

## Editorial

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One of our editors had the pleasure of attending a special session at the 2005 annual Pacific Northwest Renaissance Conference in Banff in which Mary Polito, Amy Scott, and others first made public to scholars outside of the University of Calgary their findings about the anonymous manuscript play housed in their library's Osborne collection. Those present at that event, enticed by the possibility of learning about an undiscovered seventeenth-century play-text, immediately recognized the potential significance of this document to the study of early modern drama. The past half dozen years have witnessed significant research developments sparked by encounters with this document that would surprise even that engaged audience.

Since identifying the Osborne manuscript play as *The Humorous Magistrate* and thus linking it to the dramatic miscellany associated with Arbury Hall Warwickshire, Polito and members of the SSHRC-funded collaborative research team she heads have identified the likely author of Arbury plays as John Newdigate III, staged *The Humorous Magistrate*, built a massive archive of digital images of manuscript materials, developed a digital hand comparison tool to facilitate paleographic studies, and participated in and organized numerous conference panels and a Shakespeare Association of America seminar. Their research has generated an impressive array of scholarly publications, both in print and forthcoming: two Malone society editions, two collections of essays, and several articles, including Mary Polito and Jean-Sébastien Windle's "You see the times are dangerous": The Political and Theatrical Situation of *The Humorous Magistrate*, which appeared in this journal in 2009. We are proud to devote issue 14.2 of *Early Theatre* to the insights that have emerged from sustained collaborative engagement with Newdigate-linked manuscripts, particularly with the four plays found in the Arbury manuscript, *The Humorous Magistrate*, *The Emperor's Favourite*, *The Twice Chang'd Friar*, and *Ghismonda and Guiscardo*.

Certainly the four Arbury plays merit further consideration as examples of Caroline drama. Those who read the articles and notes presented here, however, will find much more than an introduction to a novel group of play-texts – they will encounter arguments relevant to some of theatre historians' and literary critics' most pressing current research questions. Individual contributors in this issue encourage us to consider how circuits of readers, authors, and audience members moved between London and the Midlands, thus extending recent studies of regional and provincial drama in new directions. Discussions of the Arbury and Osborne manuscript plays raise issues for scholars who work with any early modern literary manuscripts but particularly for those who wish to better understand, and perhaps edit, dramatic manuscript texts. Consideration of materials analyzed here will enrich critical arguments about the significance of plays' paratexts, such as prologues and epilogues, of music featured as part of dramatic entertainments, and of the contingencies of country house performances. These plays survive as records of how dramatic patronage, spectatorship, and authorship might intertwine within a small group of closely related individuals, thus encouraging further consideration of these basic categories for understanding early drama.

In addition to showcasing the excellent work produced under the oversight of Mary Polito and Amy Scott, this special issue encourages further examination of *The Humorous Magistrate*, *The Emperor's Favourite*, *The Twice Chang'd Friar*, *Ghismonda and Guiscardo*, and other manuscript plays. Those whose research focuses on early English theatre recognize how unusual it is to have an opportunity to work with a relatively unstudied group of seventeenth-century plays. The arguments presented in this issue we hope will inspire our readers to make their own forays into archives to explore these plays further or to work with other under-researched manuscript materials. Such research will always be welcome in the pages of this journal.

Our next issue, 15.1, will also be a special issue, guest-edited by Peter Parolin and James Stokes, on women and performance in the early modern period, including Europe.

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