

SAA 2021
Seminar on Entertainers and Institutions
Peter Greenfield and Paul Whitfield White

ABSTRACTS

“They buy not their Ordinary for the Copie of a Prologue”: Paratexts and the entertainment economy—Katie Blankenau, Northwestern University

In the induction to Thomas Goffe’s *The Careless Shepherdess* (performed 1618-1629), a character representing an audience member explains that as it is “fasting night,” “I did chuse / Rather to spend my money at a Play, / Then at the Ordinary.” The line reminds us of the potential competition between playhouses and commercial vendors of alcohol and food, such as taverns, which provided a la carte dining, and ordinaries, a less-expensive, mid-sixteenth-century innovation serving fixed-price meals. This essay examines how paratexts, including prologues, epilogues, and inductions, negotiated the relationship between playhouses and dining establishments. Paratexts outline the value of theatrical wares and the economics of playgoing and eating, and in doing so, situate playing and commercial dining as part of one economy of entertainment in which food, wit, and wine were circulated and consumed.

Don Hedrick, Kansas State University
Scattered Reflections on Gambling Culture

The present study is largely suggestive, an inconclusive set of theoretical reflections part of a larger study of entertainment value, from which I have been coming to the tentative conclusion that gambling and gaming risks occupy a prominent position in early modern culture generally. Rather than an argumentative essay, this assemblage cites several cultural and dramatic points of contact through different approaches, suggestive of creating a “wagerable” mindset in audiences and beyond. The points of reference include the following: betting on actors; actor and theater business gamblers; logic of admission charge; agon (contest) vs. aleatory (random) play; almanac predictions; animal bloodsports; dicing houses; Elizabeth’s national lottery; theater as “pleasure enclosure”; “sportification” (Adorno); “opportunistic” (impromptu) betting; gambling as uncanny; profit over return (“advantage”); boredom; child conception; plot prediction (suspense and surprise); biblical and theological debates. A chief theoretical frame is the manufacturing of situations into “betttable outcomes” onto which wagers may be placed (Goffman).

**“The forme of a Citie representing London”: Gates, Boundaries, and Walls
in the Imagined Civic Topography of Lord Mayors’ Shows
Jill Ingram, Ohio University**

London’s Lord Mayors’ Shows, most often penned by eminent stage dramatists including Anthony Munday, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Dekker, and Thomas Middleton, were written to please the commissioning livery companies sponsoring the annual shows and to honor the incoming mayor. Such shows reflected larger issues at the heart of institutional relationships between the City, the livery company, and the crown. As the livery companies’ ancient privileges of the City were contracting and as the period saw a decline of the long-standing dominance of the great companies, companies used the Lord Mayors’ Shows to signal connections with London’s prestigious founders and the past. Some of these signals became more urgent with the onset of Charles I’s “personal rule” and practice of royal arbitrariness. I will examine a number of Shows’ references to the topography of London—most specifically its walls and gates—as an expression of livery companies’ anxieties about their powers and liberties within the City. In my analysis I will employ theories about the evolution of institutions regarding methods that institutions used to promote compliance with credible commitments. Such commitments are woven into the pageant books of the Lord Mayors’ Shows, where skilled dramatists shaped narratives illustrating consequences of broken boundaries—whether social, economic, or political.

**‘The King’s Players and Civic Drama in London: The example of *London’s Love to the Royal Prince Henry* (1610)
Professor Siobhan Keenan, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK**

Traditionally, studies of the Shakespearean theatre world have focused on London’s public theatres, yet we know that performances were not confined to its stages. The leading companies of the day were not only accustomed to touring and performing their plays at court; on occasion, they also participated in other kinds of performance, including court masques and civic drama. While the role of professional performers in court masques has received some critical attention, their part in civic performance culture remains under-researched. This paper addresses this gap in Renaissance performance history by paying fresh attention to a civic entertainment which featured two of the King’s players, Richard Burbage and John Rice—the civic show commissioned by London’s corporation to celebrate the installation of Prince Henry as Prince of Wales, *London’s Love to the Royal Prince Henry* (1610). The show, written by Anthony Munday, featured Burbage as Amphion, father of music and genius of Wales, and Rice as Corinea, queen of Cornwall. As well as re-examining the roles of Burbage and Rice in *London’s Love*, this paper will reconsider what the civic entertainment reveals about the relationship between London’s citizens, the city authorities, and its leading players in the Jacobean era.

Lost Plays, Henslowe's Diary, and Popular Entertainments
Rosalind Knutson, University of Arkansas, Little Rock

Slipping in under the broadest phrasing of the subject of this seminar, I address two lost plays performed on stage at the Rose playhouse in the winter of 1594-5 by the Admiral's men ("makers of theater") that advertise popular card games ("related forms of entertainment"). I am interested, first, in the content of the plays and their stage lives with the Admiral's men and, second, in their significance to the repertory system of which they were briefly a part.

Betsy Labiner, University of Arizona
"I like not this': Mediation between Power and Playwrights by the Master of the Revels"

In this paper I will focus on theatrical relationships with monarchs, specifically as mediated by the Master of the Revels. In *Love's Sacrifice*, John Ford depicts theater as a mechanism through which to seize agency and act (in all senses of the word) when other avenues are closed due to power imbalances or systemic corruption. The ludic space, therefore, conceals a very real threat within dramatic entertainments. In Ford's world, theater and fiction expose ugly realities and truths that threaten to destabilize traditional institutions. The theater functions as a site of exchange between dramatists, actors, and audiences, in which plays forge connections through which to circulate themes and ideas. This exchange, of course, did not exist in a vacuum, but was mediated and subject to censorship by the Master of the Revels. Censors attempted to control or even stop the flow of ideas, and the chapter discusses the political and religious concerns evident in such attempts. Particular attention is given to antitheatricalism, the virulent response to plays and playgoing in early modern London, and what audiences and scholars can glean from such frenzied reactions.

Early Bear Garden Entertainment Records: tracing the evidence
Sally-Beth MacLean, REED, University of Toronto

My current focus is directed to completing a digital edition of Bear Garden and Hope playhouse records for the REED series. One chapter of the Introduction will assess the entertainment evidence collected for the three early Bear Gardens in Southwark that preceded Henslowe and Meade's opening of the combined baiting and playhouse operation at the Hope in 1614. A draft of this section of the chapter will be shared, with transcriptions cited appearing as an appendix. Among other aspects of the entertainment history, attention will be paid to documentary records from various authorities directed to the bearbaiting operation on Bankside during the second half of the sixteenth century.

Falstaff and the Taverns of Revolutionary London
Christopher Matusiak, Ithaca College

My starting point in this paper is a group of previously unpublished records that observe actors, musicians, and other entertainers working in London taverns in the 1650s. The commercial stage

and public drinking house were closely associated institutions in the mid-century capital, but in the wake of the civil wars their relationship took a unique turn. Pressured to shutter their purpose-built theatres, stage-players resorted with greater frequency to the semi-private rooms of local taverns as alternative performance venues, welcomed there by sympathetic vintners and drinking communities comprised of defeated royalists and others ill-affected toward the Commonwealth and Protectorate governments. I find it difficult to accept the critical commonplace therefore that such performances sought merely to “ease melancholy” with “harmless mirth.” Tavern entertainments like *The Bouncing Knight* (which compiles Falstaff’s scenes from *1 Henry IV*) in fact suggest pre-war dramatic material was adopted because it resonated with current political and cultural circumstances. Indeed, my argument will be that Falstaff—given textual pride of place and featured on the frontispiece in Henry Marsh’s subsequent collection of “droll-humors” *The Wits* (1662)—may have been the most popular and provocative tavern role of all, precisely because the character enabled spectators to wrestle with issues felt to be important, such as the politics of alcohol consumption; the corrosion of the Cavalier conception of honor; and the struggle to maintain allegiance to a royal prince in exile.

Kara Northway, Kansas State University

“Sir, you mete me by the common measurer of poets”:

Measures of Professional Work in Playwrights’ Letters, 1587–1642

In a 1616 letter exchanged between veteran theater professionals, Thomas Dekker described himself wearily to actor Edward Alleyn as “having bin long in labour in the world.” Like many early modern working people, playwrights measured themselves by certain professional standards, assessing duration of labor, volume of output, or intensity of effort. As the fledgling theater became an institution, playwrights’ manuscript letters shaped such occupational values and identities. Past scholarship has valuably mined these letters for theatrical practices and sometimes interpreted epistolary comments as evidence of real personal struggle, for example, Martin Wiggins’s diagnosis of “a bad bout of writer’s block” in Robert Daborne’s letters. But epistolary scholars underscore the artifice of early letter-writing and the need to examine letters in broader epistolary contexts. My paper therefore analyzes the discourse of work in the mini-archive of playwrights’ letters, which has not in its entirety been studied, identifying a larger rhetorical strategy. Namely, playwrights’ letters appropriated—and distorted—the yardsticks for measuring work associated with culturally respected vocations, such as agriculture, trade, and scholarship, ultimately seizing on a conceit of labor as ceaseless, hyper-productive, and intense, or even painful, pointedly countering the stigma of idleness.

Common Law Narratives in Theatre History: The Case of *Assumpsit*
Jonathan Powell, King's College, London

My paper will sit at an intersection between the commercial stage and the common law, asking how certain practitioners of the theatre negotiated the institutional ordering of the precedent-based jurisdiction. More specifically, it will consider a few of the ways in which the narrative frameworks of one institution in particular – the Court of King's Bench – may have shaped the activities of the entertainers found in its exemplary pair of case-studies. Reading through the generic prism of the common law action of *assumpsit*, then, the paper will reassess two of the more prominent documents in theatre-history: the so-called 'player's bonds' recorded in Philip Henslowe's memorandum book in 1597/8, and the entry onto rotulet 692 of the Hilary 1616 plea roll for the Court of King's Bench (better known as the suit of Thomasina Ostler against her father John Heminges). Whilst the development and expansion of *assumpsit* over the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries has been much plotted in legal scholarship, its implications for the field of theatre-history are yet to be fully explored. In the paper's particular instances, the action (for breach of promise) offers an alternative evidential paradigm through which to analyse the behaviour of the entertainers in question.

Donne in the Hague
Patrick Timmis, Duke University

This essay argues that the British delegation's distinctive approach to the topic of perseverance provides necessary context for reading two often-misunderstood performances of London religio-political sentiment in 1619: a London minister's sermons before the Elector Palatine in Heidelberg and the Lord of the States General at the Hague, and the dramatization of those same Lords and their recent actions at the Hague performed by the King's Men on the London stage. These London-based performances in turn provide evidence that the British delegation at Dort sat squarely in the mainstream of English political theology. Examining John Donne's international sermons and John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's collaborative *The Tragedy of Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt*, this essay demonstrates that James I's delegates at Dort, his European embassy's preacher, and a London play performed to "great applause" present a unified public opinion. King, church, and people speak in harmony on the necessity of persevering in faith (within the established church), in fidelity to the God-ordained civil government, and in a loyalty to the international Protestant cause balanced by a 'Britain first' national exceptionalism. The essay begins by examining the British delegation's elder-brotherly attempts to nuance and even to correct their Dutch co-religionists' controversial stance on the surety of perseverance in their *Collegiat Suffrage*, a working document prepared for the benefit of the Synod. While the delegates are often presented in Anglophone historiography as far too idiosyncratically Calvinist to truly represent the Church of England, they actually speak univocally with John Donne, a preacher who several leading scholars present as an Arminian by the late 1610s. By putting Donne's sermon at the Hague in context of his other sermons after being appointed to the Doncaster embassy, this essay argues that Donne, Bp. Carleton, et. al. promoted a distinctively English theology which affirms its kinship with continental high Calvinism, but also incorporates the Remonstrants' critiques of Calvinism's excesses. This cannot be explained as simply the position of elite evangelical clergy, chosen as ambassadors to

the Dutch simply because of their unique sympathy for the Reformed cause. Fletcher and Massinger's popular *Tragedy* shows the same nuanced perspective on perseverance in ecclesial and political fidelity promoted by the crown and clergy.