

Speaker 1:

Hello, welcome to the humanities research center's meet Vcu Authors podcast series. I'm your host Brooke Newman, associate professor of history and associate director of the Humanities Research Center at Virginia Commonwealth University. Today we'll be talking with Dr Matteo Pangallo, assistant professor of English at Vcu about his recent book, playwriting, play goers, and Shakespeare's theater, published in 2017 by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Dr. Pangallo holds a Ba from Bates college and Mba from King's college London and a phd in English from the University of Massachusetts amherst. His research focuses on early modern dramatic literature and theater history with specific emphasis on Shakespeare as well as the history of the book. In addition to his book playwriting, play Gores and Shakespeare's theater Dr Pangallo is the author of numerous essays including articles in early theater, early modern cultural studies and English literary renaissance and two edited volumes. Today we'll be talking about the world of Elizabethan Theater, specifically working and middle class amateur playwrights who wrote for professional playhouses and early modern London and learned much of what they knew about drama from being members of the audience. Welcome to the program Dr Pangallo. Why don't we start by having you tell us a little bit about yourself, your background, and your area of expertise?

Speaker 2:

Well, I came into Shakespeare Studies and the study of early modern drama from a, at a very young age through the theater. Um, I was involved with a youth shakespeare group when I was young and then when I went to college and realized that I could major in English and actually study it in and maybe even make it a profession. Um, uh, I was, I was really excited and animated to study Shakespeare in a more sort of rigorous scholarly way. And I became interested in, uh, when I was in college and the intersection between performance in the early modern theater and performance practices. The material culture of the playhouse, the props, the costumes, the, uh, the stage space itself and how the plays were written and to what extent that material contexts sort of influenced shakespeare and how he wrote for that particular material context. And it turned out that King's College London partners with the globe theater, Shakespeare's globe to offer an Maa and precisely that.

Speaker 2:

So the program uses, uses the globe theater as a kind of laboratory space to explore the material conditions of performance in Shakespeare's time and how, how they influence the place. Um, and that then sort of led into my desire to pursue the study of Shakespeare's plays and other early modern plays in the material context or the early modern stage

at the doctoral level at, at, uh, UMass Amherst at the Massachusetts Senate for Renaissance Studies. And, um, yeah, I, I became interested specifically in a peculiar of, of plays that survive in what are known as manuscript playbook form. So of the place from Shakespeare's time. Thousands and thousands of plays were written in Shakespeare's time and of those probably only about maybe 80 or 90 survive and manuscript as opposed to print and of those manuscripts, only about 10 or so survive in playbook manuscripts, which are the actual copies of manuscripts that were used in the playhouse's.

Speaker 2:

Um, so they have the actors markings, they have the stage managers, cuts and markings. And cues, and they have the censorship from the master of the rebels who was the government official responsible for censoring in licensed at licensing plays for, for public performance. And so these playbook manuscripts are really the, the, um, the best, um, window we have into seeing what performance was actually like in Shakespeare's time. And so the master's program that I was in at King's college and then my phd at UMass gave me the opportunity to, uh, to work closely with some of those manuscript place. So did you ever dabble in amateur acting yourself? Oh, sure. Yeah. Uh, and, and in part, that's part of my, um, in part that's why I became really interested in these amateur playwrights. Um, after my undergraduate, I actually took some time off before going to the masters program to start a theater company in my hometown and I ran that for a few years.

Speaker 2:

And then, um, when I was in college and Graduate School, I also was involved with various, a theatrical enterprises have an amateur in nature. Uh, and I remain still involved, uh, on a, on an amateur basis. But I became interested in the intersection between amateur labor in the theater and then, um, the commercial context of Shakespeare's theater, which are, which seemed to me like two very different worlds until I started to study them. When you wrote this book and when you did this research, was this a topic that you would already had in mind or did you develop this by finding references to all of these amateur playwrights? Well, it was, it was fortuitous that I actually stumbled on the topic. So when I was an undergraduate, I wrote my undergraduate thesis about one of these manuscripts playbooks. And when I went to the MBA program, I was in London.

Speaker 2:

I had access to the British library. So I thought I should actually work with one of these. So my Mfa thesis was editing one of these playbooks and I'm originally from Salem, Massachusetts,

which is a very sort of a maritime culture is really important and I've always loved the sea. And so I was fascinated to find out that one of these manuscript playbooks, um, was actually written by a clerk in the east India company. Um, he had, uh, been dispatched to, to Persia and 16, 29 and on the return voyage which took about a year across the Indian Ocean and ended up the African coast on the return voyage. He wrote a play and the manuscript is still survives of that play. And so I decided, well, this is, this is a play in manuscript in the manuscript playbook, which I'm interested in because it has evidence of performance and it has this really cool maritime story behind it.

Speaker 2:

And the manuscript, you can see salt water stains on it from the ocean voyage. There's a oklahoman tar fingerprints on it. So this is be a fascinating project from Ama thesis. So I went about editing it while I was working on it in the British library. I had the opportunity to sort of cross paths with another, um, early modern scholar who specializes in manuscript studies. And she and I got to talking and she raised the question, what does it mean that somebody who was a clerk in the east India company and not part of this sort of highly by the 16th, thirties, institutionalized commercial theater industry in London, could write a play for that industry and expect it to be performed and apparently see it performed. What does that mean about the nature of amateur playwriting? Were there other people like him who were outsiders to that, uh, increasingly closed industry but yet wrote place for it?

Speaker 2:

I thought that's a really good question. So how were you able to track down whether or not this play was performed and where it was performed? Sure. In some. So in some cases and amateurs plays that were written for the professional theater, the, if they were printed off in the title page, will specifically say as it was acted to great applause by the Lord Chamberlain's men or, or something along those lines and will give us a really sort of, explicit, positive evidence about performance in other cases. Um, particularly with the manuscript plays, it's a judgment that's based on the nature of the stage directions and the kinds of revisions that are made. So are the cuts, things that are being done for purposes of doubling a casting or the cuts being made for censorship reasons because of play would only be censored in manuscript if it was going to be public publicly performed.

Speaker 2:

You, you didn't have to have it censored if it was just for circulation among your friends for reading or, or even if it was going to be printed really, uh, but public performance needed to have a license. Um, so things like that can give clues about

performance. And then it becomes a process of looking at who were the acting companies that were active in June 16, 33 when this play was licensed. Um, what were the venues that they were using and which of those venues is sort of implied by the kinds of stage directions. So if the play calls, for example, for two doors for people to enter and exit at which theaters at the time in June of 16, 33 head those doors. And then you can sort of narrow it down to two, which company might have held it and there's always a question that in particularly with this play the place called the launching of the, about whether or not it was finally ultimately performed or where they're not, the actors sort of gave up on it.

Speaker 2:

Um, and unfortunately we don't always have evidence about that. Was this a maritime play based on this author's experiences at sea? Well, when I heard about it, I really hope that it was the. So the, the author, Walter Montfort was a clerk for the east India Company and um, he was always, he was frequently in trouble with east India company. He was charged with embezzlement. He would start tavern brawls. He was charged with attempted murder of arrival clerk for the east India company. Um, and this, this journey to Persia was really his opportunity, his big break to make things right. And I'm on the return voyage. He wrote this play and the play is really, um, there's two, two separate plot lines. The main plot, it's what's called the city comedy of London. So it takes place in London and involves the activities of the east India company and the main plot is basically officers or the east India company.

Speaker 2:

I'm defending to the government the need for the east India company and its value and the importance of global trade. And then in the sub plot we meet some of the workers and they ship yard for the east India Company, um, as well as some of the sailor's wives who have been left behind in London. Um, and it's a little bit more of a implicit critique of the company and the impact it has on society at the working class level. So unfortunately it's not about a life at sea, it's, it seems to be rather, um, his recollections of the city that he left behind. Unfortunately when he got back to London and in, uh, April of 16, 33, he was charged again with embezzlement. And I'm removed from employment for awhile. I mean, it's amazing to think that someone who writes a plate see who is a clerk who is charged with multiple crimes, would even have a chance to have this play performed.

Speaker 2:

Mean, what does that say about the state of theater in the thirties? You know, one of the, um, one of the reasons that I was really excited about doing this, this project is, it's kind of a

truism in performance studies that the audience is really a collaborative playmaker in the playhouse. When you see live theater, the audience helps create the event and create dramatic meaning. Um, but the work of the playwrights, who Montford is sort of just one great example, a really suggests that, that there was a, um, a tangible side to that truism, to that theoretical commonplace that there were actually playgoers who were sufficiently engaged with the theater and thought about performance and didn't just sort of go to a place to escape, but who were paying a great deal of attention to performance practices and materials for them. Playgoing was a participatory experience.

Speaker 2:

And the act of cultural consumption was a highly active and creative. Um, so in terms of what it reveals about the audience in particular members of the audience, it's, it's fascinating in that respect. But it also says something about the nature of the profession that the so called profession of playmaking at the time that even by the 16th thirties, which is well after professional theater professional commercial theater in England, really starts in the 15 seventies with the development of the first commercial troupes and then dedicated playing venues set up by the 16 thirties. There's this sense that while the profession is fully closed off to outside participants, it's, it's fully formed. There's occupants, what's called occupational closure. And the truth is I'm quite the opposite. That the 16 thirties is really the rise of the playwrights. It's the golden age of these working in middleclass dramatists who wrote plays for the stage that they clearly loved and in many cases saw those plays performed.

Speaker 2:

And I should say conversely, there's another group of amateur playwrights who were very well known to scholars and have been studied quite a bit. And those are the, the aristocratic amateurs who also start to come into their own. And the 16 twenties and thirties, who, who were members of the court, who for various reasons I'm assumed that writing a play and having the king's men in particular performance will be a great way to get some social prestige and some political show, their political importance. So you have these two different groups of amateurs. I'm working at the same time and influencing the industry and I'm responding to very different things. So we're, the aristocratic amateur is primarily writing court masks, are they also writing plays and perform for a wide variety of people. They were writing plays. I mean, there's certainly was involvement with the court mask tradition, um, but, but the Aristocrat, the aristocratic amateurs that, that I'm, I'm referring

to were specifically writing plays a, again, largely for the king's men, which was the most prestigious troop.

Speaker 2:

Shakespeare's Shakespeare's troop, largely performance, uh, at the Blackfriars theatre, which was of the two venues that the kingsmen used. The sort of more, um, a highly reputable one. It was the private theater ticket prices were much higher. It was indoors. Seating was limited as opposed to the globe, which are most people are familiar with, which is the big sort of outdoor amphitheater where it was cheap to get in and everybody went. Um, so for the aristocratic amateurs it was a way to sort of show their cultural taste and their significance. How did you go about selecting and then researching the amateur player writers that you picked for your bulk? So it was a process of first sort of looking at, um, who were the playwrights that wrote only one play a, even though some of the playwriting playgoer goes wrote several plays, um, as I began to find, but I started with asking that question about who was, who were the writers that were sort of just the one offs and then looking at what we know about their biographies, uh, looking at any records in the public record office or other provincial record offices, looking at references in other literary works.

Speaker 2:

Um, both the works themselves, but then also, um, peratech's. So things like dedications, very often writers when they would publish something, would write a commendatory poem for somebody else's book. So what were the social networks that these people were involved in, what in their own pair of texts, so prologues, epilogues, commendatory versus dedications, things like that. What in their own Peratech's did these writers say about themselves to try to establish some understanding of their biography because biography, obviously it's sort of key to the project. Um, and then from there develop this sort of universe of about 20 or so I'm sort of 20 or so playwriting, play Gores for whom there is positive evidence that they were not part of the professional industry. So they weren't actors, they weren't shareholders, they didn't apprentice with another writer to learn how to write for the stage, um, who were play goers.

Speaker 2:

Usually they explicitly identify as play goers or play readers as well. And who seemed to have no intention of professionalizing. They didn't follow up even if their play was a success they didn't follow up with. I'm trying to enter the industry in some way. In fact, some of them expressly indicate that they have no desire to professionalize. So all of those things combined would start to create a profile for who these writers were and some other their place survive in manuscript like Montfort's and a number

of them were also printed a lot of the plays that were probably not successful in performance. And in one case, a play that was explicitly rejected by the professional actors would find their way into print. That was sort of the fallback for a playwright. If you couldn't get it performed, you would pay a or to printed for you.

Speaker 1: That's fascinating. I always assumed that if it was printed, it had also been performed. Well, that's not the case.

Speaker 2: No, that's not the case. In fact, very often, especially with the professional theater, theater troops had a sort of vested interest in keeping their popular place from being printed. Um, there was no system of copyright like we have nowadays. So if a, and particularly in terms of, of, of theatrical performance. So if a play made into print, there was a very real likelihood than a rival company could then perform it. There were very few limits. I'm restricting plays to particular companies, so if you had a box office hit, you wouldn't turn around and then sell that manuscript to the printer. There were other ways that that plays, even if they were successful or especially if they were successful, what sort of surreptitiously end up in print. But the companies usually are not the ones behind that unless they were strapped for cash.

Speaker 1: How did the professionals respond to all of these amateurs trying to break into their industry?

Speaker 2: There are some professionals who sort of explicitly, um, seem to comment on this practice and the, it's often wrapped up that commentary is often wrapped up in the sort of larger theoretical question of to what degree is it appropriate for the audience to shape the theatrical experience? Um, the idea of if the professional theater is a marketplace of artists, the artists sort of is independent of audience demand, um, as opposed to sort of the notion of the typical commercial marketplace where demand is sort of dictates everything. Uh, and so you have writers, like, for example, Ben Johnson, who was a playwright, extremely interested in defining what it meant to be professional. Um, there were specific rules that he, he felt had to be in place to qualify to be a professional writer, a professional playwright rules that he established. He was, um, he saw himself very much at the center of the profession, um, and he advocated very much for a sort of apprenticeship model for pressure professionalization so that you would, as a up and coming writer collaborate.

Speaker 2:

And that was the proper way to learn how to write all of these other writers, playwriting, playgoers, aristocratic amateurs. Um, they were people who were dabbling in playwriting and so had not had this sort of proper training to enter the profession. I'm one of the more interesting, from a dramatic perspective, representations of amateur playmaking. I mean, we obviously have examples like Hamlet in Shakespeare's. Hamlet is effectively an amateur playmaker and play writer because he writes his own additions to the mouse trap. And we also have this sort of bumbling amateur players have a midsummer night's dream and their theatrical failure. So Shakespeare seems to have some interesting views as much as we can read the plays autobiographically, which we can't really, but he has some interesting views about amateur playmaking, but the, but the more sort of dramatically compelling evidence is found in winter called induction scenes, which are like little skits or sketches that will be performed before play occasionally.

Speaker 2:

They fell from favor, uh, right around the early 1600s. So they start to disappear by, by the time of King James. But in the 1580's, 1590's, and early 1600s, there are these induction scenes and they do come back to popularity a little bit later in the period is a little skits and they're not prologues really. They, they don't, they, they usually don't have to do with the play itself. You could almost detach it from the play and put it before any play. They usually show I'm an audience member or rather an actor playing an audience member, interacting with an actor, playing himself. And it's meant to be a way to kind of teach the audience about how to behave. How to interpret or take the play, uh, what the proper role for the audience is.

Speaker 2:

And obviously there is all of representational, it's not documentary evidence, but one of the sort of trends that you notice in reading the induction scenes is that in induction scenes written by amateur playwrights, whatever context they're writing for, whether aristocratic amateurs, playwriting, playgoers, academic playwrights at the universities, if they're amateur, if we're not part of the professionalized industry, they almost always represent the audience as a constructive force in the playhouse. They endorsed the idea of the participating playgoer, um, and they show them sometimes even saving a play from ruin. On the other hand, when you look at it, induction scenes written by professional playwrights, the intruding playgoer always ruins the play in some way. They don't know what they're talking about or they are too many sort of conflicting ideas, conflicting tastes among the audience to try to satisfy everybody. And if you try to please everybody, you end up just ruining the play.



Speaker 1: I'm imagining that all of these professional playwrights at some point were amateurs themselves and I'm assuming that they are playgoers as well, even if they are part of a professional troop. So how do you make the distinction? Is it in terms of how they perceive audience participation and whether or not they are actively involved in a professional troop? Is that how you make the distinction in your book?

Speaker 2: I should say there were some professional playwrights who welcomed audience participation in a way and um, it's hard to say whether or not they were pandering to the audience in that respect, but it's not that every professional as opposed to the idea of, of the audience being inactive. Participant. This question about what is the distinction between an amateur playwright who succeeds by writing just one play and then a professional who fails because they wrote only just one play it, it's a, it's a difficult one to answer. And in part it requires looking at what the systems were for professionalization in terms of writing for the stage. Because unlike most, most other professions at the time, there was no guild, there were no formal rules about who could or couldn't write. It largely was if you had the leisure time to do it and you were literate then in theory you could write the state would regulate the content that you would include in a play and the performance of the play.

Speaker 2: But there was no regulation about who could or couldn't write either by the state or by the theater industry itself. And so we have to look at what I think about as the informal systems that professionalization. So in the seventies and eighties, those systems, because the theater industry was new, those systems were largely generating writers from external sources, largely academic. So university playwrights, school teachers who were playwrights, people who wrote plays for the Inns of court, which were the law schools in London. Um, those were the sources that were effectively training the first generation of professional playwrights. Um, so the so called university widths that we're writing plays like Marlowe and, and Greene and nationally starting in the 1980s though, after the industry has had time to develop for almost a decade, you begin to see a different source of professionalization for writers. And these were people who were involved with the theater already as actors.

Speaker 2: So Shakespeare's most famous example, but also Johnson, uh, Samuel O'Reilly and, and others of their kind people that had experience with the industry because they had been acting in it and decided to pick up a pen and start writing and then starting, I'm a little bit later, 1990s a lasting up to the end of the

period to 16, 42. You also see the rise of what Johnson really wanted, which is the idea of training younger writers by collaborating with established professionals. Um, and so, uh, Richard Brown, for example, collaborated with Johnson, basically served a, um, an official apprenticeship with him for awhile before becoming his own, um, professional playwright and, and even existing writers in the industry would collaborate with more professional playwrights to learn the ins and outs of writing for different companies. So the most famous example of this is John Fletcher, who was pretty well established playwright in his own regard when Shakespeare was approaching retirement, Fletcher collaborated with Shakespeare because he was going to take over as the professional sort of inhouse playwright for the king's men when Shakespeare retired.

Speaker 2:

The question about playwrights who went to see place is also an interesting one because we obviously have abundant evidence of playgoers attending place very often their own place to make sure the actors are getting it right. Um, and I do think of it as a distinction in terms of the proximity to how plays are being made that a play, writing playgoer is somebody who's familiarity with the theater is largely from the perspective of the cultural consumer. Whereas a play going playwright is somebody who's familiar as a producer for that. For that industry, and, and this is where the distinction or this is where the parallel with fan fiction I think is really helpful. I was actually thinking that while you were talking. Yeah. Um, so they're obviously distinct. There are differences between modern day fan fiction and the work of these playwriting plague ours, but the sort of broader framework of the idea of a highly engaged cultural consumer who is not merely a sort of passively absorbing cultural content, but as writing back to the mainstream industry and engaging with in a way that shows what they understand about that industry and what they understand about how the industry creates culture, but then also what they desire and when one of the more interesting things is looking at the work of playwriting, playgoers and seeing what is it that they understand about how plays were made.

Speaker 2:

What is it that they like about what they're seeing. But then also what are the things that they differ, differ about what, where do they deviate from those sort of cultural norms. Um, and those things can be hard to determine sometimes. But the, the, the parallel with fan fiction means that in studying plays by playwriting, cigars in a way to understand the audience means that we're not really looking at what was staged, we're looking at what particular very particular audience members thought was staged, how they thought it was staged, how they thought

it should be staged, and what they wanted to see staged. So to what extent did the civil war, the interregnum and the restoration, disrupt and transform this industry will 16, 42 when, um, when the parliamentary army effectively occupies London, they shut down all of the commercial theaters and theater goes with a few exceptions.

Speaker 2:

Theater goes largely underground. You still have some commercial theater happening illegally, but theater largely becomes the domain entirely of amateurs, which, which I think is always healthy to think about. And I think we tend to forget because we focused so much on Shakespeare, the consummate professional, we tend to forget that theater in England began with amateurs and after 16, 42 until 16, 60 in the restoration, it was largely dominated by amateurs. Um, so the period of professional theater was a sort of this rare blip in the midst of amateurism after 16, 60 in the restoration amateur theater then sort of continue to blossom as well though it was very much dominated by the rest of Kratz by the, by the court. You're amateurs. Is there anything about this project that you found that just was completely unexpected? So one of the things that, that I was really excited by was the extent to which, um, the extent to which the theater was much more open and I'm encouraging of, of, of that active player experience than, than I had been taught or I had assumed.

Speaker 2:

And the idea of being able to access individual audience members understandings and experiences and desires was really regulatory. Because when I first came to these plays, I didn't think about them as telling us things about play goers, experiences. I thought of these as amateur playwrights and they're going to tell us about difference. They're going to tell us about how people who weren't part of the industry didn't understand it. And it took a while of working on the book to begin thinking about. They are telling us something, we're just, I'm just asking the wrong questions of the evidence. The question isn't what are they getting wrong? It's, it's what are, what are they, what are they, what is their particular perspective? My familiarity with early modern audience studies like, like most other scholars in the field is really through two different camps. There's the sort of demographic study of the early modern audience which looks at who went to which theater.

Speaker 2:

So if you had a particular level of education or you belong to a particular occupational group, you are more likely to go to this theater, that theater. So who was where and where do they sit in the audience, you know, based on ticket prices and so forth.

And then the other camp is the so called orchestration study of the early modern audience, which sort of assumes that by looking at plays written by professional playwrights, we can use that to deduce what audience members thought. And this sort of assumes that the audience is the creature of the, of the playwright, and we'll respond uniformly in the way the playwright wants. And a lot of literary critics sort of implicitly adopt this and they're in their own work. This idea that the, um, assumptions about audience response can be accurately determined from what the professional playwrights assigned to the audience.

Speaker 2:

And it is absolutely true that a really good professional like Shakespeare knows the audience and succeeds in reaching the audience. But what's lost at that level is the kind of granular anecdotal perspective of the individual playgoer. And instead we tend to think about audiences as these monolithic creatures in Shakespeare's time when they weren't, they really weren't. And, and, and a lot of the playwrights acknowledged that some of them like Johnson with a great deal of anxiety and frustration. But by thinking about playwrights who were not part of the industry and the plays they created, you can then sort of narrow it down and look at one particular person's response to the stage in a way that you can't. When you're looking, for example, at stage directions. In Shakespeare's plays as a way to try to understand how he controls audience, audience attention, um, or you know, questions of John Rowe. We assume that because professional playwrights wrote a particular cluster of plays of one genre for one theater, that's what the audience really, really wanted. But what does it mean then when we have a playgoer's play from that same theater, from that same audience who is rejecting that genre or, or rejecting the conventions of that. John Rowe, not everybody in the early modern audience, the same way about the theater and wanted to see the same things. What's interesting about it, about

Speaker 1:

When you were talking about fan fiction, I was thinking that now we have gatekeepers, we have agents, publishers, the screen writers guild. I mean you have all of these different means by which people are prevented from making a contribution and transforming Hollywood, for example. But in this period you have people who are in the audience, they're amateurs. They are not part of this professional industry and yet they're able to write plays while at sea or wherever, and in some cases have them performed. I think that says a lot about the differences between, you know, Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Carolinian culture and our current culture.

Speaker 2: Absolutely. And I think that, in that respect, the entertainment industry today has, as you say, has all these mechanisms because it has obtained a degree of, of that occupational closure that did not exist in Shakespeare's time. And I think very often we, we, we make a too easy correlation between the entertainment industry today in the entertainment industry back then. And one of the things that we sort of, uh, uh, export anachronistically back in time to Shakespeare's theater is this notion of this, this closed industry, um, when really it was much more fluid. It was much more highly open to the participation of outsiders of the term. They actually, a lot of the professional playwrights used to refer to these writers, um, as strangers, which is also the term that he used for immigrants and foreigners in the country. And so this idea of the stranger play, right?

Speaker 2: Somebody who is not part of the established industry. It exists because the established industry itself did not have that occupational closure that we have nowadays with all of these different agents, but I will say also the rise of digital media and so forth. I mean, the ecosystem for fan fiction today is much greater than it would have been in Shakespeare's Day. I think a lot of the, uh, one reason why so many amateur playwrights gravitated to the commercial stage is because at least within London itself, less so for, for the provinces. But in London itself, that was the only game in town. That's where if you wrote a play and you wanted see performed, you had to go to the actors and the professional actors and see in and see if they would stage it for you. Particularly by the 16 thirties. I'm Robert Stebbins who's a sociologist that a lot of work on amateurism, mostly modern amateurism is pointed out that sort of, it seems like a paradox, but very often the more professionalized field of labor becomes that will provoke an increase in also the rate of amateur participation, um, sometimes within the profession but also sort of externally to it.

Speaker 1: So what are you working on now? What is your next project?

Speaker 2: I have two things that are sort of on my desk at the moment, and one of them emerges from the question that you asked about what is the difference between a successful amateur and then the failed professional. And that question came up for me a lot while I was working on the book and then began to think more broadly about what, what does failure mean in the early modern theater in Shakespeare's theater? And so one of the book projects I'm working on right now is a study of theatrical failure in the early modern theater. I'm not just the commercial theater, but also sort of beyond that court masks, academic

plays, a household, entertainments and so forth. Looking at plays that failed people that failed, the professionalized theater companies that failed to make it, props that malfunctioned theaters that fell down, looking at not just why those things happened and how they happen, but then also sort of more crucially, um, what was made of that?

Speaker 2:

How did people who were involved with the theater, the theater apologists, the anti theatrical lists, the play goers, the playwrights, how did they respond to failure and understand it and make use of it. Um, so the book is really an examination of the sort of that, the productive results of failure in the early modern theater, especially in the commercial context, but not exclusively. Um, and then the other project, which is part of, I see the three books really as a trilogy about the way I think of it, the edges of early modern theater history, looking sort of beyond the Canada and beyond Shakespeare to the failures, the outsiders, the strangers. So the other project, which has become a, it's moved up on my radar for lots of reasons, involved with the current state of politics is a study of foreign performers in England.

Speaker 2:

Um, there's this sort of truism. I'm in early modern studies that England was an exporter of dramatic culture and um, that's a view that I find implicitly imperialist and also, uh, as I've gone through this sort of records of, of performers in England, a factually incorrect, uh, that in fact that there were many, many actors, musicians, dancers, dancing, teacher's animal acts, pyrotechnics, puppet shows, prodigies, all kinds of entertainers, entertainers who came to England in the period from the continent from Scotland, Ireland, North Africa, Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire who brought their cultural practices into Shakespeare's England. And so that book is really looking at how England is connected. Um, globally. It's the English theatrical renaissance was actually part of this Inter, um, uh, and wants to international but, but transnational. I'm theatrical, renaissance and, and so those three books are sort of about the edges of Shakespeare's theatrical world.

Speaker 1:

It sounds like a very timely project. So which, which one do you plan to work on next or do you plan to work on both of them simultaneously?

Speaker 2:

I'm working on both simultaneously. The failure project was sort of the next one up, but then following the Brexit vote and in 2016, the presidential election, I thought it's probably important to have this conversation about the connection between Shakespeare's England and then the rest of the world and to

look at the way in which, um, the influence of immigrants and I'm a diplomatic performers, this sort of idea of cultural diplomacy and cultural commerce from beyond England served to help create England's own sort of cultural identity and industry. And so that is sort of for obvious reasons. Then moved up on my docket and is also inspired my teaching in some ways. So next semester I'll be teaching a senior seminar specifically about representations of immigrants in early modern English drama.

Speaker 1:

Well, thank you very much for speaking with me today. Your work sounds fascinating and I look forward to reading your future books and thanks for listening to the humanities research center's meet Vcu Authors podcast series.