

# *Early Theatre 7.2 (2004)*

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## Article Abstracts

**Making Death a Miracle: Audience and the Genres of Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*** by Nova Myhill

## Abstract

Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's protestant saint's play, *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), represents the competition over the significance of the execution of the title character not only in terms of pagan vs. Christian understandings of the world but also in terms of theatrical vs. doctrinal understandings of spectacle. In presenting signs of spiritual authenticity in explicitly theatrical terms, *The Virgin Martyr* puts its audience in the position of recognizing the truth of both the pagan characters who argue that the seemingly miraculous events surrounding Dorothea's torture and execution are counterfeits and the Christian characters who claim that her death is true martyrdom. This understanding of interpretation as a product of the conventions of genre rather than the transparent significance of the spectacle raises important questions about the nature of the relationship between spectator and spectacle on both the public stage and the public scaffold: an issue the article considers in the context of antitheatrical assumptions about the power of spectacle, the discourses of treason and martyrdom surrounding the executions of protestant and catholic divines in the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth respectively, and the changing expectations of the audiences at the Red Bull in 1619-20.

## Biography

**Nova Myhill** <[NMyhill@ncf.edu](mailto:NMyhill@ncf.edu)> holds a doctorate from UCLA and is an assistant professor of British and American Literature at New College of Florida, where she teaches courses in drama and medieval and early modern literature. She has published on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and is currently working on a book on theories of spectatorship in early modern England, focusing on dramatic representations of public punishment.

**Food and Foreignness in *Sir Thomas More*** by Joan Fitzpatrick

## Abstract

In *Sir Thomas More*, by Anthony Munday and others, foreign culinary appetites are associated with physical and sexual degeneracy, and the perception that foreign consumption is harmful to English natives acts as a dominant theme. The accusations rehearsed against resident foreigners in the play are that they have a detrimental effect upon the economy (specifically causing inflation), they have strange culinary practices, and they bring disease. One of the play's key linkages brings these last two together: vegetables grown by the foreigners infect Londoners and so undermine the security of the city. The body's consumption of infected vegetables becomes a powerful symbol for what the rioters believe to be the effect of London's absorption of aliens: as the body consumes that which will infect it so London incorporates the seeds of its own destruction by allowing the aliens to remain. Just as a body that has been poisoned should purge itself of the poisonous matter to ensure its well-being, so violent efforts to purge London of its foreigners are considered necessary by the rioters to ensure the safety of the city. Complaints made by Londoners against European foreigners in *Sir Thomas More* can be contextualized via contemporary accounts of the Irish diet in colonial prose writings that describe unusual and degenerate consumption in order to draw distinctions between civilized English men and their foreign inferiors. The dating of *Sir Thomas More* is itself difficult and a further complication is the relationship between the manuscript's main text, an apparent layer of censorship, and the 'additions' in several hands, but I will nevertheless attempt to contextualize the play's interrelation of food and civil disorder in the light of food shortages in the 1590s and early 1600s that gave rise to real riots. My study of food in the play links Shakespeare's 'addition' (Hand D) in a way that supports recent work on the manuscript's specific theatrical provenance.

## Biography

**Joan Fitzpatrick** <[j.fitzpatrick@ucnorthampton.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:j.fitzpatrick@ucnorthampton.freeserve.co.uk)> teaches Renaissance literature at University College Northampton, UK. She has published articles on Spenser, Ireland, and gender and writes the 'Spenser and Sidney' section of *The Year's Work in English Studies*. She has written two monographs: *Irish Demons: English Writings on Ireland, the Irish, and Gender by Spenser and his Contemporaries* (2000) and *Shakespeare and Spenser's Fantastic Contours: Renaissance Literature's Reshaping of the British Archipelago* (2003) and is currently writing a third called *Food and Feeding in Shakespeare*.

## **Galley-foists, Lord Mayors' Shows, and Early Modern English Drama** by David Carnegie

### **Abstract**

This paper argues that the *OED*'s mistaken definition of a 'galley-foist' as 'a stage barge, esp. that of the lord mayor of London' has significantly misled readers, editors of Jonson and other early modern drama, and writers on London civic pageantry. Evidence from chronicles, eyewitness accounts, livery company records, and the pictorial record demonstrates that the galley-foist was indeed a central feature of lord mayor's show in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but despite what early lexicographers say, it was not the light, elegant row-berge in which the new lord mayor was carried by water to take his oath at Westminster each year. It was, rather, his armed escort: a small square-rigged ship (unusual above London Bridge), painted and highly decorated with coats of arms, flags, pennons, and ribbons, and full of noise from trumpets, drums, musketeers, fireworks, and cannon. If we understand its role and characteristics, a number of passages from early modern drama become more comprehensible, depending as they do on the reader's or spectator's understanding of the galley-foist as the spectacular centrepiece of the entire lord mayor's show, as a mocking reference to a vessel (or, figuratively, a person) of diminutive size or armament, or as satirical reference to elaborately painted or beribboned women.

### **Biography**

**David Carnegie** <[david.carnegie@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:david.carnegie@vuw.ac.nz)> is Reader in Theatre at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He has edited three plays for the Malone Society, published a number of articles on early modern stagecraft, and is co-editor, with Mac Jackson and David Gunby, of the Cambridge *Works of John Webster* (Volume 3 forthcoming).

### **Note Abstract**

**'which 'longs to women of all fashion': Churching and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*** by Jeffrey Johnson

### **Abstract**

In Act 3, scene 2 of *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes brings his wife Hermione to trial, formally charging her with conducting an adulterous relationship. During her defense, Hermione rightly complains that she has had 'the child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs / To women of all fashion'. In this trial scene Shakespeare draws attention to the fact that Leontes, in his hasty condemnation of his wife, not only denies Hermione her month of privilege after giving birth and exposes her to the public humiliation of not being afforded a proper churching ceremony, but also deliberately disregards the divine oracle. There can be little doubt that Shakespeare's contemporaries would have been aware of the fact that Hermione's first public appearance should not have been her trial, but instead her churching. Thus, the personal, legalistic action that Leontes puts forward as a matter of state usurps the obligations of religious discipline and church authority that are not simply wrongs she suffers individually, but ones that affect the community at large. As a consequence of the breach in divine order caused by Leontes, Hermione's

reappearance in the play's final scene serves as a delayed churching service that reaffirms the redemptive themes so often discussed in this play. Further, the epistemological concerns found throughout *The Winter's Tale* regarding the apprehension of truth are resolved, specifically, in Hermione's reintegration into public life and, more broadly, in the affirmation of a dialogic unity attained through shared communal knowledge.

## Biography

**Jeffrey Johnson** <[jsjohnson@niu.edu](mailto:jsjohnson@niu.edu)> is Professor of English at Northern Illinois University. He is the author of *The Theology of John Donne*, as well as the co-editor, with Eugene Cunnar, of *Discovering and Recovering the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. In addition to publishing articles on the poetry of Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, and Henry Vaughan, he continues to contribute to the Donne Variorum project.

## Issues in Review Abstract

**Subjectivity, Theory, and Early Modern Drama** selected and introduced by Viviana Comensoli

This forum has been organized, introduced, and edited by Viviana Comensoli with the aim of exploring current theoretical and critical approaches to the conceptualization and representation of subjectivity in English Renaissance drama. The introduction provides an overview of various poststructuralist theoretical approaches that since the 1980s have guided our thinking about the representation of early modern subjectivities, and calls for continued revision and reevaluation of contemporary theoretical applications. In the spirit of continuing debate, the three essays that follow approach the topic from different revisionist perspectives.

Although the three essays differ substantially in their theoretical/critical apparatus, they share two important and unqualified claims: 1) the need to link our contemporary investigations of Renaissance subjectivities and identifications with ideologies (early modern and modern) of power; and 2) the absolute need, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, for a theoretical methodology that is politically engaged and progressive.

**Identifying Othello: Race and the Colonial (non)Subject** by Viviana Comensoli

## Abstract

Comensoli combines political and psychoanalytic theory in an analysis of Shakespeare's *Othello*, arguing that the play not only coheres with the Subject/Other split that underwrites Western epistemologies of difference, but also upholds the colonialist ideology that works to exclude the black man from the Self/Other binary through which subjectivity is made possible.

## Biography

Viviana Comensoli <[vcomenso@wlu.ca](mailto:vcomenso@wlu.ca)> is Professor in the Department of English and Film Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University. She is the author of *'Household Business': Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* (University of Toronto Press, 1996) and co-editor, with Anne Russell, of *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage* (University of Illinois Press, 1999).

**'The chick got in the way' or, the Woman is/as Queer: Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Unlocking of Female Subjectivity in Early Modern Drama** by Theodora Jankowski

## Abstract

Jankowski argues that an alliance between queer theory with feminist and Marxist/cultural-materialist theories contributes in nuanced and significant ways to our understanding of subject performance in the early modern theatre. She illustrates her argument in a trenchant analysis of Thomas Dekker's *Honest Whore* plays.

## Biography

Theodora Jankowski <[Jankowski@ecc.edu](mailto:Jankowski@ecc.edu)>, formerly from Washington State University, is currently Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs at Erie Community College in Buffalo. She recently published *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

**Transversal Poetics and Fugitive Explorations: Subject Performance, Early Modern English Theatre, and *Macbeth*** by Bryan Reynolds

## Abstract

Reynolds expands upon his theory of 'transversal poetics' with an 'investigative-expansive' mode of analysis that he has called 'fugitive explorations,' a politically and aesthetically empowering mode of critical analysis designed to combat the ideology of the disempowered subject that various forms of poststructuralist discourse have promoted.

## Biography

Bryan Reynolds <[breyneold@uci.edu](mailto:breyneold@uci.edu)> is head of the PhD in Drama program at the University of California, Irvine. He has published *Performing Transversally: Reimagining Shakespeare for the New Millennium* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and *Becoming Criminal: Transversal Performance and Cultural Dissidence in Early Modern England* (Johns Hopkins, 2002).