

SAA 2023: Counting (In) Early Modern Drama

Abstracts

Andreas P. Bassett (University of Washington, andbass@uw.edu)

“Biblio-Quantification and Counting Early Modern Drama and Sermons”

My paper presents ongoing research in the titles of printed playbooks and sermons over 1590–1640. Building on previous findings, notably that first edition professional playbook titles declined in the average number of words used (roughly twenty-three to five) from 1590 to 1640 and were increasingly published in only one of two short title formats, I analyze 1,300 first edition printed sermon titles (STC numbers kindly provided by Prof. Alan B. Farmer) to see if trends and conventions in titling are consistent across book genres. In addition to documenting bibliographical changes in title-page wording across the early modern period, my paper queries whether we can make accurate deductions about larger phenomena in the book trade, in early English print culture, through biblio-quantitative approaches such as measuring, visualizing, and examining the wordage of printed titles.

Douglas I. Clark (Université de Neuchâtel, dclarkrenaissance@gmail.com)

“What’s Division Got To Do With It? *Gorboduc* and Uncertainty”

Counting is a means of assigning value in the world. Anything that is lucky or unlucky enough to be counted matters. So what exactly matters most (or least) for early modern scholars? What do we need to count or account for? My paper offers a tentative response to these questions by exploring the logic of division that structures Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc*. My paper considers some of the uncertainties of performance that are revealed in *Gorboduc*’s textual afterlives to suggest that the play can teach us a great deal about the structure of dramatic narratives in early modern English plays more generally.

Patrick Durdel (Université de Lausanne, patrick.durdel@unil.ch)

“Counting Lines: Dramaturgy, Data, and Close-Reading”

In my paper, I ask a seemingly simple question: What does it mean to count the lines of a play? What, for example, are we trying to say when we express the distance between two speeches or two occurrences of a word in lines? Or what does it mean to speak of the rhythm of a dialogue? To answer these questions, I draw on recent work by Claire Bourne and Michael Gavin to develop a more nuanced understanding of the component parts of dramatic texts. By comparing the first printing of Richard Edwards’s *Damon and Pithias* (1571) and its EEBO-TCP transcription, I explore how different kinds of information are encoded in the dramatic text. Ultimately, I argue that our ways of counting early modern printed plays shape how we encounter them and what statements we (can) make about them.

Alan B. Farmer (Ohio State University, farmer.109@osu.edu)
“Counting and Estimating the Loss Rates of Short Publications”

Very short publications were ubiquitous in the early modern British book trade but are notoriously difficult to account for now. Numerous questions in book history—about the economics of running a printing house, about the retail trade in selling books, about literacy and readership—come back to attempting to count short books and other forms of printing that no longer survive. In this essay I revisit a 2016 paper I published on the loss rates of playbooks and other kinds of books, comparing my earlier estimates to those derived from new research on lost titles entered in the Stationers’ Registers. These new estimates are usually close to my earlier findings, but there is a greater discrepancy among both poetry books and news pamphlets, two print genres filled with short editions. Based on these discrepancies, I attempt to think through possible reasons for these differences and what they reveal about the difficulties of counting short publications, both those that are extant and those that are lost. The essay ends with some observations about the even more significant challenges posed by estimating the prevalence of single-leaf publications, such as ballads and religious tables, and how the counting of very short publications affects our larger sense of the early modern British book trade.

Adam G. Hooks (University of Iowa, adam-hooks@uiowa.edu)
“Counting Shakespeare”

Counting Shakespeare matters because it defines what counts as Shakespeare. It is a practice that dates back to the 17th century when booksellers like Francis Kirkman produced catalogues of printed plays based on a commercial archive of over 800 playbooks, a figure that stacks up well with his 20th century counterpart, W. W. Greg. Sidney Lee produced the first systematic census of Shakespeare (focusing on First Folios) in 1902, and also produced informal lists of non-Folio works—*Pericles*, the *Sonnets*, and the poems. Henrietta Bartlett and A.W. Pollard later compiled a census of Shakespeare’s plays in quarto (1916, revised by Bartlett in 1939), while Bartlett produced multiple works that defined a more comprehensive Shakespearean corpus (foregrounding the poems, among other artifacts). This work serves as the foundation for the digital *Shakespeare Census*. This paper will build on my own work with Bartlett, and on editorial work on the *Poems*, to focus on what could not be *counted* and so was therefore considered supplemental in the past: what has been gained — and what has been lost or invisible — in the long history of counting Shakespeare?

Steven Monte (College of Staten Island, CUNY, vincenzino153@gmail.com)
“Metatheatrical Numbers in *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*”

My approach to counting in Shakespeare’s plays derives from my work on *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, a sequence of poems in which number games, number symbolism, and numerology more generally proliferate. I am thus most interested in counting that might not be immediately perceptible in performance but nonetheless informs the plays in which it is present. More specifically, I am interested in double figures and calendrical numbers, such as 33 (the traditional age of Christ and Richard at their deaths) and 44 (the B.C. year of Caesar’s death), and how such numbers serve as thematic touchstones and structure scenes, especially Richard’s prison soliloquy and Caesar’s assassination. These numbers “tell” us something about Shakespeare’s aims and preoccupations (the numbers *count*), which include engagement with providential views of history. My paper will also explore the idea of play as poem (text), along the lines of Lukas Erne in his seminal study *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. My hope is to sketch an alternative to the nineteenth-century bias toward poetry, and the twentieth-century bias toward performance, when it comes to the plays.

Eoin Price (Swansea University, eoin.price@swansea.ac.uk)
“Playgoing by Numbers”

A playgoer’s experience of drama is conditioned, in part, by their available frame of reference – somebody who sees lots of plays has a different frame of reference to someone who only sees them occasionally – but there is very little data about playgoing attendance and so there has been little sustained attempt to think through the effects of playgoing frequency. In the absence of such evidence scholars have unintentionally presented a version of a playgoer that could never have existed. The playgoer of the critical imagination never missed a play. In reality, even the most committed playgoers are likely to have seen only a fraction of the hundreds of plays on offer in the London playhouses.

Using data taken from the Caroline-era diaries of such playgoers as John Greene and Sir Humphrey Mildmay and collocating this information with the fuller records of performance detailed in Philip Henslowe’s theatrical accounts, I attempt to imagine the experience of a playgoer who saw a couple of plays a week. What might they see and what might they miss? How differently does early modern theatre look if we acknowledge that playgoers only had a very partial sense of the much wider dramatic enterprise?

Courtney N. Scuro (Austin, TX, cscuro001@ucr.edu)

“Counting (In) Time with Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 3* and *Henry IV, Part 1*”

This essay explores the consequences of counting (in) time in two of Shakespeare’s history plays—and in doing so, demonstrates how significant quantifying time is to the early modern temporal experience despite it thus far receiving little attention in literary scholars’ work on time. By delving into the high-stakes anxieties that some-times accompany characters’ attempts to track and tally their movements through time, this paper looks at how timekeeping acts as a mechanism for measuring individual belonging, influence, and moral culpability in *Henry VI, Part 3* and *Henry IV, Part 1*. Exemplary of the troubles with time found throughout the early modern English canon, these plays’ expressions of temporal angst and uncertainty begin to reveal how much keeping time may truly count--and how often--in early modern writers' attempts to understand one's place within the long stretch of historical time.

Emily Louisa Smith (Université de Genève, emily.smith@unige.ch)

“Comparison – the bringer of joy?”

This paper engages with the critical reading practices which grow out of computational corpus investigation. The EEBO-TCP project imported the traditionally linguistic approach of corpus analysis into literary studies, inspiring a research revolution by expanding the range of texts explored by research and the claims which can be made about these texts as a collective body. Although the entire EEBO-TCP corpus informs every search on its ProQuest interface - meaning that every user is guilty of data mining - this mass of textual data also rewards more formalised analysis. Concordancing and corpus analysis programmes such as AntConc and CQPWeb allow for a more systematic approach to words within the EEBO-TCP corpus, enabling an enumeration of all instances of a word, its common collocations, its relative frequency, distribution, and more.

Such analytical tools, this paper argues, offer an intermediate route between traditional close reading and more abstracted distant reading, centred around the analysis of individual words. It will, in particular, discuss enumerated comparisons as a form of literary “proof” - inviting participants to think about the uses and abuses of counting and comparisons in an early modern context.

Christopher Warren (Carnegie Mellon University, cnwarren@cmu.edu)

“The Early Modern Book of Numbers”

A book's a book, and numbers are numbers, right? Well, maybe. For this seminar, I propose to give myself the task of understanding and then communicating the technological underpinnings of a digital facsimile. One specific question I want to address, with the help of media archaeology, digital forensics, and glitch art is, "Are EEBO PDFs and Google Books really just numbers all the way down?"

Daniel Yabut (CNRS/Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, daniel.yabut@univ-montp3.fr)
“Statistics, stylometrics, and Middleton’s *Chesse*: attempting to solve an early modern numbers game”

Two hours’ traffic. Four weeks of rehearsal. Function word counts, part lengths, and play lengths. These and other figures serve as the basis for wide-ranging claims about how early modern drama is created and staged. Yet, how viable is any study that is based on few existing testimonies and texts, considering that only 543 or so of an estimated 3,000 playbooks are still extant? This paper will examine certain approaches to studying the early modern playwriting, rehearsal, and staging process that are based in whole or in part on quantitative analysis (such as stylometrics) or types of textual witnesses of which there exists few samples (such as actors’ parts) or multiple texts of an edition (such as *A Game at Chesse*), and attempt to define the parameters by which statistics may or should be employed to help ‘solve’ issues concerning the creation of a theatrical work.

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Bios

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Andreas P. Bassett is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at the University of Washington in Seattle, WA, where he studies early modern literature and the London book trade. He is currently working on his dissertation which investigates the interplay between book shopping and reading experiences. In addition to his research, Andreas teaches literature and composition in the Program of Writing and Rhetoric, and was recently appointed as a W. M. Keck Foundation Fellow at The Huntington Library.

Douglas I. Clark (Université de Neuchâtel, dclarkrenaissance@gmail.com)

Douglas Clark is a Research Assistant in the Institute of English Studies at the Université de Neuchâtel. His work has recently appeared in the Spring 2022 issue of *Renaissance Drama*. He has articles forthcoming with *Studies in Philology* and *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*. His first book, *The Will in English Renaissance Drama*, is under contract with Cambridge University Press.

Patrick Durdel (Université de Lausanne, patrick.durdel@unil.ch)

Patrick Durdel is a doctoral assistant in the SNSF-funded research project “Theater and Judgment in Early Modern England” at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. His PhD project investigates dramaturgies of judgment in Tudor drama, ranging from early sixteenth-century interludes to the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Patrick’s work is forthcoming in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*.

Alan B. Farmer (Ohio State University, farmer.109@osu.edu)

Alan B. Farmer is an Associate Professor English at Ohio State University. He is the co-creator, with Zachary Lesser, of *DEEP: Database of Early English Playbooks*, and is currently working on two projects: a study of lost books in the early modern English book trade and another on the popularity of playbooks in Renaissance England. He is also quietly obsessed with Anne Griffin, who was a printer at the Eliot’s Court printing house in the 1620s and 1630s.

Adam G. Hooks (University of Iowa, adam-hooks@uiowa.edu)

Adam G. Hooks is Associate Professor in the Department of English and the Center for the Book at the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Selling Shakespeare: Biography, Bibliography, and the Book Trade* (2016). He is currently editing the *Poems* for the Arden Shakespeare Fourth Series and has published widely on the textual histories of Shakespeare’s plays and poetry. With Zachary Lesser, he is the co-director of the *Shakespeare Census* (<https://shakespearecensus.org/>), and is the curator of an exhibition at the University of Iowa Libraries called *The Books that Made Shakespeare* (<http://shakespeare.lib.uiowa.edu/>).

Carla Mazzio (University of California, Riverside, carlam@ucr.edu)

Carla Mazzio teaches in the Department of English at the University of California, Riverside, and is the author of *The Inarticulate Renaissance, Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), awarded the Roland H. Bainton Book Prize for Literature, co-author (with Bradin Cormack) of *Book Use, Book Theory: 1500-1700* (University of Chicago Library, 2005, digitized 2011), and editor of *Histories of the Future: On Shakespeare and Thinking Ahead* (University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming 2023), *Shakespeare & Science* (Special Double Issue of *South Central*

Review, 2009), *Historicism, Psychoanalysis and Early Modern Culture* (with Douglas Trevor, Routledge 2000) and *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (with David Hillman, Routledge 1997), awarded the English Association's Beatrice White Book Prize. Her current book project, *The Trouble with Numbers*, examines quantification, temporality, and emotion in early modern culture and drama.

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Steven Monte is a full professor in the English Department at the College of Staten Island (CUNY). He has taught at the University of Chicago and Yale University, from which he received his doctorate in Comparative Literature. His scholarly writing is mostly on Renaissance and modern poetry, including his books: *The Secret Architecture of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, *Victor Hugo: Selected Poetry in French and English*, and *Invisible Fences: Prose Poetry as a Genre in French and American Literature*. He has also published verse translations and his own poetry. His current translation project is an anthology of French sonnets.

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Eoin Price is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Swansea University. He is the author of *'Public' and 'Private' Playhouses in Renaissance England* (Palgrave, 2015). His current project, [Playgoing Time in Elizabethan London](#), is funded by a Leverhulme Research Fellowship.

Courtney N. Scuro (Austin, TX, cscuro001@ucr.edu)

Courtney Naum Scuro received her Ph.D. in 2021 from UC, Riverside. She is the Director of the ESG & CSR Board, a community for social impact and sustainability leaders at the world's largest companies. She also continues to research time and politics of difference in early modern England and today. Her publications include "Timesoup, Missed Meaning, and Making a Pandemic History" in *Scholars in Covid Times* (forthcoming, Cornell UP), "Temporo-Corporeal Politics in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Other Monster Texts" in *Shakespeare* and "History, Politics, and Spatial Ambiguity in Richard Mulcaster's *The Queen's Majesty's Passage* and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward IP*" in *JMMLA*.

Emily Louisa Smith (Université de Genève, emily.smith@unige.ch)

Emily Smith is a third-year PhD student and teaching assistant in early modern English Literature at the Université de Genève under the supervision of Lukas Erne, having previously completed a Master of Studies in English Literature (1550-1700) at the University of Oxford and a BA at Durham University. Her doctoral research focuses on ambiguous signification in early modern drama, and incorporates approaches including the study of dramatic reception and adaptation, the intersection of digital humanities methodologies and literary close reading, and cognitive approaches to literature.

Christopher Warren (Carnegie Mellon University, cnwarren@cmu.edu)

Christopher Warren is Associate Professor of English and Associate Department Head with a Courtesy Appointment in History at Carnegie Mellon University. Warren is the author of *Literature and the Law of Nations, 1580-1680* (Oxford University Press, 2015), which was awarded the 2016 Roland H. Bainton Prize for Literature. A former member of the MLA's executive committee for 17th-Century English, he is co-founder of the digital humanities project Six Degrees of Francis Bacon, and a founding member of CMU's Center for Print, Networks, and Performance (CPNP). Warren's current research focuses on "Freedom and the Press before

Freedom of the Press,” using machine learning and artificial intelligence to discover and center the anonymous craftsmen and -women responsible for printing controversial clandestine materials.

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Daniel Yabut is a research associate for the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), in association with the Institute for Research on the Renaissance, the Neo-Classical Age, and the Enlightenment (IRCL) and Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3. He specialises in sixteenth-seventeenth-century early modern theatre and book history, and serves as Performance Reviews editor of *Cahiers Élisabéthains*. He is an actor and teaching artist, with theatre, film, and television credits in the United States, England, and France.