

**On Glossing** (SAA 2026)  
Paper Abstracts

**Glossing, Neo-Latin, and Google Books**

*Marlin E. Blaine*

Scholars have long been aware of the influence of Neo-Latin writing on vernacular texts of the Renaissance and have, of course, used them in glossing all sorts of references. Nevertheless, a tendency of glossers to prioritize classical Latin texts over Neo-Latin works when identifying sources or allusions remains operative in some instances. Such choices inevitably affect interpretation. In part, the preference for classical texts results from their greater familiarity and accessibility. Neo-Latin writing bulks many times larger than the corpus of ancient Latin texts, but most of it has lain forgotten, ignored, and often beyond reach in the great libraries of the world that many scholars rarely have access to. Databases such as EEBO and Early European Books have helped expand access, but Google Books is by far the most helpful resource in this area because of the scope and searchability of its offerings. My essay will offer some examples of instances where glosses from Neo-Latin texts enable more accurate and productive readings of Renaissance works than do classical ones. Because my suggested glosses were only made possible by the new technologies, my essay is also a celebration of their potentialities.

**Glossing for Practitioners**

*Kurt Daw*

My seminar contribution explores a proposed augmentation to current editorial practice by articulating a mode of glossing explicitly designed for theatre practitioners. Rather than offering performance history, cataloging notable stagings, or supplying interpretive alternatives, I advocate for concise, generative glosses that highlight textual features requiring embodied decision-making. Such glosses identify moments where a script presents consequential alternatives; where linguistic or rhetorical cues imply presentational rather than representational modes of performance; and where cruxes, lacunae, or unstable textual states demand practitioner engagement not to “determine meaning” but to recognize and navigate sites of uncertainty.

Generative glosses foreground these conditions without foreclosing possibilities, supplementing rather than replacing conventional annotation. By resisting merely “performance-aware” glossing in favor of performance-enabling prompts, this approach repositions the gloss as a tool that equips actors, directors, and dramaturgs to work directly and collaboratively with the text. I tentatively outline principles for constructing these glosses and consider their implications for both digital and print editions.

## **Sex/Unsex: Intention, Invention, and Trans Glossing**

*Joseph Gamble*

In his majority opinion in *Bostock v. Clayton* (2020), a landmark ruling that declared that employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity was barred by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act's prohibition of employment discrimination "on the basis of . . . sex," Justice Gorsuch writes that "the limits of the drafters' imagination supply no reason to ignore the law's demands." Such a statement, *mutatis mutandum*, might well have been written by a contemporary critical editor of Shakespeare, slaking off the author's imagined intentions (at least momentarily) in favor of a more capacious historical sense of a word or phrase's possible meanings.

This essay will take up the surprising methodological, epistemological, and political convergences between a long history of glossarial practice that wants both to claim and to exceed what Shakespeare "meant" in any given moment and a textualist legal doctrine that wants both to claim and disregard what legislators "mean" in any given law. In particular, given the content of *Bostock*, I am interested in the effects of such glossarial practices on our understanding of transness, both historically and today. What are the laws of the margins? Are trans people included in the audiences of contemporary Shakespearean glosses? And if not, what would it mean to include them?

## **Glossing "Wench:" Language Evolution and the Reader's Authority**

*Suzanne Tanner*

In his edition of a Third Folio, currently owned by the Folger Library (S2914 Fo.3 no.22), an anonymous eighteenth-century reader of *The Tempest* felt the need to gloss Prospero's address of his daughter Miranda as "wench." In the margins, this reader took up his pen to write, "Wench] An Appellation in our Author's Days by no means disrespectfull but the contrary as may appear spars in thro' the whole Work. Tho' af this it has lost it's respectfull meaning, a little similar to the former & present meaning of the Word Parson." This marginal gloss is fascinating for many reasons, but this paper will seek to explore two of them. First, this comment highlights the evolution of English language in general, and the term "wench" in particular. Positive or negative connotations of the word "wench" throughout time influence whether the relationship between Prospero and Miranda are viewed positively or negatively, and editorial choices on whether and how to gloss this word have consequences on how a reader interprets the text. Second, this comment features a practice of glossing that is reader, not editor, driven, and underscores the shared authority of the reader in meaning-making and interpretation of the Shakespearean text.

## **Glossing Race and Gender in *The Maid's Tragedy***

*Dalton Greene*

Scholars have paid much attention to the theory and practice of glossing, but given the variety of textual origins, networks of transmission, and histories of intervention for early modern playtexts, coming to any singular method is a tall order. This presents a challenge—but also an opportunity—when it comes to identities like race and gender, which have historically been sidelined in treatments of these texts. This paper sketches a possible approach to glossing with an eye toward racial and gendered constructions, using Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* as a case study. In this play, Evadne, a woman previously assaulted by the king, kills her abuser, a significant moment for understanding emergent notions of white femininity. As Evadne soliloquizes her intentions, she distances herself from norms of feminine behavior, tapping into explicitly racialized language. She also employs an exclamation: “good heavens!” in the original, but “oh, God!” in later editions. Through a micro-editorial history of this emendation's implications, I build out a case for leveraging digital editions to foreground such editorial interventions for lay readers, thereby demystifying the process of textual editing and the ways it alternately reveals or obscures insights into the cultural biases operating in premodern texts.

## **The Demise of Professional Glossing**

*Eric M. Johnson*

Glosses (a.k.a. annotations, notes, etc.) have been major selling points of Shakespeare editions since the 18th century. Other than the texts themselves, they are the most important feature of any edition. Because of the knowledge and skills involved, creating a bounded, curated set of glosses is traditionally understood as the domain of the scholarly editor.

That publishing model will be eclipsed soon, as large-language models (LLMs) will mediate between readers and the substrate materials they harvest (everything from monographs to the simplest individual gloss). They will produce glossary sets to suit different audiences' needs. Books will still have to limit the number of glosses to a publishable number, but they need not all be written by professionals – and some portion will be written by machines.

This paper will examine the positive and negative ramifications of this inevitability, with a focus on what a high-quality and AI-enabled edition might look like. It will also explain why “high-quality and AI-enabled” is not necessarily an oxymoronic phrase, and why such an edition could help sustain and deepen global interest in Shakespeare.

## Here and There: (Not) Directing via the Deictic Gloss

Peter Kirwan

In the pressurized space of the modern critical edition, function words such as pronouns and prepositions are among the most likely to be straightforwardly glossed for clarity rather than subjected to extended commentary, using such formulae as “**she** Hermione” or “**them** i.e. the remaining soldiers”. But more complex is the glossing of deictic language indicating space and relationality: “here”, “there”, “this”, “that”. Editors vary widely in approaches to this kind of language, from ignoring it entirely, to simple glosses of clarification, to extended commentary notes that extrapolate the implied blocking of early modern performance.

Drawing on my work both with students in the rehearsal room and in my ongoing labors on the Arden 4 *Winter's Tale*, my aim in this paper is to think through the role of the gloss in helping triangulate the spatial relationalities of bodies and objects via deictic language. With a focus on the “babyography” of act two, scene three, I trace the potential of deictic glossing to help map proxemics within the scene, as a way to thinking about the respective labors of the rehearsal room and the editor in clarifying stage action.

## “He speaks very shrewishly”: Glossing Misogyny in (and into) Shakespeare

James Mardock

In part, or perhaps mainly, because of the title of Shakespeare’s most troublesome comedy, the word *shrew* and its forms — *beshrew*, *shrewish*, *shrewd*, and *shrewdly* — come to be glossed in early modern texts with either a primary or implicit additional meaning described by *OED shrew* n2 3.a.: “A person, esp. (now only) a woman given to railing or scolding or other perverse or malignant behaviour; frequently a scolding or turbulent wife.” In my first attempt at editing *Henry V*, for example, I glossed *shrewdly* thus: “1) Sharply, severely; 2) like a shrew, i.e., an ill-tempered woman.” I’m abashed to say that it took years, and the careful re-reading of my colleagues at the Digital Renaissance Editions to point out that this gloss recapitulates the linguistic sexism inherent in the word. While I’ve since revised the original gloss, I’d like to use this paper to review both the history and origins of the forms of *shrew*, which was used without the assumption of gender well into the 17th century and beyond, to discuss the development of the critical and editorial assumption of misogynistic meaning these words, and to survey the ways in which the Shakespeare’s glossatorial tradition may have contributed to our idea of the word’s inherent misogyny.

## **Glosses Make Words Harder: Patrick Hume and the Amazonian Targe**

*Andrew Mattison*

This paper will argue that glosses, by identifying words as in need of explication, often create or exacerbate the condition of reading they are theoretically designed to alleviate. Its primary example is the gloss provided by Patrick Hume, in his 1695 commentary on *Paradise Lost*, on the phrase “Amazonian targe,” which describes the size of the leaves repurposed as clothing by Adam and Eve in Book 10. It is an interesting gloss in itself, dealing with one of those seemingly transient but spectacularly fraught and freighted allusions for which Milton is infamous. It is also, like many glosses historically of the word *Amazon*, wrong (the paper will include some discussion of this history, including in relation to Shakespeare’s use in *King John*). But it is illustrative of glosses’ tendency to make words harder for neither of these reasons, but because it demonstrates the difficulties that arise when an English word is identified as requiring another language for its comprehension.

## **Glossing Assignments in Medieval and Early Modern Literature Courses**

*Vanessa L. Rapatz*

When I first began teaching the undergraduate early British Literature survey course as a graduate student, I ended up having to use an online, unannotated edition of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, which resulted in my first foray into asking students to gloss an early text. What resulted was a wonderful collection of student annotations and discussions not only of the details of the texts, but also of how to gather sources outside of a text to help make sense of a variety of textual references and allusions. Rather than relying on a particular editorial choice, students gained agency as readers in finding and selecting meanings and learned how each editor creates an argument through their paratextual analyses. They also had to think about what perhaps should not be glossed, a nod to Stephen Greenblatt’s sense of “diminishing returns” that comes with an overabundance of notes. This first experience with student glossing led me to incorporate similar assignments into my undergraduate and graduate Shakespeare courses. Paired with other assignments, like commonplace books, glossing exercises aid students’ close reading and reflections on their reading process. Additionally, I will argue, such assignments allow students to engage with and critique existing paratextual practices as they consider a variety Shakespearean textual implications that might relate to our courses’ diverse interests including questions of race, gender, sexuality, religion, and politics.

## **Glosses Gone Missing**

*Evelyn Tribble*

What does it mean when passages are left unannotated? Past annotations tend to generate more annotations in an ongoing scholarly dialogue; in contrast, words, phrases and allusions that have historically been passed over in silence tend not to attract further glosses. This is particularly true when the verbal texture seems relatively uncomplicated. As John Russell Brown observes, “Some verbally simple and repetitive moments are so naturally phrased that a reader may not notice the accompanying need for action without some editorial comment” (171). In my paper, I will examine two such moments: 1) Prospero’s sudden decision to renounce his magic in response to Ariel’s description of the plight of “the King and his followers” (5.1.8-20); 2) The “measure round the tree” in 5.5 of the Folio version of *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Neither of these moments have generated much annotation, which raises questions about principles of selection, as well as how editors grapple with glossing embedded action.