

Introduction

Learning to Play

Jonathan Walker

In the midst of a discussion about “the trew vse of perfite Imitation,” the pedagogue Roger Ascham recalls his days as a Cambridge University student in the 1530s:

Whan *M. Watson* in S. Johns College at Cambrige wrote his excellent Tragedie of *Absalon, M. Cheke*, he and I, for that part of trew Imitation, had many pleasant talkes together, in comparing the preceptes of Aristotle and *Horace de Arte Poetica*, with the examples of *Euripides, Sophocles*, and *Seneca*. Few men, in wrytyng of Tragedies in our dayes, haue shot at this marke. Some in *England*, moe in *France, Germanie*, and *Italie*, also haue written Tragedies in our tyme: of the which, not one I am sure is able to abyde the trew touch of *Aristotles* preceptes, and *Euripides* examples, saue onely two, that euer I saw, *M. Watsons Absalon*, and *Georgius Buckananus Iepithe*.¹

Although reminiscing about “trew Imitation,” Ascham stops short of either setting the scene or reproducing the dialogue from his “many pleasant talkes” with Thomas Watson and Sir John Cheke. Nor does *THE SCHOLEMASTER* spell out either the specific content of their conversations or their assessment of where classical dramatic practice meets classical dramatic theory. But even in its brevity the anecdote is evocative. For, like the unlocalized settings and uncluttered stages that so many early modern plays make a virtue of, Ascham economically dramatizes a perfect humanist moment with but a few words and little action. His story presents, in other words, the epitome of an academic play, one in which the actors converse informally within a formal educational environment, enhancing their understanding “together” by refining the necessary skills that facilitate the production of knowledge. Inviting the reader to participate imaginatively in the scholarly exchange, Ascham’s scene portrays the humanist reclamation of classical learning, whose “preceptes” and “examples” furnish its pupils with modern standards for critical judgment, while at the same time supplying them with models for contemporary education and praxis.

Besides adding a measure of narrative delight to *THE SCHOLEMASTER*’s lesson on imitatio, Ascham’s story illustrates for the reader the humanist program’s ideals in action. The form in which he casts the scene, moreover, pays homage to one of humanism’s predominant methodologies: the extraction of universal principles from particular examples, which proceeds from the assumption that such principles are contested and, therefore, that the historical or fictional examples from which one draws them are in need of careful interpretation. As Joel Altman has argued,

These [methodological] emphases lay the foundation for a mimetic fiction of explorative character, one that teaches and delights by examining through exempla which engage the emotions the diverse existential claims that govern human life. The concern to link the universal principle with the particular example—which lies at the heart of Renaissance poetic theory—and the interest in developing the ability to see both sides of the question remain constants throughout the program.²

In addition to offering young scholars rich instructional opportunities through the dramatic mode—for invention, the imitation of classical exemplars; for rhetoric, the *disputatio* of the dramatic *agon*; for oratory, the practical delivery of well-formed speeches—academic plays seek to articulate humanistic ideals within the unpredictable circumstances of concrete social relations, which students can inhabit and observe through the simulacrum of dramatic performance. Such an approximative enterprise, however, has the inexorable consequence of producing a gap between the ideals that humanism encoded as universal principles and the practices that it read as embodiments of those ideals. This gap is one that academic plays both enact and examine.

Our investigations into early modern academic drama aim to account for this differential between practices and ideals by tracing two trajectories at once: first, the forces of influence and resistance that the academy exercised over England's political, religious, and economic relations and, second, the ways that English culture influenced and resisted the power of academic institutions, the appeal of education, and the value of humanistic knowledge. If academic drama is a platform for humanistic scholars to imagine how they might inaugurate change for the interests of a more ideal social sphere, then it is equally a means of confronting and negotiating the social realities of early modern England that impede such change on national and cultural scales.

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Each of the essays in this volume explores academic plays as sites of cultural contestation. Such plays often take the form of academic exercises devised to give participants and spectators alike practical experience with Latin and Greek, with declamation and debate, and with ancient myths and histories, which yield valuable lessons despite their remoteness in time and place. The expressly pedagogical nature of much academic drama has tended to limit its critical reception as an elite and secluded undertaking in schools. Yet the collective thesis that this volume of essays argues is that—however elite and secluded they might be in their composition, performance, audience, and objectives—academic plays actively engage with urgent social, religious, and political questions of the period. The field of academic drama certainly consists of plays that originate from within educational environments or that offer representations of scholars and the academy. But the field also concerns the cultural place, social perceptions, and political uses of the academy. It includes humanist theater that is designed (according to

Horace's dictum³) both to instruct and to entertain, whether within the aristocratic household, in grammar schools, or in universities. It involves the connections and competitions between the academy and popular theatrical venues as institutions of formal and informal education. It comprises the technologies of theater, such as the practices of live performance, the oratorical training of the voice and mind, and the disciplining of the actor's body. Finally, academic drama extends to the educative function of role-playing and both the dramatization of learning and the teaching of theatricality.

Scholars on the Continent seem to have embraced drama as a method of formal instruction earlier and more frequently than those in England, although by the mid-sixteenth century the statutes of several Cambridge and Oxford colleges stipulate yearly funds to be expended on "comoedias et tragoedias."⁴ On the one hand, it is important to recognize a continuity between humanist academic drama and a large proportion of medieval theater, whose objectives usually included the spiritual edification of its audiences. But, on the other hand, the formalization of drama as a component of educational programs marked a shift toward theatrical practices with less exclusively religious motivations, which was significantly enhanced by the performance, translation, and imitation of classical dramatic texts. From the available evidence, academic plays were most often written or adapted by schoolmasters, fellows, and lecturers to be performed by their students. The contributions to this volume, however, interpret "academic drama" more widely to include plays written by sometime students—as is apparently the case with the trilogy of *Parnassus* plays that appeared around the turn of the seventeenth century—as well as plays that depict academic environs and scholars. With the exception of its concluding essay, which examines American academic drama from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries, the book concentrates on Greek, Latin, and vernacular drama in England that emerged from grammar schools, universities, and the Inns of Court during the early modern period.

With such a vast field in which to conduct their investigations, the volume's contributors can inevitably survey only a narrow stretch of ground so as to attain a significant depth in their particular discussions. The essays thus achieve their depth and coverage, both individually and for the book's common goals, by drawing on and advancing a body of scholarship that traverses literary studies, theater history, pedagogical theory, intellectual history, the history of religious reform, gender studies, cultural criticism, economics, and political history. Especially important is the work of cultural materialist, new historicist, and feminist critics, whose interdisciplinary modes of enquiry have helped to shape our own. Furthermore, the essays in this volume join scholarly conversations about academic drama that are themselves methodologically and ideologically diverse. Frederick S. Boas's *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (1914), G.C. Moore Smith's *College Plays Performed in the University of Cambridge* (1923), and T.H. Vail Motter's *The School Drama in England* (1929) are familiar but indispensable studies which chronicle a chapter of dramatic history whose documentary record is often terribly fragmented and elusive.⁵ Supplementing and systematizing the research that Boas,

Smith, and Motter have bequeathed us are the equally indispensable Cambridge and Oxford volumes from the Records of Early English Drama project as well as the research to which Alan H. Nelson and John R. Elliott, Jr., have devoted much of their careers.⁶

While these scholars and the REED project provide a documentary foundation, the work of others has contributed cultural and historical dimensions to our examination of early modern academic drama. In *Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500–1700* (1988), Bruce R. Smith formulates an influential argument for understanding academic plays as part of a broader cultural exchange, one which partook of the medieval *translatio studii et translatio imperii* topos, but which also profited from the traffic of humanism, whose intellectual networks and printed editions of classical texts permitted new transactions of knowledge and culture across many European borders. More recently, Rebecca Bushnell has argued in *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (1996) that the early modern humanist regime frequently registered its own paradoxes and contradictions, stressing the ways in which schools and scholars negotiated and understood their cultural capital. And, by challenging the long-established orthodoxy that the commercial drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries issued chiefly from the popular morality play tradition, Kent Cartwright makes a persuasive case for humanist school drama's extensive contributions to London's commercial dramatic repertory in his *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (1999).⁷

Arranged in this way, these critics who comprise part of the book's scholarly genealogy exhibit an increasing concern for the kinds of cultural agency that schools and universities brought to bear on early modern English society, particularly in the form of drama. *Early Modern Academic Drama* emphasizes this cultural agency by arguing that the plays articulate points of contact between the academy and the wider English culture, and that the discourse they articulate is political, religious, and economic just as it is intellectual and humanistic. On one hand, this volume attempts to revitalize, rather than displace, an earlier base of knowledge about academic drama—principally established by Boas, Smith, and Motter—by asking of it new kinds of questions that have only become articulable over the last thirty years or so. But, on the other hand, the volume seeks to examine a variety of dramatic texts and theatrical spaces in the academy that have received limited exposure to questions about gender, politics, and the material conditions under which these texts and spaces were produced. We want thereby not to circumscribe the field of academic drama but, rather, to reposition it in relation to dominant questions that have occupied researchers in recent years about the cultural significance of early modern theater. The challenge that this task has posed to our contributors is one that the book extends to other scholars as well, just as the collection itself is impelled by developing research in the field.

Hence the discussions in this volume are carried out with two key questions in mind. The first explores how academic plays negotiate political, religious, and economic issues. Like other early modern institutions, the academy resided within

the purview of the state and the church, whose ideological and economic interests it served by regularly producing suitably educated young men to fill governmental, diplomatic, and clerical posts, among other esteemed occupations. At the same time, however, academies like Oxford and Cambridge administered their day-to-day activities in large measure as independent institutions, often insulated from issues of *Realpolitik*. Thus universities, Inns of Court, and even grammar schools not only prepared many students to participate in actual affairs of state, religion, law, and so forth; they also provided a space wherein students were encouraged to test, question, and debate such affairs. Academic plays frequently dramatize a variety of religious, political, and economic problems, sometimes deliberately and directly, sometimes implicitly. The strategies that the plays use as they strive conceptually to resolve these problems make acutely visible both the pedagogical role of the drama and, more broadly, the institutional role of the academy within the larger culture. Many of these plays, in other words, represent an unofficial discourse addressing tensions in the period brought about by contradictions and upheavals in political, religious, and economic relations.

The volume's second guiding question asks how the composition, staging, and reception of the plays helped to produce distinct academic and theatrical cultures. As an essentially pedagogical undertaking, academic drama occupies a fascinating place within the educational structure. Such drama is often instructive and thus purposive, but it also provides entertainment and recreation for players and playgoers alike. In such an atmosphere of profit and delight, the educational system brings a vibrant theatrical culture to life, while in the same breath the academic theater creates an interactive culture of learning. This mutual constitution is no accident. The activity of "performance," of course, comprises a core pedagogical element in the acquisition and demonstration of knowledge, and, steeped in the teachings of humanism, early modern schools and universities frequently exploited the didactic value of theater as a tool for illustrating, modeling, and manipulating forms of knowledge. That academic drama actively engages with and explores cultural issues which are ostensibly non-academic suggests its value for understanding the relation between cultural and intellectual formations in the period. Academic plays therefore record important cultural moments in which the realm of ideas becomes actualized through dramatic performance as it is embodied by students, who both teach and are taught by their experiences onstage.

But herein lay a profound cultural anxiety. While the actor manipulated his role through performance, he was also understood to be manipulated by it, shaped by the identity that he was called upon to perform. Remarkably, however, academic drama is virtually immune to the charges of those critics, such as antitheatrical writers, who most feared the transformative quality of performance and who repeatedly condemned the popular stage for its immoral instruction. Although at variance, such disparate attitudes toward the pedagogical and the professional stages point to the basic early modern belief that dramatic performance was itself a mode of learning, one that possessed an unsettling power to fashion individuals in its own image. In recent years, for example, new historicist and cultural materialist

critics have demonstrated how the period's deeply religious and political rituals were both practiced and understood in terms of dramatic display. "[W]e princes," said Queen Elizabeth I in 1586, "are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed. The eyes of many behold our actions," a sentiment that King James I would echo years later.⁸ Furthermore, controversies between Catholics and Protestants often centered on the troubling resemblance of religious rite to dramatic acting. The fact that academic drama tended to elude antitheatrical censure suggests that it occupied an especially meaningful place in the cultural imagination.

If school and university plays inhabited this cultural imagination, however, then they were also distinct manifestations of that imaginary. Academic plays are at once a way of imagining the possibilities of humanist aspirations—of altering the course of social history by narrativizing it otherwise in the present—as well as a way of putting tangible humanist achievements on view. Above all, this drama is about representing and modeling speech and behavior, about modifying student subjects in ways that will allow them to exercise their knowledge within social settings beyond institutional walls. In other words, the proposition that students will effectively undergo verbal, intellectual, and behavioral modifications through their involvement in dramatic events is in fact an investment in the power of narrative to refashion existing social relations, a power which is greatly enhanced by the experience of playing and playgoing itself. Because early modern humanism is a multifaceted discourse—affecting for instance educational reform, political counsel, book production and trade, notions of human meaning and cultural value—academic plays might be viewed as individual dialogues within this larger discourse. We might think of academic plays as cultural dramas allied to humanistic ideals while at the same time constrained by the practicalities of trying to realize those ideals within imperfect social, political, religious, and economic systems.

Academic plays literally represent narratives of early modern learning. Some of these narratives take the form of fictional conflicts that activate a process of humanistic assumptions, explanations, and solutions. Other narratives account for actual events and controversies that often surrounded academic performances themselves. Still others consist simply of the dramatic action that scholars and students have scripted and staged for the edification of their minds and for the pleasure of their senses. Yet, from a compositional standpoint, academic plays *narrativize* knowledge as much as they are narratives *about* knowledge and its uses. These scriptings and stagings attest, then, to the peculiar double-nature of knowledge, which students must experience as an a priori phenomenon—as something to be encountered anew, practiced, and mastered—but which is also an epistemological construction that forever depends on its own rehearsal and recapitulation, a process that necessarily, if subtly, alters the constitution of that knowledge through the re-creation of theater. Conceiving of the field in these terms, we propose to examine how early modern academic drama mediates such

transactions of knowledge, how it organizes its own ways of knowing, and how it participates in the work of cultural reproduction and social change.

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The sequence of the essays in this volume reflects a process of historical change within broad cultural trends such as humanism, the English Reformation, Tudor and Stuart absolutism, and proto-capitalism. While it resists a developmental narrative about how these broad trends constitute early modern history, the book nonetheless proceeds along an arc that considers, first, how residual cultural values confront changing political and religious circumstances during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; second, how the dominant educational force of humanism exhibits both vitality in its pedagogical variety and limitations in its ideological disunity; and, third, how academic drama meets with an emergent proto-capitalist market, an escalating centralization of state power, and finally a revitalized religious orthodoxy in and beyond the seventeenth century. On one hand, the taxonomy of “residual,” “dominant,” and “emergent” provides a way of locating academic drama within the broad cultural and historical trends mentioned above.⁹ But, on the other hand, the language promotes the scrutiny of terms like humanism and the Reformation, which enables us to foreground the plays less as clear-cut examples of broad trends and more as complex material events that bring those cultural and historical trends into existence in the first place. In its emphasis on the collective cultural work of individual academic plays, the volume uses a method of enquiry that first appropriates the humanist objective of extolling universal principles by extracting them from particular examples, and then inverts and reverses that objective.

The thematic organization of the essays follows the volume’s cultural and historical arc by grouping the discussions into four interconnected clusters. The first is comprised of essays that address political and religious issues, both within academic plays and surrounding their composition and production. Opening this group is Linda Shenk’s examination of the changing relationship between royal patrons of Cambridge and Oxford and the advisory role of the two universities in matters of state. The change in this relationship, she argues, reached a crisis point in 1592 when Queen Elizabeth I requested both universities to produce distinctly non-academic plays for her Christmas festivities at court. Shenk demonstrates how university officials—who were possessed with a keen institutional memory of offering their princes academic demonstrations that imparted good counsel—experienced Elizabeth’s request as an active erosion of their political significance. The university administrations entreated William Cecil, Chancellor of Cambridge and the queen’s chief advisor, to intervene on their behalves, but whether the festivities proceeded according to her desire, we have no evidence. Yet the confrontation that we witness between the crown and the gown in 1592 is an event that records a crucial moment in the history of the two universities, concerning not only the influence they exercised with the queen but also the power that they

commanded in a rapidly changing culture. Because Shenk's analysis also situates the academy and its drama within sixteenth-century English politics generally, it provides a valuable contextualization for the wider field and for the volume's subsequent essays.

The concern in Shenk's essay with the shifting political circumstances that university officials negotiated under Elizabeth takes on a pronounced religious dimension in Paul D. Streufert's essay on John Christopherson's *Jephthah*, a Cambridge play in Greek from about 1544. "Ιεφθάε," Frederick Boas explains, "is of peculiar interest as the only English academic play in Greek known to have survived."¹⁰ Streufert argues that Christopherson, a vocal Catholic proponent, manages to synthesize divergent and far-flung cultural elements into a vehicle for Greek-language acquisition, for proper ethical training, and for teaching conciliatory solutions to the religious controversies afflicting England under King Henry VIII. By deploying three separate dialects of Greek (including Homeric, Classical, and New Testament Greek) into an ancient Hebraic story from the Book of Judges, *Jephthah* effectively appropriates non-native cultural values to suggest how divisions between English Catholics and Protestants might be remedied through common national interests. Simultaneously, the play emphasizes how Christopherson's appropriation of other cultures is itself a means of creating early modern Englishness through the education and acculturation of its students.

Taken together, the two opening essays reveal the extent to which academic plays were used to effect political and religious change, whether by redefining established institutional traditions or by fashioning the language and ethical behaviors of individual scholars. While *Jephthah* aims to transform esoteric knowledge into the everyday practices of Catholic faith within an unpredictable Protestant milieu, Elizabeth takes up drama as an instrument to reduce the advisory responsibilities of university dons, who anxiously witness the devaluation of their knowledge as it is put to increasingly exoteric ends. The consideration that Streufert gives to *Jephthah*'s reworking of earlier cultural traditions serves as a link to a second group of essays concerned with challenges to the humanist tradition. As the dominant educational mode of early modern Europe, humanism exerted a sweeping authority over its ranks, whose subjects ranged from the most powerful heads of state to the most junior of grammar school boys. Yet such a characterization of humanism—even if in the first instance a relatively accurate one—has a tendency to totalize its ideological program and to paper over the many skirmishes that would come to define its theoretical terrain. Through its methodological interest in questioning assumptions and in exploring many sides of an issue, this dominant mode of learning produced the intellectual conditions that would encourage internal critique, both at the macrocultural level of humanist ideology and at the microcultural level of individual humanists.

As Ursula Potter shows in her essay, Thomas Ingelend is one individual who formulates his own vision of humanism in *The Disobedient Child*, a mid-sixteenth-century grammar-school play that is preoccupied with recuperating the poor image and diminished authority of schoolmasters. Potter examines how *The*

Disobedient Child advocates formal education among the gentry and aristocracy by suggesting that, contrary to popular belief, a school education will develop in boys the necessary skills and masculinity that they will need to maintain authority in their own households. We see here the residual aristocratic values that disfavor literacy confronting the dominance of humanism, but the play also resists that dominance by representing the elementary schooling of girls as a threat to male authority. The play thus challenges a variety of leading contemporary scholars like Juan Luis Vives and Desiderius Erasmus, who promote as an ideal of the humanist project the education of young girls, at least among the socially privileged classes. In order to shore up his own authority as an educator, Ingelend makes an appeal through his play to more powerful social classes than those historically represented in grammar schools, and Potter argues that he makes his appeal persuasive by portraying formal schooling as the solution to a social crisis in authority, which has been brought about by an educational crisis in gender. Potter's essay demonstrates how Ingelend's play sets up its own humanist paradigm, which competes with more familiar and esteemed pronouncements from scholars like Vives and Erasmus, revealing one process by which humanism understands and critiques itself.

In another essay that explores challenges to the humanist tradition, Emily D. Bryan takes up the question of authority introduced by Potter and addresses a specific production of *Ignoramus*, a play by George Ruggle that was performed before King James I at Cambridge in March of 1615. Unlike *The Disobedient Child*, which contests the authority of prominent European scholars in order to garner its own authority from wealthier classes, *Ignoramus* engages in a biting satire of English lawyers, which brought the play and apparently many of its student-players into the favor of the king. Bryan reveals that the dispute instigated by the production of Ruggle's play was in fact acted out behind the scenes in the more intimate relationship between tutors and students, who disagreed about how far the university could exercise its power over the individual principles of its students. One student, she explains, categorically refused to perform despite the influence of university authorities, while another student disobeyed his tutor's instructions and proceeded to perform in the play before the king. Recalling Potter's concern with ideological conflicts between individual humanists, and also Shenk's concern with the declining political significance of the Elizabethan universities, Bryan investigates how the confrontations occasioned by *Ignoramus* point to a discrepancy in what were once believed to be common interests between tutors and students, on the one hand, and, on the other, to a kind of self-determination that capitalizes on the opportunities that an increasingly competitive culture offers to those individuals.

One joint observation that both Potter's and Bryan's essays furnish is that the educational reforms experienced by early modern Europe were contested as much within the boundaries of humanism as along them. The disputes that humanist methodologies fostered amongst its practitioners were therefore not marginal affairs, but were instead constitutive of the educational program itself. Influential and prolific as they were, writers like Vives and Erasmus face the undue burden

of speaking rather monologically on behalf of early modern humanism when the voices of other individuals go unheard, like those of the schoolmaster Ingelend or the tutors and students involved in the 1615 production of *Ignoramus*. In other words, humanism qualifies as what Michel Foucault would call a “transdiscursive” field, one which generates “an endless possibility of discourse” by producing the conditions for “a certain number of divergences—with respect to [...] its] own texts, concepts, and hypotheses—that all arise from the [...] discourse itself.”¹¹ Hence the expansion of humanism entails the transformation of its discursive practices from within, and the apparently isolated struggles for authority that we see depicted vividly in especially Potter’s and Bryan’s essays necessarily belong to the historically more visible dialogues in which eminent European humanists are engaged. Moreover, the renovations that humanism sought to carry out within early modern European culture were often simultaneously renovations to its own discursive practices, which were heterogeneous enough to accommodate major pedagogical texts like those of Vives and Erasmus as well as academic plays by little-known schoolmasters like Ingelend writing from unknown grammar schools.

If the essays by Potter and Bryan emphasize divisions within and challenges to early modern humanist ideology, then the next group of essays explores how academic solidarity and common scholarly hardships emerge from the rigorous application of humanist principles of study. This group of essays also considers how students leverage academic drama in order to understand and grapple with their institutional environments. Following Bryan’s discussion of satirized lawyers in *Ignoramus* at Cambridge, Eric Leonidas moves us to the Inns of Court in London, where English students received formal training and experience in the practice of law. Leonidas focuses on the *Gesta Grayorum*, a series of Christmas revels staged at Gray’s Inn during 1594–95 where the dramatic activities were framed as an evolving social experiment. The Gray’s revels, he argues, allowed students to construct an artificial environment within which the audience was invited to test and adapt their knowledge through the shifting experiences of performance. Ultimately culminating in a performance before Queen Elizabeth I at Whitehall, the *Gesta Grayorum* is marked by a series of “occasions” or moments when revelers pause and reflect so they may determine proceedings as they go, incorporating what they learn into the order of their fictional kingdom. Leonidas demonstrates that the revels put into conversation two modes of knowledge production, one which was based in community and the shared experiences of students, and one which was based in individual observation and the independent substantiation of knowledge.

This juxtaposition of collective and individual epistemologies, which helps the students of Gray’s Inn to navigate a variable field of experience, also serves to structure the second essay in this group by Sarah Knight. While the *Gesta Grayorum* tends to foreground a productive and socially unifying application of students’ knowledge and intellectual skills, other dramatic ventures in the academy emphasize the destructive and socially isolating effects that individual study and

scholarship too often educe. Knight situates such dramatic ventures within the early modern discourse on humors psychology, arguing that “fantasy” or the faculty of imagination was understood both to aid and to vex scholars in an erratic and progressively debilitating manner. Since “fantasy” has the ability to promote creativity while also inspiring melancholia in the intellectual life of every student, the mind’s imaginative faculty itself becomes an object of study in a number of dramatic satires hailing from universities, including Thomas Tomkis’s *Lingua* (1607), Barten Holyday’s *Technogamia* (1617), and the *Parnassus* trilogy (circa 1598–1601), presumably written by out-of-work Cambridge alumni. Treatises on psychopathology and educational theory provide Knight with a backdrop that shows how the debates staged by university dramatists over the pedagogical utility of imagination are in fact symptomatic of broader transformations in the culture of humanism. Knight argues that while these debates reduce the epistemological value that scholars might derive from “fantasy,” scholars are themselves experiencing a very real sense of decreased social value as the universities overproduce learned men for a market that has fewer and fewer positions to offer them.

The academic plays examined by Leonidas and Knight represent the most self-reflexive drama in the volume. Together, their essays underscore the relationship between public and private spheres: while the *Gesta Grayorum* depicts an optimum—if perhaps idealized—interaction between communal and individual experiences, wherein the production of knowledge becomes process-oriented and facilitated by regular adaptation and improvisation, then the satirical academic plays that are the focus of Knight’s essay illustrate how scholars tend to face the communal problem of a shrinking job market by withdrawing more frequently into unhealthy private study, which gives rise to ruminating melancholia. That the texts both essays discuss appear around the same period of time suggests that the individual scholar’s relationship with his community is an especially topical issue at the turn of the seventeenth century. These two representations of academic communities and individual scholars indicate two different perspectives on the same cultural problem, one in which the dominant ideals and optimism of humanistic learning are, on one hand, staving off and, on the other, succumbing to emergent forces in politics and the market economy, to which the academy too slowly adapts. In other words, if nearly a century earlier humanist scholars were busy theorizing and institutionalizing a programmatic endeavor to alter politics and social relations for the better through systematic educational reforms, then by the end of the sixteenth century political, social, and economic relations have begun to outstrip humanism’s influence. The result of such a shift is the subjection of the academy in general and of scholars in particular to powers that humanists had once dreamt of appropriating and maintaining according to their own rational principles.

The question of the individual scholar’s relationship with his academic community and, even more, the academic community’s relationship with its surrounding culture provides a bridge to the volume’s last group of essays. Helen Higbee opens this group with a consideration of John Ricketts’s *Byrsa Basilica*

(circa 1633), a play that overtly speaks to topical debates occurring within the London market. Set in the Royal Exchange, Ricketts's play takes as its subject a variety of business relationships between London merchants, which it then structures using the conventions of Plautine comedy. In her essay, Higbee argues that the play's preoccupation with the growing business of marine insurance and with the decline of the competing practice of judicial astrology marks a radical departure from the typical concerns that academic plays had historically addressed. Whereas in Knight's essay we see a deterioration of humanism's influence over the social sphere at the dawn of the seventeenth century, Higbee's essay shows how, by the 1630s, at least one drama has begun to imagine ways to meet the demands of an emergent market-based economy, one which international trade and imperialism have helped to engender. That *Byrsa Basilica* essentially stages a debate around the mercantile issues of marine insurance and judicial astrology indicates just how far humanistic ideals have been transmuted into residual values within Caroline England.

Whether we understand these changing cultural formations as academic drama expanding into the marketplace or as the market infiltrating the academy, *Byrsa Basilica* clearly argues that the educational and economic systems might cultivate a mutually profitable relationship in the 1630s, one which plays like the *Parnassus* trilogy at the turn of the seventeenth century seem more at pains to imagine. The commercial and maritime themes that Higbee's discussion highlights both provide links to the second essay in this group, which closes the volume. Odai Johnson's essay departs from the others in both disciplinary and geographic terms as it crosses the Atlantic from early modern England to colonial America, where commercial theater faced manifold cultural difficulties that the academic theater found much easier to navigate. By surveying a number of recorded performances as well as a series of *curricula vitae* for students involved in dramatic activities, Johnson shows how theatrical cultures existed virtually only within the academy in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England. Yet he also argues that the distinction between commercial and academic drama in early America is much more troubled than it at first seems, especially because students often profited from their performances—which were usually advertised simply as rhetorical demonstrations—and also because ventures in commercial theater tended to draw on the language of the academy in an effort to validate their existence. Thus Johnson finds that popular theater could at times circumvent Puritan resistance in America by associating itself with academic drama, but as a result public fears about theatricality more readily attached themselves to student-players.

As Johnson's essay looks forward and outward toward the eighteenth century and the development of American dramatic cultures, it also returns to the volume's earliest concerns (in Shenk's and Streufert's discussions) with the political and religious issues that helped to shape the early modern theater in England. In this concluding group of essays, Higbee's analysis of *Byrsa Basilica* reveals a drive toward expansionism and colonialism, both from the academy into the marketplace, and from the domestic market into international trade relations.

Johnson's discussion, in contrast, transports us to the American colonies where the residual values of English culture confront new and uncertain ways of knowing, which are dependent as much upon familiar narratives of self and nationhood as they are upon imagining novel forms of identity. As this volume argues, such narratives and forms always manifest themselves not simply in sweeping trends like humanism or colonialism but also in more intricate structures that have specific material dimensions and chartable socio-historical coordinates. Because especially Johnson's essay in this group reprises some of the issues that other contributors examine in earlier English contexts, the cultural and historical arc that the volume sets out to trace acquires a reverse trajectory. This reversal furnishes a dynamic perspective whereby our self-consciously back-constructed narrative about early modern culture overlays a chronological model of development in the period, which throws into relief the residual, dominant, and emergent forces that inspired and produced early modern academic drama.

These forces can be glimpsed in the manuscript leaf that adorns the cover of this book. The annotated drawings represent a design for the adaptation of the great hall at Christ Church, Oxford, into a theater for a visit by James I in 1605: the Court's visit in late August corresponded with "the week of ceremonies at Oxford called the Act, an annual celebration when public debates were held by day in St Mary's, the University Church, and in the evenings the colleges fell to feasting and sometimes by custom to dramatic entertainments."¹² The drawings, moreover, can be viewed as "academic" in a variety of ways, for they include classical, contemporary, and prospective intellectual currents. Whereas the classical influence was mainly generic, the contemporary came in the form of original dramatic compositions in Latin. "The plays," John Orrell explains,

were of an academic sort, at once learned and facetious. The three evening productions, in Latin, represented the whole range of the drama, for in accord with the ancient division found in Vitruvius and his Renaissance commentators the authorities had chosen a tragedy, a comedy, and a satyr play. The satyr play, *Alba*, was performed first, on the Tuesday night; it was followed successively by the tragedy, *Ajax Flagellifer*, and the moral comedy, Matthew Gwinne's *Vertumnus*. All were staged at Christ Church, as was an English pastoral, Samuel Daniel's *Arcadia Reformed*, given on the morning after the main series had concluded.¹³

The influences that I am calling prospective were in a sense the future not of the academic stage but of English court productions, which took advantage of the latest Continental and the most esoteric theatrical innovations, both for perspective staging and for seating arrangements designed to optimize the perspectival effects. These innovations were "academic" insofar as they had scarcely been seen in England except in books and in the Whitehall production of *The Masque of Blackness* earlier that same year.

Not yet affiliated with the Royal Works during the Oxford visit, Inigo Jones was nonetheless responsible for the stage set and machinery, as indeed he had been

for *The Masque of Blackness* in January. For the Christ Church productions, Jones probably used modified versions of classical *periaktoi*, and he certainly employed a raked stage, the first recorded example in England. On the other side, the responsibility for designing the auditorium fell to the Comptroller, Simon Basil, who modeled much of the spectatorial space on woodcuts and descriptions in Sebastiano Serlio's *Tutte l'opere dell'architettura* (1566 edition).¹⁴ Yet, despite the confluence of classical authority, modern learnedness, and cutting-edge technical innovations in staging and seating, the plan for the auditorium had to be changed because several of James's courtiers objected to the placement of "the Isl for the kinge, a foote eleuated above the gronde."¹⁵ Disrupting the intended perspectival effects, James's Council required the workmen to move the king's halpace further back in the auditorium to a more conventional location, where he could be more easily viewed by all those present. The ironic result was that James ended up being "too farr from the stage (vizt) xxviiij. feete, soe that there were manye longe speeches delivered, which neyther the kinge nor anye neere him could well heere or vnderstand."¹⁶

The annotated drawings for the theater at Christ Church, then, might represent the most erudite and astonishing neoclassical developments in theater technology in 1605. But they also form only a single stage in a larger narrative, one in which complex negotiations between the culture of learning and the culture of the Court play themselves out with compromised and disproportionate results. Such negotiations with external forces, we argue, are what the academy both encounters and puts on display when producing its own dramatic events.

* * *

Together, the essays collected in this volume aim to present a series of challenges to the reader. The first of these challenges regards the place of early modern academic drama within the critical consciousness of the various disciplines with which the essays engage, especially that of literary studies and theater history. From the sixteenth century alone, Boas accounts for some seventy-one extant university plays in English, Latin, and Greek, more than half of which are original compositions written on a wide range of classical, biblical, and contemporary subjects during the Tudor period.¹⁷ As with the hundreds and hundreds of plays surviving from the commercial theaters that have historically failed to meet canonical standards, plays issuing from academic environments tend to remain peripheral or specialized concerns. Moreover, academic plays are often less accessible to scholars because of a dearth of available or affordable editions, and to some degree either because of language barriers in the case of Greek and Latin texts or because training in archival research and paleography is now less common in many graduate curricula. Yet our contemporary retrieval of academic drama might be seen to parallel the humanist recovery of "the examples of *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, and *Seneca*," which had once lain neglected or undiscovered for well over a millennium. Just as the advent of feminism, cultural materialism, new

historicism, and post-colonialism has encouraged a reevaluation of the texts and materials we study—in terms of canonicity, of distinctions between “high” and “low” culture, and even of the notion of a field called the “Renaissance”—this volume, too, promotes the continued reassessment of these issues within the halls and upon the stages of the early modern academy.

This first challenge of centralizing academic plays within the general study of early modern English drama is greatly dependent upon the work of recent scholars and the REED project, who have begun to give more visibility to the dramatic output of educational institutions in the period as well as to the microcultures that helped to produce such plays.¹⁸ Like the conversations that Roger Ascham recalls having with Sir John Cheke and Thomas Watson, the work of these scholars opens up a discourse about academic drama while at once modeling a critical practice for its study. Therefore the intellectual affiliations that I have emphasized between this volume and recent research in the field I also want to extend to scholarship in the early modern period itself. Since the intellectual work that humanists performed was also a kind of cultural architecture, one which both influenced and was influenced by the period’s political, religious, and economic relations, there are not a few continuities between the place that scholars and their educational system occupied in early modern England and the ones that we occupy in North America, England, and Australia, which are the regions represented by our contributors. If the first challenge offered by the volume chiefly involves critical awareness and disciplinarity, then the second is epistemological, insofar as academic drama presents us not only with narratives of early modern learning to be studied, but also with ways to understand and narrativize our own relationships with scholarly subject-matter and with the intellectual and cultural communities to which we belong.

Such a restructuring of our ways of knowing amounts to far more than a rhetorical conceit about the stories we tell, or an idealized vision of the scholarly life. Quite to the contrary, the poststructuralist precept that narrative organizes social relations and constitutes a form of belief continues to be a potent incitement to take stock of how intellectual work affects our cultural surroundings, and even actively to cultivate change within them, much as early modern humanists did. Hence the volume’s last challenge is one that we have set for ourselves as well as for our audiences: as I have said, the essays seek to examine academic drama in order to understand the relationship between cultural and intellectual formations. But this examination also entails a reconsideration of a body of scholarship devoted to academic drama, which enables us to hear, instead of neglect, the stories that critics such as Boas, Motter, and Smith have told about it, while also offering new arguments about the work that such plays achieved—and failed to achieve—within early modern culture. While the essays in this volume are examples of new critical narratives about the field of academic drama, we also await the work of others who will extend and enhance our conclusions.

Indeed my argument in this introduction is that—from “the preceptes of Aristotle and *Horace de Arte Poetica*” discussed by Ascham, Cheke, and Watson,

to the subsequent research that we hope this book will stimulate—this particular dramatic criticism participates in a scholarly dialogue that is itself a kind of academic drama, one which features many perspectives on and disagreements over the aesthetic merits and the cultural significance of plays written and performed by scholars and students. And though, for us, the intersection between theater and learning may not always take the form of “many pleasant talkes together” with colleagues and friends, the academic drama of early modern England invites us to imagine both new and old ways of experiencing the production of knowledge.

Notes

- 1 Roger Ascham, *THE SCHOLEMASTER Or plaine and perfite way of teachyng children [...]* (London: by Iohn Daye, 1570), 57.
- 2 Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Renaissance Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 44.
- 3 Horace, *Ars Poetica*, in *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), ll. 333–4: “Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae” (“Poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life”).
- 4 J.E.B. Mayor, *Early Statutes of the College of St. John the Evangelist in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1859), 139.
- 5 Frederick S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914); G.C. Moore Smith, *College Plays Performed in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923); and T.H. Vail Motter, *The School Drama in England* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929).
- 6 Cf. Alan H. Nelson, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); John R. Elliott, Jr., and Alan H. Nelson (University), Alexandra F. Johnston and Diana Wyatt (City), eds., *Records of Early English Drama: Oxford*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Alan H. Nelson, *Early Cambridge Theatres: University, College, and Town Stages, 1464–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and John R. Elliott, Jr., “Plays, Players and Playwrights in Renaissance Oxford,” in *From Page to Performance: Essays in Early English Drama*, ed. John A. Alford (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), 179–94.
- 7 Bruce R. Smith, *Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500–1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Rebecca Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism:*

English Drama in the Sixteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

- 8 “Queen Elizabeth’s first reply to the Parliamentary petitions urging the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, November 12, 1586” (version 2), in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 194. For James I’s remark addressed to his son Prince Henry, see his *Basilicon Doron*, in *King James VI and I: The Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4: “Kings being public persons, by reason of their office and authority, are as it were set (as it was said of old) upon a public stage, in the sight of all people; where all the beholders’ eyes are attentively bent to look and pry into the least circumstance of their secretest drifts.”
- 9 See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–7.
- 10 Boas, *University Drama*, 43.
- 11 Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. and trans. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 153, 154, 155. Foucault, it should be said, would likely disagree that humanism is a transdiscursive field because he believes Marxism and psychoanalysis “to be both the first and the most important cases” (154).
- 12 John Orrell, *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 24.
- 13 John Orrell, *The Human Stage: English Theatre Design, 1567–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 120. Incidentally, King James did not attend the performance of *Arcadia Reformed*, which seems to have been “played in English as a treat for the queen and Prince Henry” (Orrell, *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb*, 30).
- 14 For detailed discussions of Jones’s and Basil’s influences, see especially Orrell, *The Theatres of Inigo Jones and John Webb*, 24–38; and Orrell, *The Human Stage*, 119–29. In “The Theatre at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1605,” *Shakespeare Survey* 35 (1982): 129–40, John Orrell is less confident about attributing the drawings to Basil (132–3), but he appears to have accepted the attribution by the time he writes *The Human Stage*.
- 15 The quotation is from annotation “K.” for the upper drawing on the manuscript, “Theater at Christ Church, Oxford, August 1605,” British Library, Additional MS. 15505, fol. 21a. Cf. the classic study by Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
- 16 Cambridge University Library, Additional MS. 34, fol. 30a; quoted in Orrell, *The Human Stage*, 127. For a sensitive discussion of just how unfamiliar the Christ Church theater design was in 1605 England, see Stephen Orgel, “The

Poetics of Spectacle,” *New Literary History* 2 (1971): 367–89, especially 376–9 and 385–6.

17 See Boas, *University Drama*, “Appendix IV,” 385–90.

18 For exciting recent work on academic drama see, for instance, Lynn Enterline on grammar schools: “Rhetoric, Discipline, and the Theatricality of Everyday Life in Elizabethan Grammar Schools,” in *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare’s England*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 173–90; Carla Mazzio on universities: “The Three Dimensional Self: Geometry, Melancholy, Drama,” in *The Arts of Calculation: Quantifying Thought in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Glimp and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 39–65; and Matthew Steggle on the Inns of Court: “Varieties of fantasy in ‘What You Will,’” in *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-Visions*, ed. T.F. Wharton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45–59.