend to posit "elite" and "popular" as mutually exclusive categories that confirm class-based hierarchies of

intellectual/moral vs. manual labor. This paper traces a different conversation emerging in *Pericles*, one that embraces pragmatic awareness, everyday labor, and occupational identity a new basis for social and economic value. I propose that these qualities, which are exhibited not only by the fishermen but by noble characters such as Cerimon and Helicanus, make these men better equipped to build and sustain a Mediterranean empire than the wayward Prince of Tyre. By focusing on occupational consciousness, my paper responds to imperialist histories that neglect the role of labor in building and sustaining empire.

Donald Hedrick (Kansas State University)

“Davy, Davy, Davy, let me see, Davy”: Shakespeare and the Class Politics of Minor Characterization

While several scholars have examined (and championed) Shakespeare’s “bit parts,” further attention is warranted to the intriguing case some have noted: his representation of rural Justice Shallow and his manservant Davy in *2 Henry IV*. In only two scenes and thirteen lines of Davy’s, Shakespeare carefully represents key class and cultural issues regarding these relations, controversial at time of the denounced decline of hospitality and rise of “upstarts.” If we apply Bruce Robbins’ analysis of servants as evading surveillance and often therefore as “characterless,” we can bring this observation to consider what must have been a special artistic if not political challenge in the dark 1590s, colliding with Shakespeare’s own achievement at the same time in representing individuality in characterization, the ability to afford the most in the least.

Davy’s lines are examined one-by-one for their focus on aspects of his “business,” as a cover for character with few but revealing exceptions. His work as a steward involves accumulating skills, each line representing abilities in his master’s law practice, in accounting, in agricultural management, personnel (docking a co-worker in the role of “contradictory class location”), doing his best to accommodate guests. He even serves as jovial host for after-dinner drinks with Falstaff, who privately scorns rural Davy and Shallow’s swapping identities, but misses seeing Davy’s ambitious tactics. Shakespeare uses the relation to set up the interruption of Pistol’s news of the death of the king, with implications that for Davy may be monumental. The essay ends with a spectacular claim about what Shakespeare, prefiguring a historical observation by Marx, might well be up to with this minor character.

Marina Leslie (Northeastern University)

Bad Romance: Fraud, Flax-wenches, and “Borrowed Flaunts,”
Reconstructing Class in *Winter’s Tale*

It has long been observed that *The Winter’s Tale*’s debts to Robert Greene extend beyond *Pandosto* to include his popular cony-catching pamphlets and other popular

writings. Steve Mentz, for example, has made the case that the “unruly subtexts” of Greene’s popular rogue literature and published confessions contribute significantly to the “romance master plot” (73), demonstrating the complex traffic between Shakespeare’s play and its source material.

In this essay, I’m particularly interested in how female productive and reproductive labor are recast when Shakespeare conjoins together the romance and roguery he draws from Greene, among others. Although the play’s cheeky criminality is most clearly personified by Autolycus, I will consider how the threat represented by Autolycus, his disguise, his uncertain class position, and his “traffic in sheets,” offers a parallel to—as well as a comic redirection of—the anxieties that center on Perdita’s seeming capacity to pass beyond her class and thus threaten both filial obedience and royal bloodlines. The feared reproductive crises represented by the seeming upstarts, Perdita and Fawnia, are averted in both story lines by the ultimate revelation of their noble births, however, the description and explanatory power of the problem that is exposed when women are seen to usurp their proper social role reveal quite distinct representations of gendered productive labor that ultimately underwrite fundamentally different morals about women, class, and the fruits of their labor.

Sandra Logan (Michigan State University)

Three Versions of Commoning: Commons, Commoning, and the Common Good in *WT*, *AYL*, and *2HVI*

Sixteenth century political theorist Jean Bodin, a monarchist, leaves the correction or punishment of tyrants in divine hands alone, negating the right or responsibility of the people to resist, correct, or rebel against their monarch. Even so, he follows Aristotle in recognizing that the sovereign in any governmental configuration must devote his efforts to supporting the good of the people, not merely that of the state or some fraction of the people. Beyond this, he situates virtually every other aspect of government as either “shared in common or of common concern,” and declares “there is no commonwealth where there is no common interest.” In this paper, linking Bodin to Esposito’s conception of *communitas*, I consider how Shakespeare represents *communio* as the social collaboration around and stewardship of those things shared in common, including, in some cases, the government of the state. Although none of the plays I deal with here – *The Winter’s Tale*, *As You Like It*, or *2 Henry VI* – make these connections directly, each offers juxtapositions which suggest that communio cultivates values and virtues in the microcosm that model good government in the macrocosm, and in one case, that the commons must intervene when misgovernment arises.

Elizabeth McIntosh (Columbia University)

“Paying such a rent”: From commons to commercial agriculture in John Lyly’s *Galatea*

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon has argued that we need to pay more attention to violence that “is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive,” with “calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of

temporal scales.” This paper analyzes moments of “spectacular” natural disruption, such as intense flooding, but it is especially interested in how plays like John Lyly’s *Galatea* represent (and even influence) the repercussions of such events in the long-term, as they unfold in the everyday lives of local citizens. Who, for example, finally benefitted from the re-arrangement of lands necessitated by catastrophic flooding along England’s eastern coastline in the 1570s, 80s, and 90s? Which class groups suffered the most from such natural disruptions, especially as they influenced local environmental policy over time? This paper explores the ways in which *Galatea* narratively alludes to and even endorses policies of drainage and enclosure as they were pursued by Lincolnshire landowners—and contested by the dispossessed—in the aftermath of late-sixteenth century flooding.

Roderick H. McKeown (University of Toronto)

“What to do? Lick figs:” Sodomy and Social Distinction in *The Alchemist*

In this paper, taking the play’s opening reference to analingus (where “figs” is an early modern slang term for hemorrhoids) I will trace how occasional, usually pejorative, references to sodomy, broadly defined, are deployed along Jonson’s two axes of satire. Combining Lorna Hutson’s reading of classical quotation in *Every Man in His Humour* with Boehrer’s scatological reading of *The Alchemist* both to pinpoint the latter play’s more one-dimensional satire, and to demonstrate that the topsy-turvy social dynamics of the absent Lovewit’s household are, as such inverted hierarchies so often are in early modern writing, coded as queer.

David Morrow (College of Saint Rose)

Indigenous Metabolism, Dispossession, Shakespeare

The intensification of enclosure, increases in rents and fees, along with other legal maneuvers, and a range of agricultural innovations unsettled rural society in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, including separating many English from the land, and, according to influential accounts, thereby creating a new social class. The drama of the day interrogated these changes directly, and indirectly, and commentators have covered much of this ground – in studies of vagrancy and rural protest, for example. My premise here is that Shakespeare’s work is engaged to a greater degree than has been noted specifically with the dispossession of small farmers – a process that often motivated protest, and which fuelled homelessness and vagrancy. This paper sketches a concept called *indigenous metabolism* to describe the relationship many rural people with access to the land enjoyed with nonhuman nature; looks at representations of this mode of life, in characters who produce knowledge out of their situated manual labor on the land, and then at characters who register a loss of connection with the land. In a final section I argue that in *Henry VIII* Shakespeare deploys elements of tragicomic romance storytelling to raise and resolve issues around the era’s land-based crises.

Lauren Shook (Texas Lutheran University)

Exploitative Labor of Food Production in *As You Like It*

As early modern food studies establishes itself as a sub-field within literary studies, it must consider a social history of food. We must ask how food scarcity affected the ‘poorer sort,’ the types of food they consumed, and their relationship with other social classes via food labor. I take up the relationship between food labor and food scarcity by using *As You Like It* as a case study. This paper is the beginning of a new chapter in my ongoing book project. I am half inspired by my outrage at the 21st-century Southern food historian John T. Edge’s insinuation that 17k/yr is an “equitable living” for laborers who harvest tomatoes for American fast-food restaurants (287; 2017) and half fueled by two separate moments in *AYLI* when working-class hands become punchlines of scarcity. Touchstone indulgently flashes his abundant wit in the face of Corin’s penurious philosophy; Rosalind/Ganymede revels in Petrarchan love poetry while disparaging Phoebe’s poetic abilities. Rosalind, Touchstone, and audiences, I argue, symbolically feast on the comedy produced at the expense of Phoebe and Corin. Finally, this paper brings poetics and genre to bear upon early modern dearth while contemplating presentist, material concerns surrounding class, food, and comedy.

Daniel Vitkus (UC San Diego)

“Merchants and Maritime Laborers on the Early Modern Stage”

The paper looks at early modern drama in terms of class, emergent capitalism, primitive accumulation, social inequality, and labor relations. How do English Renaissance plays featuring merchants and proto-capitalists function to indicate (or obscure) the lower-class labor that creates merchant wealth? How do travel plays like *The Tempest* or *The Sea Voyage* represent the labor and “travail” of long-distance journeys that were sponsored by London merchants? Do they show the dependence of merchants on sailors and other lower-class laborers? Or do they conceal the merchants' exploitation of maritime labor beneath various fantasies that represent travel as effortless or instantaneous? When does the performative “magic” of the theater evoke a wonder in the audience that fetishizes sea-going travel and conceals the economic structures that made it possible? When is overseas venturing questioned or exposed as dangerous and deadly for maritime laborers?
