

SAA 2024: 'Theatre History Now—Sites and Insights' SAA Seminar: Collated Abstracts

1. Douglas Arrell (University of Winnipeg)

The Date and Authorship of the “Hecate Passages” in *Macbeth*

Most scholars agree that the “Hecate passages” in *Macbeth* were written to splice into the play three musical numbers from the prematurely-closed production of Middleton’s tragicomedy *The Witch*. Most date that play to 1616, but I present an argument that the correct date is late 1612 or early 1613, based on the play’s relation to the Howard/Essex/Carr scandal. The Hecate passages were probably written in May or June 1613. Critics have not acknowledged the extent to which they are dissonant with the rest of *Macbeth*. Their author either had limited knowledge of the play or, more likely, did not consider fitting in to the dramatic context to be very important in writing them. Gary Taylor has argued strenuously that Middleton wrote these passages, but while his mathematical analysis is impressive, doubts remain. Taylor contends that Middleton also executed a detailed revision of the play, at times inserting single sentences or even single words into Shakespeare’s text. Could the man who carefully revised the play also write these passages that so inaccurately refer to it? Middleton either did not write the Hecate passages or did not carry out the supposed revision of the play. He surely cannot have done both.

2. Benjamin Blyth (University of Calgary)

Archaeology, AI, and After at Shakespeare’s Shoreditch Sites.

Recent excavations at the Theatre and the Curtain have provided extensive new data about playing and playgoing in sixteenth-century Shoreditch. The findings will be displayed at a new “Museum of Shakespeare” due to open at the site of the Curtain early next year. Alongside the physical archaeology, the museum will host an exhibition that uses “the latest AI technology... [to] allow theatre lovers to walk across the Elizabethan stage” (Khomami, “London Museum”). This is the start of an exciting new chapter in the site’s history; however, the exhibition’s use of AI to generate reimagined performance spaces raises further questions about how these new technologies might influence our understanding of the role, use, and accessibility of early modern playhouse sites. This paper considers the implications of using AI to augment the physical archaeology at the Curtain. It outlines how AI may both challenge and reinscribe existing perspectives of early modern performance practices and raises further questions about rights and representation in response to the museum’s claim that “AI technology will place guests in animated performances” (Khomami, “London Museum”), which has taken on a new imperative following the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike. With the understandable excitement around the museum’s opening, the paper concludes by asking what comes after the AI at Shakespeare’s Shoreditch sites?

3. Meryl Faiers (Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham)

‘Philip Henslowe of the parish of St Saviour in Southwark, gentleman’ – and pawnbroker

On folio 55 of Philip Henslowe’s Diary, records of Henslowe’s loans to the Admiral’s Men in 1598 abruptly give way to accounts of his transactions as a pawnbroker, beginning five years earlier, in 1593. Compiled in three sections, and intermingled with his theatrical records, the pawn accounts run to the end of 1595. 120 years ago, W. W. Greg ignored these leaves declaring, ‘there is not sufficient evidence for the identification of any of the persons incidentally appearing in these entries’. In 2024, with online images and transcriptions of the Southwark token books readily available, it is possible to identify many of Henslowe’s customers and therefore to see that he sat at the centre of a network of predominantly female clients living close by his home and the Rose playhouse in Clink Liberty. Reading these records alongside the inventories of

costumes and props of the Admiral's Men taken in March 1598, do we glimpse Henslowe using his pawnbroking business to supply costume items for the Rose's resident playing company?

4. Louise Geddes (Adelphi University)

Camping the Body Politic in *The Broken Heart*

At the beginning of *The Broken Heart*, John Ford insists that the play should not be staged for laughs. Ford is, presumably, responding to the camped body that characterizes the absurdist melodrama of such playwrights as Thomas Middleton and Beaumont and Fletcher. Defined variously as a commitment to the marginal, a self-representation that refuses hegemonic understandings of the body, and more importantly for this paper's purposes, a queer refusal (or, to use Jack Halberstam's term, a failure), to adhere to generic expectations of what a body can do, camp continues to proliferate Ford's play, suggesting a staging of the bodies that is camp by its commitment to melancholy - there is, after all, no business as serious as comedy. The play's ridiculous dramaturgy, then, inevitably demands a staging of Orgilus' death that is a camp denial of the state's authority over him that is defined by his garrulous refusal of submission to the over-wrought spectacle of his own bleeding body. This essay draws from my own theorization of camp, combined with Diana Taylor's insistence on the value of the embodiment as *present!* to consider the absurd persistence of the camped body in the face of the erasure of civil liberties.

5. Eva Griffith

Information about the Red Bull Playhouse, Clerkenwell. Sites uncovered via extra surveying.

Going on from the 2021/2022 announcement article concerning a new Ralph Treswell survey of the Tudor Seckford Estate (1587), found in the journal *Transactions* (LAMAS), this paper opens up other areas of interest for the Red Bull playhouse with the aid of other data new to published scholarship.

6. Tracey Hill (Bath Spa University, Emerita)

How to stage a triumph

I propose to 'look under the bonnet' of the civic entertainments that were such an important feature of the performance culture of early modern London. The pageant books that survive preserve the speeches and aspects of props and costuming, but do not provide the whole story. Much of the planning, creative design and expenditure on these events is captured, in considerable detail, in the various civic bodies' records. These records reveal how capacious early modern theatricality was: large sums were expended not only on commissioning writers but also on the wider trappings of ceremonial celebration like flags and streamers, drums and fireworks, swordsmen and costumed whiffers. Accordingly, the City's Guildhall and the livery company halls acted as crucial sites of theatrical productivity, as of course did the locations used as pageant stations, such as Cheapside Conduit, the river Thames, and St Paul's churchyard.

Drawing on my ongoing research for the REED Civic London 1558-1642 project, my paper will track civic pageantry from initial project to its realisation on the City streets. I will use case studies from both the minor and Great Twelve companies to reveal the ways in which practical and aesthetic considerations were combined to produce spectacle.

7. Lucy Holehouse (University of Birmingham)

Seeing Skin in Thomas Middleton's *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (1621-2)

'rather than my bewty should play the villaine and betray myne honor [...] thus would I mangle yt' states Victoria in *The Telltale* (1622-40), before attempting to 'cut her face'. Julio prevents her and instead umbers her face, declaring, 'so & they bee in love w yo bewty now hange mee'. *The Telltale* thus exemplifies how cosmetic disguise was used to supposedly disfigure characters on the early modern stage. This would be visually striking: the use of crushed pearl in white paint or an egg wash layer would make the undisguised Victoria literally shine to signify her beauty. Then, application of John Rumler's 1621 removable umbering recipe of 'walnut and hog's grease' would mattify the skin, making the umbered Victoria less eye-catching under light, in direct contrast with those characters still in shimmering white paint.

This paper considers Aurelia's umbering disguise and discovery in *More Dissemblers*, V.ii, which develops innovative stage spectacle through systematic engagement with light reflection and visibility. Aurelia's discovery following reapplication of white paint shows Middleton exploring new potentials of disguise spectacle marshalling racialised ideals of beauty. This paper thus models how disguise analysis can offer tangible insights into early modern ideas of race and gender.

8. David Kathman

Doing Theatre History with the Anglo-American Legal Tradition Website

The Anglo-American Legal Tradition website, hosted by the University of Houston's O'Quinn Law Library, allows anyone with a web browser and an internet connection to access millions of images of medieval and early modern legal records housed in the UK's National Archives in Kew. Among much else, these include plea rolls for the two main common-law courts, Common Pleas (CP40) and King's Bench (KB27), as well as contemporary indexes to the King's Bench and modern indexes to some Common Pleas rolls. These records, previously very difficult to access, contain a wealth of valuable information for historians of the early modern English theatre. Several Common Pleas and King's Bench suits found on the AALT website have been key to my recent research on the Curtain playhouse, establishing that Robert Miles was leasing the property from Richard Hicke and Henry Lanman when the playhouse was built, and providing valuable new information about Hicke and his son-in-law Peter Hunningborne. In my searches through the plea rolls, I have also found previously unknown common-law suits involving the player Lawrence Dutton and many writers with theatrical connections, including John Lyly, George Gascoigne, Rowland Broughton, George Puttenham, Thomas Watson, Job Throckmorton, Philemon Holland, Arthur Golding, George Turberville, and Thomas Tusser.

9. Sally-Beth MacLean, Director of Research and General Editor of the Records of Early English Drama (REED) and Professor Emerita (English, University of Toronto)

1570s Newington Revisited

No longer obscure, the early playhouse at Newington Butts has benefitted from pioneering work done by William Ingram and most recently by Laurie Johnson in an important book-length study, *Shakespeare's Lost Playhouse: Eleven Days at Newington Butts*. I am currently working on a digital edition of dramatic records for Newington Butts, forthcoming by early 2025 in the REED

series. My focus is on making available the documentary evidence transcribed from leases, sewer records, a well-known court case and relevant privy council orders, linked to MS images and mapping of the Southwark area. I will share sections of my draft introduction to the collection that relate to the 1570s period of performance at Newington, with a particular interest in evidence for the building that we assume was first used by Jerome Savage and his acting company. After a renewed search for further parish and legal records, the limits of this evidence continue to frustrate but an unanticipated clue from a new source is worth examining. Two early leases for Lurklane and an interim itinerary for Warwick's Men will be included as an appendix.

10. Clare McManus (Northumbria University)

Women investors and gendered performance at the second Fortune playhouse (2)

In March 1624 Elizabeth Gunnell paid Henry Herbert to license 'a masque for the dancers of the ropes' at the second Fortune playhouse. In tandem with Lucy Munro's paper on the Fortune's female leaseholders and 'Engendering the Stage' project research, this paper will attend to women's rope-dancing (ubiquitous across early modern England and Europe) and to women's playhouse labour and investment to analyse the nature of performance at the second Fortune. The paper will explore the intertwined histories of the Fortune and the multi-generational, transnational Peadle troupe of rope-dancers and tumblers. Based in Flushing and London, the company toured across England and northern Europe between the 1590s and 1630s; key troupe members are linked to the Fortune, either through owning property or, like Abraham Peadle, as an actor, and the company was led for a short time in the 1630s by one Cicely Peadle. The paper aims to assess what records of rope-dancing can tell us about the relationship between women's theatrical entrepreneurship, women's performance, and the repertory of the second Fortune playhouse.

11. Lucy Munro (King's College, London)

Women Investors and Gendered Performance at the Second Fortune Playhouse (I)

In 1621, the Fortune playhouse in Clerkenwell was destroyed by fire. In order to fund its reconstruction, its owner, Edward Alleyn, created a new twelve-part lease, opening up the project to outside investors. Three of the initial leaseholders in 1622-4 were women: Frances Juby, Margaret Gray and Mary Bryan. Moreover, research conducted as part of the 'Engendering the Stage' project has revealed that women comprised 24 of the 71 identifiable individuals who had a stake in the Fortune's lease in the period between 1622 and 1649. Drawing on materials at Dulwich College and The National Archives, this paper will look closely at the histories of the leases purchased by Juby, Gray and Bryan, which were later held by Susan Baskerville, Elizabeth Shank, Winifred Shank, Mary Minshawe and Susan Cade. It will examine such areas as (1) the ways in which the lives of these women connect the playhouse with broader histories of gender, mental illness, trade and colonisation; (2) what these women's leases tell us about the processes surrounding playhouse investment; and (3) the potential connections between women's economic agency and the playhouse's repertory.

12. Kara Northway (Kansas State University)

"Your Place or Mine?": Epistolary Insights into Theater Transaction Sites

Lucy Munro's 2020 study of Robert Daborne's playwriting process concludes, "textual transactions are informed by personal, emotional and bodily experience." My paper will attempt to pinpoint where these bodily experiences of transactions occurred, or were imagined to ideally happen. While much of the business of early theater naturally was conducted within playing

spaces or on tour, I examine epistolary evidence for other sites of London commercial theater business off-stage, after hours. Letters by Daborne to theater manager Philip Henslowe regularly anticipated locations for business—puzzling choices not always fully explained by, for example, fears of arrest; Daborne then played with geographical, artistic, and social distance to suit his rhetorical purposes. So what factors determined his expectations either for specific business locations (e.g., at his home, Henslowe’s house, or even “*at*” a play) or whether business should be done by letter instead? Why was a letter, which assumes one party’s absence, written by Daborne and sent to Henslowe then endorsed by Henslowe back “at mr dabbornes howsse”? How were women involved in transactions? And why were letters sent by watermen—or at all—when, according to 1613-14 parish token books, the two men lived near the Clink, within a half mile of each other.

13. Gerit Quealy

Grounds for Play: Elizabeth’s Golden Age Garden Theatrics

This paper seeks to examine the use of outdoor spaces, specifically gardens and private pleasure grounds as performance spaces for royal visits and aristocratic entertainments (in contrast to tavern and inn courtyards, for example). Considerations include performances adapted to the cultivated landscape; as Tigner notes, the garden became “the backdrop for the performance and the testimony of the sponsor's vision of the kingdom” and expanding that to the ways in which features may have been impacted by specific performance needs and goals. Other elements considered include the effects on staging, costuming, accessibility versus invisibility of performers, i.e., the permeability of the classes in these venues, as well as gender considerations.

Focusing heavily (but not solely, based on what the records allow, and incorporating what a new private archive might yield) on the Kenilworth Entertainments, Elvetham in 1591, and Sudeley Castle in 1592, and pulling from what last year’s SAA paper revealed about female performance integrating the work of Elizabeth Kolkovitch and Marion Colthorpe, this paper will explore a fuller understanding of outdoor theatre as an extension of Queen Elizabeth’s vision for a new Golden Age, and its impact, if any on ecological preservation.

14. Héloïse M. Sénéchal (Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham)

The ‘blancke space’: Shadow Shareholders and the Collateralisation of Playhouse Assets

John Heminges’ shares in the Globe and Blackfriars playhouses were ‘the choicest *parte* of [his] *personall estate*’, and a chief concern as he lay dying in 1630 was to protect them from creditors. Yet his will bears the signatures of neither testator nor witnesses, and was subject to significant, possibly unauthorised, revisions that liberated the shares from a conveyancing arrangement and placed them solely in the hands of his ‘unexperienced’ son, William. This paper demonstrates that the changes were the work of Heminges’ son-in-law, scrivener John Atkins, who went on to manage Heminges’ estate on William’s behalf, and who himself briefly became the co-mortgagee of Blackfriars shares. New evidence shows that Atkins, a financial and a frippery broker, drove forwards the transfer and collateralisation of playhouse shares, a process that suggests their economic viability within wider credit networks and reveals the existence of formerly unknown ‘shadow’ shareholders, who nominally held these assets for temporary periods. Previously unexplored legal documents concerning a forfeit mortgage of 1632 additionally offer new information concerning the absolute and revenue value of shares in the Globe and Blackfriars during the late 1620s and early 1630s.

15. Elizabeth E. Tavares (University of Alabama)

Earth, Wind, and Water; or, a Site-Specific Repertory Studies

In 1599, Thomas Platter anchored his descriptions of English theatre in their place rather than content, including the wherry across the Thames, the thatch of an outdoor playhouse, the early-afternoon post-lunch start time in the “suburb of Bishopsgate, if I remember.” He concludes, “thus daily at two in the afternoon, London has two, sometimes three plays running in different places.” To what extent did site-specificity matter to the phenomenology of playgoing? In three movements, this essay will offer a preliminary consideration of what we might gain from a site-specific approach to repertory studies. The first, “earth,” sketches the methodological contours of site-specificity in performance studies. Is something activated by a homology between texts performed and the resonances of a place given touring? The second, “wind,” considers the renovated Rose’s balcony to ask whether there are correlations between structures narrative and architectural. Finally, “water” centers the ecological conditions of not only being on the Thames, but surrounded by waterways and combatting an excess of water in a little ice age. What would it look like to write a biography not of a playwright or a theatre company, but of a venue “enmeshed,” to use Timothy Morton’s phrase, in ecological time?

16. W. B. Worthen (Columbia University)

Obsolescence; or, Take a Table

As a way to consider the impact of new technologies on theatre studies and theatre historiography, this paper explores the consequences of thinking about theatre not as an institution that uses technology but as a mode of technology in an era of technological change. To take up that question, I correlate two productions, Forced Entertainment’s Table Top Shakespeare and Annie Dorsen’s recent Prometheus Firebringer. Here, developing some work I did as part of an SAA seminar on casting two years ago, I consider the role of the table as decisive in the instrumentalizing of a critically modern conception of theatre: theatre as a fully, technologically administered apparatus. The tables in Table Top Shakespeare and in Prometheus Firebringer perform complementary functions; indeed, since Dorsen’s performance poses a dialectic between an assertively “human” performance intelligence and the staging of an aggressively “artificial” performance intelligence, her performance resituates the work of Forced Entertainment, away from a conception of a homely and handmade Shakespeare and toward a critique of the conception of the “human” in contemporary performance.