

*Ceremony and
Text in the
Renaissance*

A Humanities Institute
Summer 1991

Sponsored by
The Folger Institute
Center for
Shakespeare Studies

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The Folger Institute
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Among the questions to be addressed:

Semiotic change Do the quarrels over the status of the sign, never more vigorous than in the sixteenth century, signal a genuine change in communal signifying practices?

Improvisation Did men and women of the Renaissance feel freer to play with ceremonial forms than they had in earlier periods, and did their ceremonial play reveal a different character? Was there a new sense of liberation in the play with such forms, and was it counter-balanced by feelings of anxiety?

Female ceremonial roles What place did women have in the evolution and execution of ceremonial performances? How did those observances specifically assigned to women differ from others, and what was their social contribution?

Symbolism and the modern state Are the ritual and pageantry of the emergent national state to be understood primarily as manipulative? What light does recent criticism shed on the semiotics of politics?

Literary forms In what various ways do the theatre, poetry, and prose fiction reflect the assumptions of a ceremonial society as well as its intermittent subversions? Is ceremonial parody, in and out of literature, itself inherently subversive?

Transhistorical musings Is ceremonial symbolism moribund today? Has this primordial signifying practice been definitively demystified? Are our private and communal lives simplified or impoverished by its waning? Can the range of Renaissance experiences help to clarify our own?

ELIGIBILITY

"Ceremony and Text in the Renaissance," a cross-disciplinary institute, is open only to postdoctoral scholars. Some command of French will be helpful. Enrollment will be largely limited to those eligible to receive N.E.H. support to attend the program (see below). A few places may be available, however, for independent scholars and for faculty members from colleges and universities outside the United States who are able to participate without stipend support; they are accordingly welcome to apply to attend.

STIPENDS

The Folger Institute will award fifteen \$3,000 stipends funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The following persons are ineligible for N.E.H. stipends: graduate students, secondary-school teachers, unaffiliated scholars, and teachers in institutions outside the United States (although non-citizens with permanent teaching appointments in U.S. institutions of higher learning are eligible). Anyone who has taken part in an N.E.H.-funded Humanities Institute or summer seminar in the last two years will be given lower priority in consideration for support from N.E.H. stipends. The home institutions of participants receiving N.E.H. stipends will be required to contribute 10% (that is, \$300) of the \$3,000 stipend, a cost-sharing stipulation of the N.E.H. Those applicants who are eligible for N.E.H. stipends will automatically be considered for them.

DATES

"Ceremony and Text in the Renaissance" will run for six weeks from June 17 through July 26, 1991.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

March 1, 1991. For application forms, interested scholars should write: Lena Cowen Orlin, The Folger Institute, The Folger Shakespeare Library, 201 East Capitol Street, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003-1094, or telephone (202) 544-4600.

DIRECTOR

THOMAS M. GREENE, Frederick Clifford Ford Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Yale University, will direct "Ceremony and Text in the Renaissance." Professor Greene is the author of *The Descent from Heaven* (1963), *Rabelais: A Study in Comic Courage* (1970), *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Literature* (1986), and *Poesie et magie* (forthcoming, 1990). A past president of the Renaissance Society of America and of the American Comparative Literature Association, he has published widely on Renaissance literature and culture.

PARTICIPATING FACULTY

JAMES A. BOON, Professor of Anthropology at Princeton University, is the author of *From Symbolism to Structuralism: Levi-Strauss in a Literary Tradition* (1972), *The Anthropological Romance of Bali, 1597-1972* (1977), *Other Tribes, Other Scribes: Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures, Histories, Religions, and Texts* (1982), and *Affinities and Extremes* (1990).

EMILY R. JAYNE, Assistant Professor of Art History at Mount Holyoke College, is a specialist in Italian Renaissance art. She has completed a book-length study, *Tuscan Dancing Figures in the Quattrocento*. A performer of Renaissance dance, she has also organized workshops and lectured on Renaissance dancing. For the institute she will direct a recital-demonstration in conjunction with Nach Tanz Historical Dance Group.

LEAH S. MARCUS, Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, is a specialist on the interplay between Tudor and Stuart society and its theatre, poetry, and court masques. She is the author of *Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (1978), *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (1986), and *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (1988).

RICHARD McCOY, Professor of English at the Graduate Center and Queens College, City University of New York, is the author of *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia* (1979) and *The Rites of Knighthood: The Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry* (1989).

RICHARD C. TREXLER, Professor of History at the State University of New York at Binghamton, has published widely on the social, civic, and religious history of Italy during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Among his most notable books are *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (1980), *Church and Community, 1200-1600: Studies in the History of Florence and New Spain* (1987), and *Naked Before the Father: The Renunciation of Francis of Assisi* (1989).



Ceremony and Text in the Renaissance

Ceremonial, ritual, pageantry, popular festivity — reiterated, communal, symbolic activities such as these organized human experience during the Middle Ages and much of the Renaissance, assigning to each individual a social role and a particular identity, as they had in most earlier societies known to us. But the era of the Renaissance and Reform witnessed a questioning of ceremonial symbolism — most visibly though not exclusively in the religious sphere. Literary texts and historical documents of the period recurrently bear witness to both the continued force of ceremonial symbols and the new challenges to them. “Ceremony and Text in the Renaissance” will explore the complex interaction of texts and ceremonial performances from the perspectives of many disciplines, including anthropology, social history, theology, choreography, and politics. Drawing upon the perspectives of these and other disciplines, discussion will range over a number of symbolic activities, among them narrative, the popular theatre, courtly entertainment, and civic spectacle. Although the institute will focus primarily on England, continental texts and occasions will also receive attention. The aim will be not to “cover” the immense amount of relevant material, but to suggest approaches to its multiple facets. Topics may reflect the interests of the participants. The group may be asked to consider such various matters as the functions of ritual in human society, the meanings of an early Tudor disguising, the conflicting definitions of the sacraments of the church, the sexual and metaphysical implications of formal dancing in the Italian Quattrocento, the staging of royal entries and Elizabethan chivalric rites, ceremonial symbolism in Dante’s *Purgatorio* and Shakespeare’s *Henriad*.

THE *Folger* INSTITUTE

The Folger Institute is a center for advanced study and research in the humanities that is sponsored by the Folger Shakespeare Library and a consortium of twenty-six universities. With additional support from such agencies as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, the Exxon Education Foundation, and the Hillsdale Fund, the Institute offers a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural program of seminars, workshops, symposia, colloquia, and lectures. Founded in 1970, the Institute has recently established under its umbrella a Center for the History of British Political Thought and a Center for Shakespeare Studies.

The Folger Shakespeare Library, located two blocks from the nation’s Capitol and across the street from the Library of Congress, holds the largest collection of English Renaissance books outside the British Isles, as well as extensive collections in the English seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the Continental Renaissance, and in English and American theatre history from their beginnings to the twentieth century. The Folger is also the world’s foremost repository of archival materials on Shakespeare, with an incomparable collection, not only of Shakespeare First Folios and quartos, but also of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century editions, translations, critical and scholarly works, and theatrical materials ranging from programs and playbills to promptbooks, diaries, costumes, and scene designs. The Library also holds major films on Shakespeare, as well as paintings, prints, and music related to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan period.

Chair: Barbara Mowat

Executive Director: Lena Cowen Orlin

Program Assistant: Carol Brobeck

Secretary: Molly Haws