

2023 SAA
London Historiography and Drama Seminar
Janelle Jenstad
Mark Kaethler

Seminar Abstracts

1. Susan Anderson

London mayoral pageantry and meritocracy.

Coined in the 1950s,¹ the satiric origins of the term “meritocracy” have been obscured by its subsequent unironic invocation as a desirable political goal.² This paper will investigate discourses of merit in London mayoral pageantry, and their alignment with the political, social, and economic frameworks and phenomena that the shows promote. The paper will discuss case studies that demonstrate:

- How the shows present desert – which people deserve what.
- How this necessitates a taxonomising impulse – what kinds of people there are, and what they deserve on account of their belonging to particular groups.
- How those taxonomies map onto somatic difference, as identified by Patricia Akhimie in her account of the way that some bodies (particularly in term of how they are racialised) are construed as improvable and others are not.³
- How racialised somatic difference allows for the extraction and appropriation of wealth and resources.

This long history of ideas of meritocracy aims to show how they can work as a decoy for the further entrenchment of precisely the kinds of inequity that the term appears to challenge.

2. Andrew S. Brown

Pax Londinii: Migrant Flows and the Global City in *The Triumphs of Peace* (1620)

In December 2022, a New York Times podcast published an episode on “Why Haiti Wants an Armed Intervention”—its title silently amended, after some backlash, to “Why Haiti Asked for an Intervention.”⁴ Despite that significant omission, the premise of the Times’ reporting remained the same. A “specialized armed force,” alternatively described as an “international peacekeeping force,” was proposed to confront Haiti’s political-economic crisis and thereby prevent its most concerning consequence: “more Haitians migrat[ing] to the United States, often on dangerous journeys in boats

¹ In an article by Alan Fox in 1956 (OED Online). Subsequently popularised by Michael Young’s work of dystopian sci-fi, written in the guise of a sociological report from the near future, *Rise of the Meritocracy* in 1958.

² See Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Myth of Meritocracy”, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2018.

³ Patricia Akhimie, *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁴ Sabrina Tavernise, Will Reid, Luke Vander Ploeg, Alex Stern, Rachelle Bonja, Carlos Prieto, M.J. Davis Lin, Dan Powell, Marion Lozano, Chris Wood, “Why Haiti Asked for an Intervention,” *The Daily Podcast*, New York Times, Dec. 8, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/08/podcasts/the-daily/haiti-violence-intervention.html> (accessed Dec. 11, 2022).

known to capsize in rough seas.”⁵ My paper will track the topics raised by these recent events—particularly the relationship between a militarized conception of “peacekeeping” and efforts to control the movement of goods and human beings—across our seminar’s setting of early modern London. In doing so, it takes as its guide *The Triumphs of Peace*, a waterborne pageant funded by the wealthy Haberdashers’ Company in honour of the Lord Mayor in 1620. By imagining its titular figure of “Peace” as the guarantor of commercial wealth, colonial mastery, and London’s civic identity, I argue, this mayoral show anticipates more recent claims that military conflict can best be prevented through universal participation in a global market system.⁶

3. Heather C. Easterling

“Prospecting’ City-Space in *Eastward Ho!*”

In this paper, I follow Jean Howard’s argument that early modern citizen-comedies are most interesting as “attempts to come to terms with a complicated and changing city” (*Theater of a City*, 22), with a focus on the striking dramatic and urban interlude of Act 4, scene 1 of *Eastward Ho!* (1605). Climbing a pole, the apprentice Slitgut explicitly announces himself as the voyeur of all that will unfold beneath him on the largely unmapped but imaginatively and politically charged Isle of Dogs, east of London: “And now, let me discover from this lofty prospect what pranks the rude Thames plays in her desperate lunacy” (4.1.16-18). What did the Isle of Dogs mean in spatial and psychic terms in the period? And how does the play’s satire extend, here, to drama’s very producing of place? Relatedly, what ideas of place and its representation are invited by Slitgut’s word: “prospect”? With it, he makes a precise reference to a way of viewing and possessing urban space that was quite new in the period, according to Karen Newman. With its staging of marked but unmapped places and its use of new terms of “scopic mastery” (Newman 13), *Eastward Ho!* sharpens its satire in Act 4 specifically in terms of spatial concepts of the city and their limits.

4. J. Caitlin Finlayson

The Afterlives of Middleton’s Civic Pageantry

Unlike Renaissance plays, London Lord Mayor’s Shows were generally not revived or re-performed. However, Middleton’s *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613) inspired later performance iterations in 1913 and 1988, while his *Sun in Aries* (1621) recently received an abridged performance in 2021. This paper explores the unusual afterlives of Middleton’s civic pageantry. This paper will address what these productions replicate from the original, what they exclude, and the appeal of Middleton’s civic

⁵ Natalie Kitroeff and Maria Abi-Habib, “Haiti Appeals for Armed Intervention and Aid to Quell Chaos,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 7, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/07/world/americas/haiti-international-intervention-violence.html> (accessed Dec. 11, 2022). This article suggests that the Haitian crisis was essentially caused by a disruption to the free movement of goods and supplies: “In recent weeks, gangs have been blocking access to the main fuel terminal in Port-au-Prince, aggravating widespread fuel shortages, forcing hospitals to close and affecting water distribution, further hampering efforts to control the cholera outbreak.”

⁶ Compare the “Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention” advanced by Thomas Friedman, which wryly claimed that, due to the new economic interreliance generated by globalization, no two countries with a McDonald’s franchise have ever gone to war with one another. See *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1999).

shows that have created the unusual circumstance of their afterlives. Notably, the mayoral shows are bound to a specific socio-political, temporal moment and a specific civic occasion – the inauguration of an individual London Lord Mayor; how, then, is the content of Middleton’s shows altered when removed from the specific socio-political moment that produced the originals? More broadly, I hope to set these unusual reproductions of Middleton’s mayoral shows in a discussion of how civic pageantry has been re-imagined for the modern audience and what we learn about Middleton’s importance to civic tradition.

5. Andrew Fleck

“Both Providence and Prudence: The Dutch Triumphal Arch in the Royal Entry of 1604”

The English sources usually consulted in discussing the Dutch Arch constructed for King James’s royal entry into London in 1604 offer only a partial account. Drawing on Dutch sources, this essay offers a reading of the entire program of the Dutch Arch, arguing that the Dutch understood godly and material concerns would exist in productive tension in the advent of King James’s English reign.

6. Mikaela LaFave

The Eco-Urban: Reading Ecology through the City Landscape

In this paper, I aim to examine London’s changing landscape – and more specifically the land management practices of the city – in the Early Modern and Jacobean periods. I argue that viewing London as purely cityscape dissuades readers from viewing the space as ecological. The city becomes a monument to progress in a sociological and technological respect. My work forefronts how London residents of the period engage with the ecological: trade routes and other means of obtaining goods, the creation of waste through consumption, and the management of the land of London through building. I argue that the process of walking through and engaging with a city landscape, particularly that of London, is inherently ecological despite the binary divide enacted between natural and urban landscapes. The original project this is taken from engages with Whitney’s *Sweete Nosegay* and Jonson’s “Marvelous Voyage” to demonstrate the ways that urban environments transform into ecological ones. In this paper, I will engage with works not necessarily set in London – namely *As You Like It* – to illuminate the ways that citizens and visitors to London would build an eco-consciousness.

7. Bernadette Myers

“A Furnished Feast”: Provisioning London in Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV*, Parts 1 and 2

This essay reads Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV*, Parts 1 and 2 within the context of the recurring food insecurity that structured life in early modern London. Although the play’s title announces a monarchical focus, what takes center stage is not the monarchy or questions of succession, but London citizens and, as I argue here, the foodstuff they consume, distribute and produce. This obsession is evident in not only in the play’s opening scene, where rioters fantasize about the food lining London’s streets, but also in the circulation and distribution of food throughout the

two-part play. In Part I, King Edward first sees Jane Shore, a citizen's wife, at a feast thrown by the Lord Mayor. Stricken by Jane's beauty, Edward abruptly ends the feast, violating the Lord Mayor's hospitality; he eventually decides to abduct Jane and keep her as his mistress. In Part II, the tyrannical King Richard III sentences Jane to death by starvation. Violating the king's orders, London citizens prepare and covertly deliver "homely cates" and "halfpenny loaves" to relieve her suffering. These moments of provisioning and their violation, I argue, help to convey the uniquely civic virtue of London's inhabitants, especially in opposition to the tyrannical actions of their monarchs. This celebration of virtuous civic provisioning, however, would have been complicated by memories of the dearth of the 1590s, during which London was regularly accused of consuming more than it could produce.

8. Nova Myhill

Emblems and Interiority: Bodies that (Don't) Matter in the Lord Mayor's Show

Recent work on stage properties in early modern England has significantly complicated how we imagine physical objects might be understood on the sixteenth- and seventeenth- century stage. I am interested in considering not how everyday objects acquire symbolic significance, but the converse: how emblems become embodied and the conflict between physical, social, and allegorical understandings of these objects. The suggestion that the apparently common-sense distinction between an animate and an inanimate signifier (an actor and a prop) should be reconsidered as a continuum on which the human actor might be demoted and the stage prop might be promoted gains particular interest in the context of allegorical spectacles presented in civic pageants in which actors provide the means of displaying a set of costumes and props that establish their emblematic identity—most of these figures do not speak; they only represent, which might also be said of the Lord Mayor of London himself, at least in Dekker and Middleton's shows of 1612-13 (*Troia-nova triumphans* and *The Triumphs of Truth*) which will be the subject of this paper. The form of the pageant as a procession through London allows for the reference to physical landmarks such as St. Paul's, thus establishing the physical relation between the city and the world embodied in the pageant. The use of live actors in allegorical tableaux moves the nominally animate sign down the ladder of meaning, requiring viewing competencies that may only be accessible to the authors and readers of the pageants, never their observers; this is particularly significant when those tableaux present allegorically significant humans and animals (such as Envy riding on a rhinoceros in *Triumphs of Truth*) which are simultaneously located within and firmly outside the idealized model of London and the lord mayor who is framed as potentially embodying it. Like the anamorphic art that literalizes both the necessity and the impossibility of maintaining multiple perspectives simultaneously, the staged body reveals the limits of both signification and interpretation even, or especially, in forms designed to produce stable allegorical meanings.

9. Catherine Reedy

Double Rainbow: Staging Cyclicity, Punishment, and Mercy in the *Triumphs of Health and Prosperity*

Like his islands teeming with fruit, spicery, and drugs in the *Triumphs of Truth* (1613) and the "odours and riches" presented alongside the "black Personage representing India" (sig B2v) in *The Triumphs of Honor and Virtue* (1622), Thomas Middleton's *Triumphs of Health and Prosperity* (1626) begins with a

space of natural wonder, as the first pageant on land depicts a “*Beautifull Hill, or Fragrant Garden, [...] adorned and garnisht with all variety of Odoriferous flowers, on the top Archt with an Artificial and curious Raine-bow*” (sig A4v). Unlike his earlier shows, however, *Health and Prosperity* was performed just after one of London’s worst outbreaks of the plague in what is the only extant Lord Mayor’s Show performed in the year following a plague cancellation (1593, 1603, 1606, and 1625). Relatedly, *Health and Prosperity* is the only Lord Mayor’s Show to feature a rainbow, in this case emerging amidst the flocks of woolly, grazing sheep and other elements of sensory-rich abundance issuing from a “variety of Odoriferous flowers” (sig A4v). The rainbow was, indeed, a common emblem in the period, used not only for its perverse blend of divine punishment and mercy during pestilential visitations, but also for its host of resonant associations, from marital and holy covenants, to anti-masquing, heavenly messengers. Rainbows may through their colorful transience mark a visible shift from sickness and into health, and, at a more obvious level, Middleton’s *Health and Prosperity* uses this fragrant garden and other embodied representations of the body politic as a kind of performative cleanse for issues that were far from settled: most notably, the end of the plague visitation, on the one hand, and the prosperity and security experienced under the new monarch, on the other. This paper is part of a chapter that thus explores how civic performances—delivered, no less, in the potentially infectious crowds—used images of nature and exotic “others” from exploited terrains to perform health in both a metaphoric and physiological manner. Yet, by looking more closely at the rainbow in a historicized manner, exploring its uses in court masques, sermons, medical treatises, and other contexts, I argue that Middleton draws on a more complicated and (colorfully) mingled figure to perform the bio-political power of the state.

10. Gregory M. Schnitzspahn

Shaping Pageantry

Over the seven installments of the Lord Mayor’s Show that Thomas Middleton wrote between 1613 and 1626, the prolific writer seems to have given up on trying to control what took place on the river Thames. For his debut mayoral Show, *The Triumphs of Truth*, that is, Middleton’s text includes the Lord Mayor’s trip to Westminster on a waterway that should be “decked in the richest glory,” including “five islands, artfully garnished with all manner of Indian fruit trees, drugs, spiceries, and the like” (198-20). But beginning with *The Sun in Aries* in 1621, Middleton’s mayoral Shows drift away from this portion of the day’s events, instead detailing the spectacles that take place “after his honour’s return from Westminster, having received some service upon the water” (33-35). Likewise, Middleton’s final three Shows all offhandedly mention some previous “service” on the water, and while Middleton wrote the the 1623 Show, *The Triumphs of Integrity*, a completely separate text, prepared by Anthony Munday, covered the water show. Middleton, this paper argues, seems to have grown weary of trying to impose order or artifice upon the Thames’s currents and tides, and if his earlier Shows aspired to give shape to the scene on the Thames, then the river (to some extent) effectively shaped his later output of mayoral Shows. From there, the paper will then explore what the relationship between Middleton’s text and the Thames’s waters can reveal about the larger project of “London” as an urbanizing and ostensibly civilizing force . . . a force that could potentially authorize an even larger project of global empire.

11. Nicole Sheriko

Broune Paper Monsters: Early Modern London's Processional Puppets

This essay reconstructs London's place in the long pan-European tradition of giant and dragon processional puppets. Though popular across the continent in connection with romance and St George, giant and dragon puppet pageantry was adapted in England to specific national stories (like giants as the original inhabitants of the British Isles and mythic English heroes as dragon slayers). As I have found by examining surviving examples in Norwich and Salisbury, however, these puppets are not only national figures but also important local icons. For this seminar I expand that work to investigate London's pageantry as a site where local city and broader national identity intersect in more complex ways. For instance, London's giants Gog and Magog are an enduring part of city entertainment: living on public display in Guildhall, they paraded regularly through the city in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as part of the midsummer watch and royal entries and continue to appear annually as part of the Lord Mayor's Show parade. They were frequently repaired or replaced (notably after being destroyed in the Great Fire and World War II bombing) and these histories of repair attest to local care and their continued vitality as characters in spite of the material fragility. These histories are not unique to London, but what London intensifies is the way polysemous objects like pageant puppets are put to use as local characters and national symbols at once.