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Jesse Swan, University of Northern Iowa

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Relaxation and Amateur Medievalism for Early Modernity: Seeing Sir Henry Yelverton as a Woman in Love and a Bureaucrat Threatened in the 1621 Parliament

Jesse Swan, University of Northern Iowa

With the confluence of global capitalism and modernity, the manner and mode of bureaucracy have supplanted other modes of transnationalism and modernization. The global academician operates commensurately by a blunt in-or-out mode of conceptualization,[1] so that the queer is like the marginal, with both unable to be off-center, much less to be both-neither, much less to be playful. In such a discursive environment, and for those of us interested in the medievalisms of early modern English literature, normative and queer, a less professional and more amateur mode of academic knowledge rewards attention (of the queer amateur), even as it elides attention (of the bureaucratic professional).[2] There are many forms of this academic amateur mode, with a particularly promising one being the nonmodern style of Bruno Latour, and another the failing style of Jack Halberstam.[3] Picking up on such possibilities in what follows, I wish to encourage readers to relax: relax any professional anathema to amateurism; relax any anxiety associated with even the slightest connection to failure; relax the fixture of mental and conceptual framing; relax queer fear. Relaxation combined with knowledge borne of relaxation are missing from or at least marginalized by studies and work in medievalism. Relaxation regained, at least in the manner used in what follows, allows the revelation of that which was in plain sight but which has been foreclosed to the painstaking. This revelation includes oddities such as further suggestions of medievalisms before the nineteenth century and an early modern queer puritan parliamentarian.

Adopting a queer, marginal, and amateur academic manner with medievalisms draws out commensurate material, such as, in early modern English literature, the medieval figure of Gaveston, Edward II's "Ganymede." There are numerous depictions of Gaveston in early modern English literature, with perhaps the most marginal depictions of this marginal figure being those of Michael Drayton, Elizabeth Cary, and, most marginally—so marginally as to be just outside the margin—Sir Henry Yelverton.[4] Yelverton, one of the wealthiest lawyers and judges of the early Stuart era, famously, for the commons, infamously, for royal courtiers, challenged abusive practices of King James I's last favorite, the Duke of Buckingham. In the parliament of 1621, by comparing Buckingham to Hugh Spencer the younger of King Edward II's reign, Yelverton directly criticized as corrupt Buckingham's administration of patronage. Because of the expression, Yelverton's action was seized upon by the ardently royalist court faction, notably by Henry Howard, Earl of Arundel, as intolerably insulting to the king. As Curtis Perry notes in his admirable exploration of the resonances and associations of Yelverton's parallel between Buckingham and Spencer, especially as

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu discusses the modernizing modes of academics in *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1988.

[2] For a fine discussion and elaboration of queer and amateur knowledge at the margins of academic and professional modes of knowledge, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[3] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1993. Judith (Jack) Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2011.

[4] Michael Drayton, *The Barons Warres. The Works of Michael Drayton*, vol. II, ed. J. William Hebel (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press), 1932; *Mortimeriados*, vol. I, 1931; *Piers Gaveston earl of Cornwall*, vol. I, 1931. Elizabeth Cary, *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II* (London, 1680). Sir Henry Yelverton, reported in *Notes of the Debates in the House of Lords, Officially Taken by Henry Elsing, Clerk of the Parliaments, A.D. 1621*, ed. Samuel Rawson Gardiner, 1870 (New York: Johnson Reprints), 1968.

the parallel was immediately recognizable and sensational, much late modern interest in the early modern linkage of Buckingham to Spencer is in what it reveals about the early modern "political discourse of sodomy, and the homoerotics of patronage ... [especially when such represents] a thinly veiled condemnation of the king's sexual behaviour" (323).[5] Perry's alert reading draws us away from the simpler, direct linkage to queer sexual behavior and instead toward the more historically apt understanding of the expression as being "a sexualized way to comment upon perceived political disorder" (324). Complementing Perry's cogent explanations substantiating his reading, I wish to add a brief discussion, borne of marginal and queer thinking about medievalism in early modern England, of a further marginally queer parallel, that of the unmentioned but implied Gaveston.

Although Yelverton certainly suffered for his rhetorical parallelism, he did not suffer the fullness of the penalty imposed, nor did he suffer exclusion from royal court consideration and even promotion. It may seem surprising that Yelverton could criticize corruption openly, and to do so in a sexually charged way, and then have his punishment abrogated and eventually to enjoy again royal favor, but it may seem so only as long as one refuses to appreciate the possible and implied parallel between Yelverton himself and Gaveston. If Buckingham is to be seen as another Spencer, and thereby James another Edward, then we need a Gaveston, which was immediately supplied in the early Stuart period in the figure of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, disgraced favorite of James I who preceded Buckingham. The link between Yelverton and Carr is simple, as Carr was Yelverton's first major patron, and a patron Yelverton would be devoted to, including in Carr's scandalous trials for involvement in the Overbury murder.[6] Putting sodomy behind for a moment, as it were, Gaveston and Carr were passionate men who loved each king and whose king loved them, passionately. It is passion, not sexual object-choice or practice, that most characterize both Gaveston and Carr, so that Gaveston, like Carr, would be criticized for intense acquisitiveness and personal as opposed to political or civil self-promotion. Unlike the second favorite, Spencer, the first favorite, Gaveston, was beautiful and playful and personally intense, with little competence for public affairs, even when they impinged upon his own mortality. This is not unlike Carr, as was the necessity of the monarch foregoing his passionate favorite, owing to civil pressures. Unlike Gaveston, Carr lives on, and even to a degree prospers, but he loses privileged access to monarchal power and must make his way after his disgrace as many another nobleman. Yelverton, a client of Carr, in his paralleling of Buckingham and Spencer, could be associated with a paralleling of Carr and Gaveston. And, indeed, as far as sexual passions go, it seems that Yelverton implies that such is fine and perhaps even appropriate for a royal favorite, and to criticize such is to speak improperly of the king and his loves. Yelverton's expressed parallel, characterized as puritanical by contemporary recorders of it, is entirely governmental, even bureaucratic: Yelverton is recorded by the House of Lords as saying he "wished his Lordship [i.e., Buckingham] had been pleased to have read the articles against Hugh Spencer in this place, for taking upon him to place and displace officers [of the governmental bureaucracy]" (48). Depriving a bureaucrat of his office, as Buckingham was attempting with Yelverton because Yelverton insisted upon executing his office according law and policy and not according to Buckingham's arbitrary desire, is the problem, not loving the king, however passionately or even sexually.

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[5] Curtis Perry, "Yelverton, Buckingham, and the Story of Edward II in the 1620's." *The Review of English Studies* n.s. 54.215 (2003): 313-35.

[6] For Yelverton's devotion to Carr even in the scandalous period, it is most convenient to consult S.R. Gardiner's entry, revised by Louis A. Knafla, "Yelverton, Sir Henry (1566-1630)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2004; online edn., January 2008 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30214, accessed 22 January 2014.

What is remarkable is that the tradition of Edward II in the period did sexualize Edward's reign and it did hold out the influence of Spencer as egregiously maleficent, yet it did so by concentrating the sexual or personal sensationalism on Gaveston, and the serious and dangerous governmental or bureaucratic corruption on Spencer. Certainly both Gaveston and Spencer held their monarch's love and enjoyed all the benefits such power accorded in an environment of personal autocracy, and both exercised the power in the government, but there is an abiding contrast in the tradition between the two, and that contrast provides the grounds for exploring two parts of the problem of corrupt royal favoritism. Further, and to our point in contemplating an early modern medievalism, the Gaveston tradition is considered old and medieval, the sort that can be corrected by modernized government, while the Spencer part of the tradition points up the challenges to modernized improvements. Those writers who yearn for an old tradition of Arthurian society, such as that promoted by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, abhor modernization and use Hugh Spencer as a great example of the inadvisability of promised improvements, while those writers or speakers who champion modernization of government use Hugh Spencer as the example of a problem impeding the realization of the promised improvements of modernity. Gaveston, for the Arthurian or Spenserian medievalists, is the example of the corruption of a romantic world, while the modernizers see Gaveston and everything he represents as simply that which needs replacement. Yelverton the lawyer-puritan was a governmental modernizer, as such lawyer-puritans were in the period, and so his attack was on a false bureaucrat, not on a false or abusive lover.

For illustration of the difference between the Arthurian medievalist and the bureaucratic modernizer in the 1620s, that is, in the time contemporary to Yelverton's parallel in parliament of Buckingham and Spencer, it is instructive to consider the representations of Michael Drayton and Elizabeth Cary. Drayton the Arthurian or Spenserian medievalist has a long *de casibus* poem in the voice of Gaveston in which the unfortunate favorite is rendered pathetically and, indeed, sympathetically. Gaveston and Spencer are also represented in other poems by Drayton, including another *de casibus* poem, this one centering on Queen Isabel's lover and champion Mortimer, but the poem moves toward narrative tragedy more than remaining strictly a ghostly complaint against fortune, and another, longer and heroic poem on Edward II's reign, which Drayton titles, *The Barons Warres*. In all of his work treating Gaveston, Spencer, Edward and Isabel, Drayton explores the relations in terms of love and passion, with evil passions, such as pride or jealousy, being the problems. In the ghostly complaint, "Piers Gaveston," Drayton presents the nobility as too jealous of the "Swan-begotten twins" (l. 849), that is, Drayton presents the nobility as wrong for hating unto death their own Castor and Pollux, even as Isabel is sympathetically rendered as a wronged wife by the pair of male lovers: Gaveston declares, "Though shee his Wife, yet I alone his love" (l. 864). In the narrative tragedy, "Mortimeriados," Drayton represents a valiant, passionate, noble Mortimer, true lover of Isabel, notwithstanding "The Lamentable Ciuell Warres" associated with the pair and advertised in the subtitle of the poem. At Mortimer's execution at the hands of Edward III, Drayton provides Mortimer a nine-stanza letter to his love, Isabel, which expresses true love and valor: "Most mighty Empresse, daine thou to peruse / These Swan-like Dirges of a dying man: / Not like those Sonnets of my youthful Muse. ... Thus *Caesar* dyed, and thus dies *Mortimer*" (ll. 2689-91, 2744). For the romantic reader, Drayton's poems hearken to an environment of perverted love, but one definitely valuing love.

By contrast, Elizabeth Cary presents an increasingly rational, modernized consideration, a consideration more in line with that expressed by Yelverton and one that presents love as old, outmoded, and properly supplanted. Gaveston is incompetent at rational magistracy, being

thoroughly a passionate fellow, while Spencer is perfectly adept at rational calculation, but inept for magistracy, because he lacks dispassionate, mechanical operation. In a way to suggest the desirability of a renascence of a lost, measured love, Cary indicates that Edward and Gaveston introduced a novel form of love: "Such masculine Affection and rapture was in those times without president [sic], where Love went in the natural strain, fully as firm, yet far less violent" (28). The narrator then proceeds to relate Edward's madness inspiring the final recall of Gaveston, a return which triggers the aristocracy's ultimate and murderous passion against Gaveston. In expounding the subsequent lesson of the narrative of Gaveston's life and death, in which he "appearing for a time like a Blazing-star, fill'd the world with admiration, and gave the English cause to blame his fortune, that liv'd and died, nor lov'd, excus'd, or pitied" (30), Cary's explanation is mostly systematic, that is, all actions and reactions are mechanically related, once set in motion. "Summer-birds fear not the Winter, till they feel it," Cary begins the long explanatory series, and continues by observing that "Height of Promotion breeds Self-love; Self-love, Opinion; which undervalues all that are beneath it. Hence it proceeds, that few men, truely honest, can hold firm Correspondence with so great a Minion; his ends go not their ways, but with Cross-capers. ... To secure an ill-acquired Greatness that is begot with envy, grows in hatred. ... Those that are truely wise, discreet, and virtuous, will make him so that pursues their counsel; upon which Rock he rests secure untainted" (31). Gaveston was entirely passionate and lacking in mechanical rationality, and in Cary this is a product of the period in-between her day and an earlier day, an earlier day when masculine affections such as these did not exist, and no passions were so extreme. By contrast, Cary's Spencer is perfectly rational, yet still too personal, for governmental affairs.

In sharp distinction to Gaveston and his "Beauty so perfect" and "Brain ... short of a deep and solid Knowledge" (4), Cary's Spencer is "young, and had a pleasing aspect; a personage though not super-excellent, yet well enough to make a formal Minion" and possesses a remarkable "strength and cunning" (50, 51). Spencer manages the nobility by stratagem and the king by exploitation of his vices. He is realistic about the weaknesses of people, and he capitalizes upon these, as with the French, when Isabel went to her homeland for assistance against him. The detailing of Spencer's handling of the French takes up several pages, but the upshot is that "he knew the *French* were giddy, light, inconstant, apter for Civil broyls than Forraign Triumphs; beginning more than Men, but in conclusion weaker and more uncertain far than Women. ... To take off *France*, he straight selects his Agents ... and lades them o'er with Gold ... bidding them freely bribe, and promise mountains, till they had undermin'd and cross'd the Queens proceedings. ... Gold in an instant chang'd the Council's temper, and conquer'd without blowes their valiant anger" (99). As effectively as his mechanical operations succeed, they also continue to operate, mechanically, so that "Where Crowns are gain'd by Blood and Treason, they are so secured. *Spencer* had not a grain of hope for mercy: the Barons Deaths prejudg'd his coming fortune" (126). Spencer was viciously tortured, publically tormented, and finally executed, and so, like Gaveston, his association with his monarch led to ignominious death, yet Spencer and Gaveston are, in the story, distinct characters and of distinct significance. Spencer, unlike Gaveston, understood much of the mechanics of human relations, yet he did not appreciate the fullness of the mechanical operations. In Cary's story, Spencer is a failed because incomplete modernized statesman, while Gaveston is a tragic, medieval lover.

While Drayton expresses an abiding nostalgia for a past that may well be more legendary than historical and that operates by intense love, Cary expresses a muted optimism for a future of increased appreciation of the mechanisms of rational social relations and government, informed by a knowledge of past mistakes. In both very different visions, the figure of Gaveston is pernicious, but in the mechanical tradition, a tradition sometimes called Machiavellian or "politic," the problem

represented by Gaveston is more that he was allowed influence in government, not so much that he was same-sex lover, romantic or sexual or both, to Edward. The problem represented by Spencer, by contrast, is that he is a capable yet incomplete bureaucratic character.

It is in the context of such a well-known tradition that Yelverton can escape the sexual scandal of paralleling his king's last favorite with Edward II and his last favorite. As Perry demonstrates, the story of Edward II was well-known, so well-known that the knowledge of Yelverton's first and in many ways only real royal court patron, Robert Carr, was considered the sexually scandalous parallel favorite, not Buckingham. And Yelverton makes his own queerly or at least puritanically gender-bending involvement in his parallelism overt, as he insists upon being seen himself as a woman devoted to James: The record of the House of Lords Debates indicates plainly that Yelverton "Besought his Majestie that he [i.e., Yelverton] might resemble the woman of Canan, though his Majestie should kyll him he would honor him" (48).

Like the medieval Gaveston and the contemporaneous Robert Carr, the Arthurian or Spenserian Yelverton operates by love of and passionate commitment to the person of his king, while, like early modern political theorists, Yelverton divides the personal and passionate from the governmental and legal or bureaucratic. Thinking marginally, queerly, and more like the amateur than the professional about early modern medievalisms reveals the dynamic and dramatic crosses that can only be ambiguous to straight thinking, yet are so rich and clear to expansive thinking, thinking that includes the margins as well as that beyond the margins. Yelverton's complex character as an incipient bureaucrat and passionate Spenserian lover rises to appreciation by such a method of contemplating marginal early modern medievalism, as does expansive appreciation of medievalism before the nineteenth century, the century when professional historians of medievalism find that it properly begins.