

**SAA Annual Meeting 2023**  
**Seminar 14: Forsaken Plays: PART TWO**

Seminar Organizer: Erin E. Kelly, University of Victoria, [ekelly@uvic.ca](mailto:ekelly@uvic.ca)

Invited respondent: Jeremy Lopez, Montclair State University, [lopezjer@montclair.edu](mailto:lopezjer@montclair.edu)

Seminar abstract:

This seminar invites participants to introduce to a captive audience the overlooked, neglected, or weird play they think deserves more scholarly attention. (Advocacy for a play that lacks a modern edition is especially welcome.) How would our understanding of literary history, early modern English drama, or Shakespeare be transformed if we focused on such plays? Along the way, expect to wrestle with questions about what qualities might lead a play to have been treated as insignificant or bad.

Seminar proposal:

I have learned the best way to start a conversation at SAA is to ask, “What’s a play you find fascinating that it seems almost no one else has read?” Every scholar who works on 16th- and 17th-century drama seems able to argue why a particular play deserves more attention. This seminar will formalize those conversations.

The past few decades have witnessed efforts to rethink the canon of early modern English drama and to make more plays readily accessible. Work discussing lost and manuscript plays has enabled us to recontextualize familiar works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Such research has transformed our understanding of plays and performance history.

Yet there are still numerous plays that remain overlooked – even with no modern edition. Some plays included in collected works editions still receive little critical attention. This seminar focuses on the question: What would happen if we centred these forsaken texts?

Practically speaking, this seminar will invite participants to introduce for consideration a play they think others should read. Rather than starting with abstracts, members will be asked to share a short description of their play along with questions it raises. The seminar meeting will facilitate discussion of papers that present a short, focused critical reading of an overlooked text while inviting responses that suggest a range of other critical issues.

This seminar encourages critical thinking about the examples around which we construct literary and theatre histories – from the centre (with well-known and typical plays) or from the margins (with odd one-offs and exceptions). It will also foster a meta-critical conversation about how even changing canons calcify as well as questions about how we decide which plays merit our attention. Along the way, we will explore what qualities might lead to a play being considered bad or insignificant.

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*The Virgin Martyr* and the Dramaturgies of the (late) Queen Anne's Men

Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (c. 1620) offers a rich and often bizarre early modern take on the *tragedia sacra* or saint's play. Scholars disagree sharply on the generic, religious, and political commitments behind the spectacular theatricality, grotesque violence, and disturbing gender politics of this drama, which has yet to benefit from a modern scholarly edition. My essay asks whether the answers to some of these questions might lie in the repertory of the company that premiered the play: "the servants of his Majesties Revels," aka the Company Formerly Known (before the death of their patroness, Queen Anna of Denmark, in 1619) as Queen Anne's Men. *The Virgin Martyr* is marked by a range of recurring tropes and themes that characterized the company's work in the years immediately before and after Queen Anna's passing. During this period, the late queen's men produced a number of plays that feature beleaguered, chaste heroines; tyrannical and misogynist villains; and ambiguously gendered intermediate figures who take up the women's cause against their oppressors. Through their scenes of desire, oppression, conversion, and redemption, I hypothesize, these plays not only respond to ongoing clashes within England's reigning royal family, but also articulate hopes for the future of the realm.

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"This most sacred dish": Appetitive Desire and Reproductive Futurism  
in *The Woman Hater, or, The Hungry Courtier*

This paper draws from Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* to argue that the seemingly unrelated plots in *The Woman Hater* are connected through the death drive, *jouissance*, and reproductive futurism. The death drive is a drive toward death and destruction, and that destruction is normally a destruction of the self, relying heavily on the pursuit of pleasure, also known as the pleasure principle. This drive is often linked to what Lacan defines as *jouissance*, in which people purposely transgress any prohibitions put upon socially acceptable enjoyment, allowing them to go beyond the pleasure principle in ways that end up producing self-inflicted pain, not more pleasure. By pursuing the umbrano head, Lazarello still participates in consumption—gastronomic yet highly sexualize—being rewarded with not only the fish's head but also marriage to a brothel's madame in line with heteronormative standards of reproductive futurism; Gondarino, though, running opposite of reproductive futurism, instead engaging his death drive and relentlessly pursuing a fruitless endeavor, ends up punished and outside the systems of reproductive futurism, queering him within the heteronormative standards of early modern England.

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## “It was Agatha All Along”: Interfering Neighbors and Tudor Interludes

In this paper, I turn to the (mildly forsaken) Tudor interlude *Nice Wanton* (c.1560) in order to demonstrate how domestic tragedies like *Arden of Feversham* borrowed and adapted theatrical conventions from Tudor moral interludes, particularly around the representation of neighbors and neighborly interference. *Nice Wanton* is one of several Tudor interludes that engage with questions of witnessing, parsing and judging human criminality without the aid of direct divine intervention. These interludes place the fall of their flawed central characters within a human community that is profoundly affected by their sinful action. The focus thus changes from the redemption of the central figure to the preservation or collapse of the neighborhood itself. In *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art* and *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, the community is so irrevocably harmed by the actions of the fallen protagonist (Moros and Worldly Man) that their neighbors settle for the pyrrhic victory of summoning a divine plague. *Nice Wanton* offers an alternative to this apocalyptic narrative; the “bad seeds” of the interlude are successfully dispatched, either by execution or by venereal disease. Yet, *Nice Wanton* frames its neighbors as both characters within the dramatic narrative and commentators outside of it; like Agatha in *Wandavision*, they act as both subjects of and stewards to the plot, aware of the moral aphorism organizing the two halves of the interlude. This paper explores how this metatheatrical knowledge is put to use when moving from moral interlude into domestic tragedy.

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## “Know the man / By the garments he had on?": Reading the “Other” in Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger’s *Love’s Cure: or The Martial Maid*

In this essay, I will address this process of knowledge-making based on outward markers of identity on the early modern stage, focusing not only on the materiality of textiles but also the gaps and limitations inherent to dramatic constructions of identity. In doing so, I will draw our attention to *Love’s Cure*, a play that manipulates the unstable markers of gender in order to cultivate multiple emotional scripts. While premodern theatrical practices demand the necessary subversion of symbolically-charged clothing through the presence of boy-actors on the stage, such moments implicitly rely on their audience’s ability to distinguish between the actors’ able-bodied masculinity and the female/trans\* otherness of the characters they portray. *Love’s Cure*, however, complicates this process of identification on the stage by framing masculinity and femininity through expectations of normativity and “monstrous” transness that attests to some of the lived experiences of otherness in the premodern world.

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## Delay, Disguise, and Stagecraft in Fletcher’s *The Chances*

John Fletcher's *The Chances* (c. 1617) engages a reader or audience member in an unusually swift first act packed with short scenes to build narrative speed that carries through the remainder of the play. In many ways, the speed of the first act carries readers or audience members through the remainder of the play, as the play thoroughly interrogates and possibly undermines the possibilities of disguise in the play. The critical and theatrical response has ranged widely from theatrical interest (maintained through the eighteenth century) to various scholarly discussions depending on a range of approaches to early modern drama. The scholarly interest has focused primarily on the source material (from Cervantes) on which the play depends and on the female characters' relationships to maternity. In addition to these areas of inquiry, I suggest that the play's stagecraft elements make the play of continued interest to scholars and theaters, possibly in clarifying the development of comedy as a genre over the longer span of early modern drama.

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Of Arms and the Cobbler: Robert Wilson's *Cobbler's Prophecy*

Robert Wilson's *Cobbler's Prophecy* is a defense and celebration of theatrical arts, an extended quasi allegorical meditation on the aptness of the arts, especially theater, to mend what ails society; along the way it takes aim at political ills. Inserting a cobbler in place of Mercury, god of commerce and prophecy, Wilson makes literal the catchphrase *Tam Marti quam Mercurio*, in praise of those equally able in soldierly and civil pursuits. Raph Cobbler travels throughout *Cobbler's Prophecy* with Sateros Souldier. Wilson's heroes are *Tam Marti quam Cobbler*. Because the cobbling craft was exceedingly humble, often itinerant, occasionally irascible, and specialized in repairs, Elizabethans identified them with menders of political soles. The Cordwainer guild's humblest members, cobblers by law exclusively work old leather. They mend defective or worn products. Raph Cobbler is the play's resident artist and mender. Raph treks through scenes in which metatheatrical, theatrical, and proto theatrical elements abound. *Cobbler's Prophecy* is set in Boeotia, a region in Greece that includes Thebes along with major literary and theatrical landmarks, all of which Raph tours in the play: birthplace of Dionysus, god of theater (debate lines 196-420); home to Mount Helicon and its resident Muses Melpomene, Thalia, and Clio (lines 421-606); origin of Echo (lines 502-522; 607-613). As befits its landscape, Wilson's play is thick with ancient Greek sources. Boeotia needs the cobbler's mending because the other powerful Art that should have accompanied Arms, the Scholler, is under sway of Oligarchy, personified in the play's vice Olygoros Contempt. Aristotle's *Politics* describes how rule by the aristoi, or best persons, under pressure declines into rule by the oligoi, the wealthy few. The Muses explain for the audience and Sateros Souldier the role of literary arts—in this case particularly the Menippean satire of Lucian of Samosata—in correcting social ills. When the arts are reduced to mocks, wonder is lost. Parrying with his own scoffs, Raph is a leveler who opposes elitist scorners under sway of Olygoros Contempt. Within the play's allegory, the wholesome scoffs of the cobbler promote wonder and demote elitism in arts: Venus, love poetry, and Roman authors have vaunted it with contempt too long; they give way. Art and arms are reconfigured, with a fresh, scholarly-adjacent art in the figure of the cobbler.

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Locating Meaning in the Paratexts of  
*A Merrie Dialogue, Betweene Band, Cuffe, and Ruffe*

*A Merrie Dialogue, Betweene Band, Cuffe, and Ruffe* achieved the impressive feat of being first printed twice within the same calendar year, 1615. Despite this indication of some contemporary popularity, the play has languished in obscurity for centuries. Only rarely has it garnered any critical attention, none of which has commented on the bizarre features of its second quarto. My paper seeks to fill some of this scholarly gap by examining the set of paratexts unique to Q2. Throughout an extended sequence almost equaling the length of the playtext itself, the paratexts berate William Stansby – the printer of the first quarto who returned for Q2 – for Q1’s poor quality; in a mind-twisting example of fictional characters pleading for real world justice, the eponymous Band, Cuffe, and Ruffe protest their ill usage, then the paratexts manufacture a jury and judge to condemn Stansby for his crimes. Despite these lengthy complaints, Q2 demonstrates only 18 textual differences from Q1’s playtext, just over half of which improve on errors from Q1 and slightly less than half introduce new errors into Q2. My paper explores these paratexts, who might have created them, and what effect they have had on *Merrie Dialogue*’s textual history.

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*The Insatiate Countess* and the Pleasures of Time

I was talking to a friend a while ago and told him I was reading *The Insatiate Countess*, and asked him if he knew or had read it. “Well,” he said, “I remember the first line.” Here it is: “What should we do in this Countess’s dark hole?” These words, conflating Isabella’s perceived depression or mourning with her vagina, and maybe her tomb, give a hint about the thematic obsessions of this work. The strangely leering *and* sympathetic opening line brilliantly suggests utter male inadequacy and ignorance about female emotion or sexual need. The work matters because it reads as if it were a primer or skeleton key to erotic relations on the early modern stage. The subplot is especially rife with comedy and curtailment of the will, but the main plot also carries folly and frustration in the sexual arena. My questions are: How seriously *does* this play take sex and the idea of female desire? How seriously are we supposed to take them? Is Isabella’s desire as “queer” (nonnormative, excessive) as the subplot’s near-cuckolds’ desires? What is the effect of the play’s abundant mythological references? And how do these relate to the tragicomic thematic of the play? In my essay, I will claim that *The Insatiate Countess* anatomizes female sexual desire and conceives of its origins as effectively social (or possibly mythic) more than affective or physiological: the result of privation and restriction more than abundance or jouissance.

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“If hap the skie fall, we hap may have larkes”:  
Comedy and Moral Ambiguity in *Apius and Virginia*

One of the main themes of the drama *Apius and Virginia* (printed in 1575) is virtue understood as virginity and constancy of character. The long monologue of Haphazard, the play's Vice is about his extreme changeability, and thus offers the idea opposite of constancy. This setup suggests a moral framework in which Virginius and his family represent virtue, while Haphazard, the rough couple and Subservus stand for moral corruption (together with Judge Apius). I wish to complicate this interpretation by stressing that although Haphazard acts as the opposite of the allegories of virtuous characters in the tragic plot involving Apius, his function in the play as a whole is more nuanced. Connecting the two plots, Haphazard helps us realize that the comic and the tragic plot deal with the same issue – how to maintain good friendship and family and how to deal with the adversities of fate/chance. They offer alternative but parallel solutions that are equally important messages to the audience.

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“Let Me Be Englishèd”:  
Gender and Nationality in *Thomas of Woodstock*

This essay examines how gender and nationality intersect in the character of Anne of Bohemia. Upon her marriage to Richard, Anne immediately rejects the role of the implicitly dangerous foreign woman: “My native country I no more remember / But as a tale told in my infancy” (1.3.41–42). (Bohemia’s Protestant associations may help to enable this easy translation.) Anne quickly becomes more emotionally and spiritually connected to England and its people than Richard is. This is a very different narrative from what we see in plays like Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* or *Henry V*, where the foreign Queen either wields dangerous and seductive power (Margaret of Anjou) or stands in for her newly subjugated country (Katherine of France). Anne actively and successfully *decides* to be English. In the play’s framing, however, Richard never has the same option. As Lancaster points out: “At Bordeaux was he born, which place allures / And ties his deep affections still to France” (5.3.99–100). As a woman, Anne must lose her homeland in a state marriage; but at the same time, she seems able to put her native country behind her in a way that Richard never can.

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Forsaking *All's Lost by Lust*

William Rowley’s Jacobean tragedy *All's Lost by Lust* was popular until the early days of the Restoration, but since then has become ‘forsaken’. This paper surveys the history of the play's

reputation to examine how and why it was forsaken, and what its status should be today. I begin by identifying possible reasons for the play's sudden rejection after 1661 despite several revivals in that year. I will then show how scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, even while admiring the play, gave it a reputation for simplistic melodrama and vulgarity, inspired in part by Rowley's own rhetorical modesty about his art. This reputation, I will propose, has coloured some of the more recent scholarship on the play. In particular, the play's fascinating representation of outspoken women, which breaks some of the conventions of early modern drama, has been dismissed as incompetence rather than as evidence for complexity. I will thus argue that there are thus reasons for scholars to pay more attention to *All's Lost*, but I will also argue that this should not mean a return to the theatre. The scholars who have taken *All's Lost* most seriously in the last few decades are scholars of early modern race who have rightly drawn attention to the play as a paradigmatic example of anti-Black racism. The play should thus rightly forsaken by the theatre and is unlikely ever to be staged again, unless in highly adapted form. I thus conclude that a play may be both forsaken and unforsaken in different contexts – or perhaps that to be forsaken is a complex and multi-faceted state.

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Shame, Character, and Characterization  
in Thomas Heywood's *King Edward IV*

How might the use of shame in creating character destabilize and reconfigure our perception of early modern societal boundaries? Throughout Thomas Heywood's *The First and Second Parts of Edward IV* (1599-1600), characters respond to words of derision and feelings of shame or guilt in various ways: a rebel pushes back, a husband turns inward, a wife discovers resilience and agency, a fair-weather friend is humbled. My close reading of the play looks at Heywood's use of shame as a literary device in his limning of Jane and Matthew Shore. The two characters are complete departures from their historical figures, and for the most part, are shaped by their affective ecologies. Using as points of departure Stanley Cavell's meditations on Shakespeare, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and explorations of cuckoldry and masculine anxiety, I consider how Jane and Matthew's individual responses to shame can efface tropes and restructure our reading of early modern gender roles, guilt/innocence, and status as power.

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Reading the "Oswald" Fragment

The "Play of Oswald" was, quite literally, forsaken: never published, its only known manuscript seems to have been used as wastepaper by a book binder. Surviving only as two fragmentary leaves recovered in the 19th century, "Oswald" challenges our ability to read in two ways: at a literal level, the surviving pages have been severely damaged, rendering several words illegible

to the naked eye, while the text's fragmentary nature frustrates our literary critical desire to understand the passage in the context of an entire play. My paper qualifies these obvious limitations with a sense of what might be possible. Using recent multispectral imaging, I propose new readings towards a more complete transcription of the fragment. Drawing on Caroline Levine's *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, I consider the critical affordances of the fragment as a literary form and, reading the "Oswald" fragment as a short text in its own right to explore how the play interrogates concepts of time and history through its experiments with anachronism and metatheatre. If dramatic fragments are the easiest kinds of texts to dismiss—to relegate to the class of the forsaken—I want to experiment with new modes of critical attention and recovery.

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### Jack Drum's Humorous Entertainment

This essay examines the way John Marston pulls the rug out from underneath himself in *Jack Drum's Entertainment*. The play has often been read in the context of the so-called "War of the Theatres" or "Poets' War," but it has largely been neglected as a play in its own right—a play that, like Jonson's comical satires, is interested in exploring the dramatic possibilities of satire in the wake of the Bishops' Ban. I argue that Marston's play is filled with fools who are ultimately purged of their humours, including the humour to purge others of their humour, and that Marston, like his onstage satirists, condemns himself by condemning others. There is no outside to Marston's critique, no privileged moral or intellectual position that he or anyone else can occupy that is safe from blame. Marston's satire is all-encompassing: it includes all of his characters, it includes himself, and it includes his play.