

# Folio



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MLitt/MFA

A BI-ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF MARY BALDWIN COLLEGE'S

MASTER OF LETTERS/MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
IN SHAKESPEARE AND RENAISSANCE LITERATURE IN PERFORMANCE  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE CENTER

## Fifth Biennial Blackfriars Conference Comes to Staunton

By Tony Tambasco and Brian Falbo, with additional reporting by Katie Crandol, Sarah Keyes, and Glenn Schudel

Staunton residents noticed a proliferation of red, orange, and yellow nametags around the necks of people on Beverley Street October 20–25, as 250 early modern scholars from across the world congregated for the fifth biennial Blackfriars Conference.

The event featured keynote addresses from some of the most prominent names in Renaissance drama and performance theory, as well as paper sessions packed with the scholarly work of actors, directors, and academics. The evenings were filled with parties, banquets, and performances, allowing the presenters to discuss their work with each other and giving MLitt/MFA students the unique opportunity to mingle with the very people

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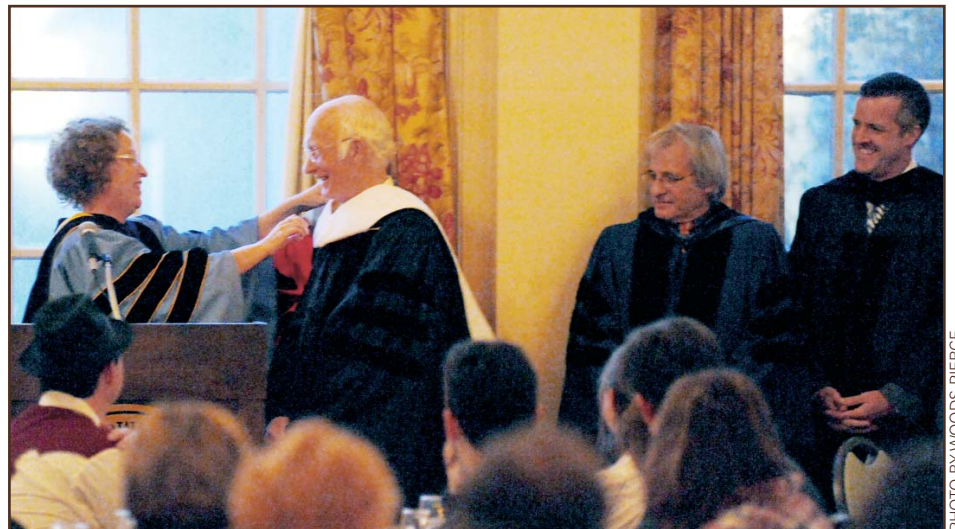


PHOTO BY WOODS PIERCE

Catharine O'Connell, MBC vice president of academic affairs and dean of the college, hoods Andrew Gurr, who received his honorary doctoral degree at the Blackfriars Conference Welcome Banquet in Hunt Dining Hall October 21. Looking on are American Shakespeare Center co-founder and director of mission and MBC professor Ralph Alan Cohen and Paul Menzer, director of the MLitt/MFA program.

## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### GARY TAYLOR:

#### "Lyrical Middleton"

In his second visit to MBC and the Blackfriars Playhouse in as many years, Gary Taylor, George Matthew Edgar Professor and head of the History of Textual Technologies program at Florida State University, delivered the first keynote address of the Blackfriars Conference. His appearance followed last year's well-received staged reading of his reconstructed text of Shakespeare and Fletcher's lost *Cardenio*.

His talk, "Lyrical Middleton," focused on the lyric poetry, songs, and dances found in Thomas Middleton's play texts, pointing out that the plays contain far more songs than Shakespeare's did, and that his songs were more admired by early modern

audiences. Taylor noted that Middleton's songs and choreography were often taken out of the context of his plays and repurposed for other entertainments of the era.

Taylor, general editor of the Oxford *Complete Works of Shakespeare* and the *Collected Works of Thomas Middleton* and author of *Reinventing Shakespeare* and *Cultural Selection*, also discussed the differences between poetry meant to be performed and poetry meant to be read. He

asked a series of questions: How can we recover the musicality of lyrics for which the music no longer exists? Why should we? And what do we mean by *lyricist*, anyway? With Taylor's assertion that moments of lyricism form islands of heightened intensity in the text of a play, the answers to these questions could and should affect our approaches to criticism, performance, and education in the 21st century.

Taylor's presentation featured musical performances by ASC company members Ben Curns and Daniel Kennedy (also an MLitt student); MLitt/MFA students Jeremiah Davis, Amanda Devlin, and Sarah Keyes; actress and scholar Terri Bourus of Indiana University of Kokomo; and, electronically, Hollywood legends Fred Astaire and Peter Boyle.



DR. GARY TAYLOR

PHOTO BY WOODS PIERCE

More highlights on p 3, 5, and 7

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

You'll note that most of the words in this issue of the *Folio* devote themselves to the diverse scholars and artists who visit Staunton to work with our students. Indeed, their contribution is worthy of comment and vital to the life of our great enterprise. But it's worth spending some words here on just what attracts these august visitors to our community, worth spending some words not in self-praise but in recognition of the questing commitment to creative and scholarly excellence that draws students, scholars, teachers, and practitioners alike to draw on our resources.

A brief accounting of those resources starts, of course, with the Blackfriars Playhouse, a building now burnished by eight years of rehearsals, plays, classes, conferences, lectures, seminars, forums, and workshops. Opened in 2001, the darling wonder of Ralph Alan Cohen, Jim Warren, and American Shakespeare Center (ASC), the Playhouse now wears a lacquer of memories that mellows the raw oak in which it first was dressed. But while the Blackfriars provides the physical site of our labors, a playhouse without people is simply an empty room. For it is the students of the MLitt/MFA program and the actors and staff of ASC who provide the spirit that makes the playhouse pulse.

Wander in from South Market Street on a Wednesday afternoon and you'll find our students on stage, pounding out iambic tattoos, limning the verse for meaning and meter; the ASC touring company in the downstairs rehearsal room, brushing up a scene from *All's Well that Ends Well*; and Jenny McNee, ASC costumer, stitching hanks of used fabrics into spectacular costumes on a budget of elbow grease and imagination; and the actors of the ASC company, coffee cups in hand, arriving for an early call for that evening's performance of *Titus Andronicus* or *The Alchemist*.

Each and every day the Blackfriars resounds with poetry and prose, wit and wisdom, laughter and learning. The various guest scholars and artists chronicled in these pages come to speak their piece as well, but they depart refreshed by the wealth of resources that Staunton boasts. It is, finally, testament to the talent and labor of the students and actors that we count the Blackfriars Playhouse itself as our second most important resource, a distant second indeed to the people who play and work there.

— Dr. Paul Menzer



## Shakespeare on Ice

On the final evening of the Blackfriars conference, the Playhouse hosted a performance of *Shakespeare on Ice*, written by Director of the MLitt/MFA program, Paul Menzer.

December 1603 was the first Christmas season at court for King James, and his players were naturally expected to perform. The play provided a backstage view of the King's Men as they try to devise entertainment for the new king, all the while freezing in the tiring-house of the Globe.

In the play, King James decides to relocate the performance to the more private — and much warmer — Blackfriars, in which the King's Men had been forbidden to play. If they impress the new ruler, they might even be allowed to play there throughout the winter, which

would mean that Mr. Shaxper and his fellow company members would no longer be on ice.

But how to impress the new king? A masque? Women on stage? Italian stage machinery and special effects?

Ben Curns directed the production. The cast of ASC members, MLitt/MFA students and alums, and local actors, included Nolan Carey, Curns, Emily Gibson, Danielle Guy, Daniel Kennedy, Sarah Keyes, Thadd McQuade, Solomon Romney, Brett Sullivan Santry, J.P. Scheidler, Christine Schmidle, and Tommy Ryan. Jeremy Lopez, professor of English at University of Toronto and Theatre Review Editor for the *Shakespeare Bulletin*, played Ben Jonson in a cameo, and Ralph Alan Cohen lit up the Lord's Room with his silent, but memorable, performance as James I.





## The Globe Sessions

The fifth Blackfriars Conference closed (appropriately enough on St. Crispin's Day) with a series of discussions on the feasibility of building a recreation of the Globe Theatre in Staunton.

Using resources as varied as Elizabethan architectural documents, the recently excavated foundations of the Theatre and the Rose Playhouse, Wenceslas Hollar's sketches, and the texts of early modern plays, experts on early modern theatre and architecture

are searching for ways to improve the accuracy of modern playhouse reconstructions. Already, it was pointed out, today's reconstructions are far more accurate than those built even 30 years ago. While these authorities on the panel did not agree on everything, they all indicated that through a close study of early modern sources, and by learning from the inaccuracies of the modern Shakespeare's Globe, the ASC's hope of making Staunton the only city in the United States with recreations of both the Globe and the Blackfriars may soon become a reality.

### Taking Part in the Discussion

- **Peter McCurdy**, of McCurdy & Co., responsible for rebuilding Shakespeare's Globe in London and the world's leading authority on the construction of historically authentic timber-frame buildings
- **Tiffany Stern**, theatre historian, professor of early modern drama at Oxford University, and author of *Shakespeare in Parts* (with Simon Palfrey), *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, and *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England*
- **Tim Fitzpatrick**, professor of performance studies and Elizabethan theatre architecture, and head of the School of Languages and Cultures at University of Sydney
- **Franklin J. Hildy**, professor of theatre at University of Maryland, editor of *New Issues in the Construction of Shakespeare's Theatre* and author of *History of the Theatre* (with Oscar Brockett).



## De-Constructing Narratives

By Glenn Schudel

MBC guest professor Roslyn Knutson joined guest lecturer Holger Syme, assistant professor of English and Drama at University of Toronto, on the Blackfriars stage September 18 for a seminar entitled "(Un)Popular Fables of the 1590s." While the presentations covered different topics, both took aim at the need for modern scholars to "construct narratives" concerning the early modern theatre and, more specifically, the life of William Shakespeare, despite a dearth of contemporary documentary evidence.

Introducing the speakers, Paul Menzer summarized this tendency,

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Knutson and Syme

PHOTO BY BONNIE MORRISON

## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### GAIL KERN PASTER:

#### "Thinking with Skulls: Hamlet, Holbein, Vesalius, and Fuller"

Introduced by Ralph Alan Cohen as "the U.S. Secretary of Shakespeare," Gail Kern Paster, editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, questioned in her keynote address the importance of skulls in the work of four intellectual giants of the 16th and 17th centuries: William Shakespeare, Hans Holbein the Younger, Andreas Vesalius, and Isaac Fuller.

Paster, director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, suggests that the presence of the skull in early modern culture goes beyond the traditional symbols of death and absence. The four skulls cited in

the title suggest a transformation of the skull from a *memento mori* to an embodied mind.

"The skull distracts us from its cognitive role" with its significance of mortality, Paster said, but it remains "an artifact of the extended mind," and is not merely "the empty container of what was or what is to come."

In cognitive terms, Yorick's skull is an extension of Hamlet's mind in Shakespeare's tragedy. And the same prop would have

likely been used to represent an extension of Vindice's wife's physical being in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Rather than a mere symbol of mortality, Paster asked if the skewed image of the skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* is "a sign of the mind pouring itself into symbolic containers and doing its own characteristic works of extension."

The illustrations in anatomist Vesalius' groundbreaking *De humani corporis fabrica* — principally one in which a skeleton seems to pensively study a skull — further this connection between the human skull and the representation of cognition. The skull in Fuller's portrait of William Petter, mirrored by an illustration in the book the subject also holds, fully transfers the symbol of death into one of "scientific objectivity," Paster said.



GAIL KERN PASTER

PHOTO BY JULIE ANSWORTH

# Guest Professors Give New Opportunities

By Glenn Schudel

Above and beyond the opportunity to attend every session at the Blackfriars Conference, MLitt/MFA students during fall 2009 had the chance to work even more intimately with three gifted guest professors, who teach an array of practical and academic classes.



CLARE



KNUTSON



LOEHLIN

PHOTO BY JOHN LEWIS

PHOTO BY LAUREL LOEHLIN

**Rob Clare**, artistic director of Kestrel Theatre Company (KTC), is probably best known to current MLitt/MFA students as director of last year's joyous production of *Twelfth Night* at ASC and as the leader of intensive acting workshops. This semester, he joined us as teacher of the advanced acting class. With a doctoral degree from Oxford University and a varied resumé that includes acting at Royal Shakespeare Company and text work at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company, students were lucky to have his expertise. Clare's more recent work with KTC — a registered charitable organization committed to creatively using drama within the British criminal justice system — was featured in the documentary *Act of Faith* and the short film *Bullfrog*.

**Roslyn Knutson**, professor emerita of English at University of Arkansas at Little Rock, brought her deep knowledge of theatre history and early modern dramatic literature to a month-long intensive Shakespeare's Theatre course, exposing students to topics and plays ("Who were the Queen's Men? And what the heck is a *Mucedorus* anyway?") often overlooked in the study of early modern drama. Knutson has published several articles and the books *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company* and *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time*. She is currently indulging her interest in lost plays by co-editing (with David McInnis of the University of Melbourne) a wiki-style *Lost Plays Database*, which can be found at [http://lostplays.org/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://lostplays.org/index.php/Main_Page).

**James Loehlin**, Shakespeare at Winedale Regents Professor of English and director of the Shakespeare at Winedale Program, University of Texas, Austin, has directed, acted in, or supervised productions of 25 of Shakespeare's plays, and all four of Chekhov's major plays. He was an invaluable asset to the program in his role as guest professor of Directing I and Dramaturgy. For two years now, Loehlin's Shakespeare at Winedale students have performed fully staged productions at the Blackfriars as part of MLitt/MFA new student orientation. Loehlin is author of four studies of plays as performance texts, including both parts of *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Cherry Orchard*.

*Narratives*, continued from p 3

reminding the audience that, "Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, and humans gotta narrate."

Knutson started the evening with her presentation, "What's So Special About 1594?" which challenged the popular notion that the year in which the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Lord Admiral's Men were formed was a watershed year for London professional theatre. Knutson studied sources as varied as Philip Henslowe's diary, recently recovered financial records of touring companies, and figures for contemporary plague deaths. Using this information, she argued that despite the long-term ramifications of Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe finding permanent homes for their dramas, there is no evidence that the average early modern Londoner would have noticed anything strange and wonderful happening in his theatrical entertainments.

Syme's presentation, "The Meaning of Success; or, the View from Kazakhstan," amusingly referenced the film *Borat*. We may think we understand what Kazakhstan is like after watching the mockumentary, but it is a very different experience than actually touring the country. Such is our understanding of early modern plays, whether in print or performance. Certain concepts seem to make sense, but once we actually visit the available evidence, we see flaws in the logic of conventional wisdom. Scholars have long held that the "best" or at least the most popular, early modern plays are the ones that eventually found themselves in print. Through an examination of box-office receipts from Henslowe's diary, Syme draws two potentially controversial conclusions: many of the most well-liked plays of the era were never printed and are consequently lost to us, and Marlowe's plays did not "form the core of the repertory of the Admiral's Men." While admired when new, their popularity waned over time, as might be expected of plays so frequently produced.

While the desire to build stories surrounding such iconic figures and moments is strong, both scholars demonstrated through use of actual evidence how fallible the narratives we construct can be. These myths tend to gain popularity and snowball over time, eventually obscuring the view of our subject, whether it is Kazakhstan, or the 1590s.

# Program Mourns the Passing of a Friend

By Glenn Schudel

Barbara Palmer, an instrumental voice in the development of Mary Baldwin's MLitt/MFA program, passed away September 15 after a long battle with cancer.

A native of Pittsburgh, Palmer served as a professor of English and department chair at Chatham College in Pennsylvania before becoming dean of faculty at University of Mary Washington. Aside from being a prominent theatre historian — best known for her revolutionary work on the medieval Towneley plays and widely published in a number of scholarly journals throughout her career — she was a vital presence on the executive board of the Records of Early English Drama (REED) at University of Toronto.

The REED program serves to clarify the way modern scholars view performance in medieval and early modern England, demonstrating through the study of primary source documents the volume and variety of drama, music, and spectacle that occurred outside of London.

Palmer and her husband, John Wasson, spent countless hours combing through the records of provincial town halls, libraries, and manor houses as

## Barbara D. Palmer

1942–2009

**Memorial donations** may be made toward the endowment for the Barbara D. Palmer Award, a prize for the best new essay in early drama studies. Checks should be made payable to University of Toronto and sent to A.F. Johnston, REED, 150 Charles St. W. No. 118, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1K9, Canada.

they co-edited the *Derbyshire* and *Yorkshire West Riding* collections of the REED series.

In Staunton, she served as scholar-in-residence, and is credited with founding REED-USA at Mary Baldwin. She will be best remembered, though, for her frequent appearances as a guest lecturer. Her disciplined scholarship, dry humor, and eagerness to share knowledge served as a model for everyone with whom she came into contact. Her legacy will live on in the memories of the students whose lives

she touched, and in those “big red suitcases” of knowledge, which she so generously donated to MBC's Grafton Library.

“Even greater than her impressive knowledge of the period was her willingness to help students,” said second-year student Veronica Watts. “She offered her time, her e-mail, and even opened her home to students whom she had just met in an effort to foster their burgeoning fascination for the literature and history, which provided her with so much joy.”



## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### PAUL WOODRUFF:

#### “The Art of Watching”

Speaking from his knowledge as a classicist and philosopher, Paul Woodruff, Mary Helen Thompson Professor of the Humanities and dean of undergraduate studies at University of Texas at Austin, delivered the conference's third keynote address. And in a nod to the performance elements of the conference, the professor gave his address from papers held by a teddy bear on the lectern.

Woodruff applied his ideas about the role of the audience and consciousness of performance not only directly to the work of both American Shakespeare Center and the MLitt/MFA program, but also to the workings of life. His ideas and theater in general were given a well-articulated and all-embracing role in the

creation and maintenance of society and culture as a whole.

Woodruff's address clarified the ubiquitous quality of theater — or performance, more generally — in the processes of social and cultural propagation and evolution, citing it as the primary means of instruction and emphasizing its existence as a necessary component to formal instruction.

“If you are teaching and don't recognize it as performance, you're doing it wrong,” Woodruff said, when asked whether he thought teaching was an act of performance.



PAUL WOODRUFF

PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

In addition to his role as a professor, Woodruff is author of the books *Reverence*, *First Democracy*, and *The Necessity of Theater* and the award-winning play *Ithaca in Black and White*.

In relating his work to that of the conference, the ASC, and the MLitt/MFA program, Woodruff described theater as “the art of making human behavior enjoyable for a determined length of time.” He emphasized the conscious elements of mimesis required by formal theater and its generation of genuine responses in its audience. He said that theater and performance do not exist without an audience to witness it, and described a “good” audience as having three qualities: it must watch with imagination, with neither too little nor too much empathy, and with its own past to contextualize the experience.

# Pericles Sets Sail for Staunton

By Jeremiah Davis

University Wits Artistic Director Edward Sheehan continued MBC's relatively new tradition of turning out a fully staged fall production, allowing incoming first-year students an opportunity to jump right in to performance, familiarize themselves with the intricacies of working in the Masonic Building and the Blackfriars Playhouse, and form connections with veteran students.

*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, emphasized the disorientation the seafaring protagonist experiences on his voyages through the use of several musical interludes, including performances of David Bowie's "Space Oddity," the Talking Heads' "Once in a Lifetime," and the Rolling Stones' "Wild Horses." It ran at the Blue Room of Staunton's Masonic Building October 16–18, and its final performance at Blackfriars Playhouse on October 26 was enthusiastically received by students, faculty, and community members.

Assisting Sheehan in the director's chair was Sarah Gusky Kemer, who also served as costume designer and properties mistress. Zach Brown and Brian Falbo were music directors. Shannon Schultz starred in the title role, with Brown narrating as Gower. The

cast also included Amanda Noel Allen, Matt Carter, Brian Falbo, Michael Hollinger, Rachel Kohler, Bonnie Morrison, Maxim Overton, Laurie Riffe, Glenn Schudel, Melissa Tolner, and Daniel Trombley.

## Monologue Slam at the Darjeeling Café

By Casey Caldwell

In all of history, there have been many kinds of theatrical events. One of the best was the second Monologue Slam held at Staunton's Darjeeling Café this fall. Ten MLitt/MFA students — Amanda Noel Allen, Matt Carter, Asae Dean, Clara Giebel, Michael Hollinger, Linden Kueck, Katy Mulvaney, Maxim Overton, Paul Rycik, and Dan Trombley — went all three rounds, performing two early modern monologues and finishing with a modern monologue.

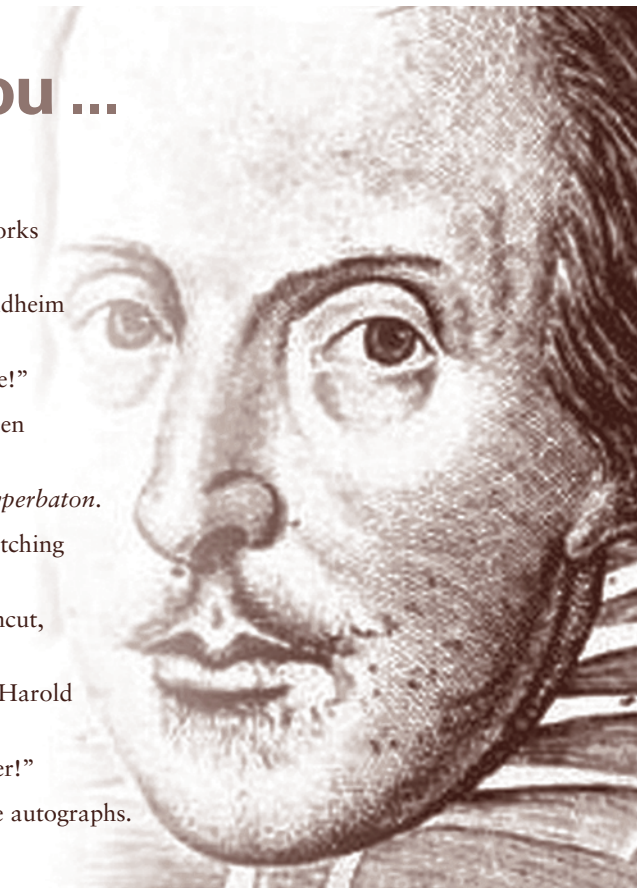
A philosopher of aesthetics once claimed that for audiences in the Athenian theater, the battles between the gods over the values of life were being fought right there in the flesh. That is, for the Greeks, their performances were no mere *representation* of a numinous battle but the very holiest of battles itself. The Monologue Slam, with its postmodern gods gracing the stage and spinning realities off their fingertips, made a play in antiquity look like a wedding party at a karaoke bar.

In each round, performers were scored by three judges chosen randomly from the audience. Each judge was given a stack of paper and marker, and was asked to score each performance Olympics-style, with 10 being the highest possible score and 0 being the lowest. The top three scorers from all three rounds won cash prizes, with Overton taking home \$25, Carter claiming \$15, and Mulvaney dancing away with \$10.

## You know you're a Shakespeare geek when you ...

Contributed by Rachel Kohler, Paul Rycik, David Santangelo, and Glenn Schudel

- # 10 ... get into arguments over which edition of Shakespeare's collected works is the best.
- # 9 ... can't decide whether Shakespeare was the Lloyd-Webber or the Sondheim of the early modern theatre.
- # 8 ... have ever uttered the sentence, "Ooooooh! She just *thoued* the Prince!"
- # 7 ... arrange your collection of Shakespeare action figures around a Queen Elizabeth rubber ducky.
- # 6 ... get really defensive about the difference between *anastrophe* and *hyperbaton*.
- # 5 ... fly to Wisconsin in the dead of winter for the express purpose of catching a performance of *Timon of Athens*.
- # 4 ... wonder why more people don't stage both parts of *Tamburlaine*, uncut, using puppets.
- # 3 ... either get really amused or really offended when someone refers to Harold Bloom as "a crazy person."
- # 2 ... respond to "Yo Mama" jokes with, "Villain, I have done thy mother!"
- # 1 ... view the Blackfriars Conference primarily as an opportunity to score autographs.



who write the books and articles they spend their days poring over.

The MLitt/MFA program was well represented. Numerous students had a chance to perform in presentations; several students and alumni shared their work in the daily round-table sessions; and current students Erin Baird (“Taking Advantage of the Interlude Structure”), Matthieu Chapman (“The Appearance of the

Negroid Races on the Early Modern Stage”), and Christine Schmidle (“Adaptation or Translation? English Comedians and *Der Bestrafte Brundermord*”), had the honor of presenting their research alongside established scholars.

The guest of honor was Andrew Gurr, who has been one of the world’s leading Shakespeare authorities since the publication of his 1970 book *The Shakespearean Stage, 1547–1642*. He was awarded an honorary doctorate at a

banquet in Mary Baldwin’s Hunt Dining Hall, after enduring — good naturedly — a half-hour roast titled, “Hats off to Andy Gurr.” Written and narrated by Bob Jones ’09, the tribute was performed by American Shakespeare Center company members.

All paper sessions and keynotes were filmed, and will be kept in the ASC archives. Tony Tambasco organized live blogging for most of the presentations, which can be accessed at <http://ascblackfriars2009.blogspot.com/tttt>



PHOTO BY LIBBY GURR

Second-year MLitt student Jeremiah Davis, center, takes in a view of the Blue Ridge Mountains with guest scholars Andrew Gurr and Tiffany Stern.



PHOTO BY WOODS PIERCE

Scholars from around the world came to Staunton for the Blackfriars Conference.

## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### ANDREW GURR: “The Economics of the 1613 Decision”

Delivering the final keynote address of the conference was Andrew Gurr, English professor and co-director of the Renaissance Texts Research Centre at University of Reading.

Gurr addressed the deliberations of the King’s Men about rebuilding the Globe Theatre after it burned to the ground during a 1613 performance of *Henry VIII*, explaining that at least two of the householders, including Shakespeare, decided not to invest in a second Globe. Gurr, former director of Globe Research at Shakespeare’s Globe in London and former editor of *Modern Language Review*, theorized that the decision to rebuild the Globe was economically

“unnecessary” — especially considering that the King’s Men had secured the private Blackfriars Playhouse — but rather a decision that served as an “affirmation of an old tradition.”

Signs of nostalgia are evident in the materials used to build the second Globe. Rather than use more durable materials, such as those used to rebuild Fortune a few years later, the sharers of the Globe returned to the same location and rebuilt the theatre in much the same fashion. Gurr added that it was possible that

Heminges, Condell, and Burbage wanted to continue operating a more inclusive public theatre. When asked about possible motives for Shakespeare’s decision not to re-invest, Gurr cited “chronic penny-pinching” and “retirement, I dare say.”

Gurr, author of *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies*; and *Shakespeare’s Opposites: The Admiral’s Company 1594–1625*, closed his presentation by focusing on the possibility of Shakespeare’s Globe in London recreating their own version of the Blackfriars, and ASC’s plans to build a Globe in the Shenandoah Valley. In many ways, this modern desire to connect with early modern London’s professional theatres ties us to “the sense of traditionalism” demonstrated by the King’s Men in 1613.



ANDREW GURR

PHOTO BY REBECCA JONES

# Wits Tour with MacTragedy

By Shannon Schultz

First, I would like to state I'm not sure why I was asked to write a summation of my experience with this specific play as I have a rather large superstition surrounding its title. That being said, the actual title of Shakespeare's *Scottish Play* will never appear in this review.

On August 30, the Blue Room of the Masonic Building played host to the University Wits' touring production of *MacTragedy*. Eight boxes filled and covered with costumes and props graced the stage from the moment the audience entered the space. Confused as I was by this concept, when the actors began madly switching between characters, the logic behind the decision became clear. Additionally, I was intrigued by how each actor transitioned from one character to the next simply by a change of

hat or coat or even just a prop.

What struck me right from the outset about this *Maccers* was the music. The way the company incorporated bits of songs throughout the play could have been jarring, but the music choices and locations were flawless. The audience got to see *Mac, the Musical*. I would love to see that show fully staged, because even just the taste we had was amazing.

Despite the very general overview this review is proving to be, I certainly had a lot of fun watching a production of *That Play About the Thane Who Kills People and Subsequently Goes Crazy* that was more musical comedy than dark, witchy tragedy. I enjoyed walking out of the theatre with a spring in my step rather than thinking the trees were going to attack my castle.

## Meet the Wits

Every summer, the University Wits, the graduate student organization at Mary Baldwin College, produces and tours a fully staged early modern play. This year's production of *Macbeth* opened in June 2009 at Blackfriars Playhouse and performed through the summer. The performance reviewed at left was the closing night show, which served as part of this year's orientation for new students. Glenn Schudel directed the production with assistance from Jeremiah Davis. The cast included eight actors doubling in multiple roles, including Johnny Adkins, Rin Barton, Katie Crandol, Amanda Devlin, Rachel Kohler, Cass Morris, Bonnie Morrison, and Paul Rycik. Devlin also served as music director and costume designer, Kohler served as dramaturg and properties mistress, and Morris served as tour manager.



PHOTO BY JEREMIAH DAVIS

UPCOMING EVENTS

## MLITT STUDENT PRODUCTION

February 15 and 16  
Blackfriars Playhouse

MLitt student Amanda Devlin presents Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* as a dance-opera.

## MFA DIRECTING PRODUCTION

February 22 and 23, 2010  
Blackfriars Playhouse

MFA directing student Brett Gann will present two performances of William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.

## THESIS PROJECT FESTIVALS

March 21, 22, and 23, 2010  
Blackfriars Playhouse

Join students in the Master of Letters and Master of Fine Arts in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance as they work toward their degrees during creative performances in fall and spring. MFA directing student Alisha Huber will exhibit her directorial work in *Love's Labor's Lost* on March 21.

## MFA ACTING PRODUCTION

April 4, 5, 11, and 12, 2010  
Blackfriars Playhouse

Founder and artistic director of Shakespeare and Company Tina Packer directs William Shakespeare's *Pericles*.



MARY BALDWIN COLLEGE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE CENTER

Master of Letters/Master of Fine Arts in  
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