

2017 SAA Seminar: The Soundscapes of Renaissance Prose Abstracts
Leaders: Jennifer Richards
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Mary Adams, Western Carolina University

Baldwin's *Beware the Cat* and the Colonial Soundscape

In *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, Bruce Smith uses the first English novel, *Beware the Cat*, to explain the idea of “soundscape.” *Beware the Cat*'s protagonist, Gregory Streamer, uses a special recipe to purge the “filmy rime” at the bottom of his ear hole that keeps him from hearing—and understanding—the noise in the world around him. Many authors have discussed the relationship of print, orality, and manuscript in this text, while others have discussed how Baldwin, as a staunch Protestant, sees “Englishing” non-English languages. I build on these arguments but make a different argument. *Beware the Cat*'s protagonist, Streamer, becomes a figure, albeit a ridiculous one, of Christian empathy precisely through his attention to sound and his command of linguistic difference. The experience of listening to cats, which by sound, time, and location are associated with non-English speaking Catholics of Ireland and Cornwall, allows him to identify with these communities. While the novel uses many strategies to muddy its message, its moral to “live openly” commands us, perhaps, to abjure our cruelties, not just our superstitions.

Biographical note

Mary Adams is an associate professor at Western Carolina University. She has published two books of poetry for which she was awarded a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She has published an article in *Milton Studies* and is working on several articles about Shakespeare's use of chiasmus.

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**“Harsh truths for tender ears”: Soundscapes and Satire in Thomas Nashe's
*Anatomie of Absurditie***

Thomas Nashe's immediate invocation of “the olde Poet Persaeus” and allusions to Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* throughout *The Anatomie of Absurditie*'s dedicatory epistle recall Folly's citation of the ancient poet when she censures the “sour wisemen” who “make harsh truth grate upon their tender ears” – specifically, on the tender ears of Princes. Amidst the polyglot intertextual cacophony that lives up to the title's promise of multiplied dissonance, it is unsurprising that the harsh truths Nashe levels at his Queen seem to have gone unnoticed. But his epistolary invocation of “heauenborne Elizabeth” only postures as praise (6.15). Nashe situates his sovereign and her court amidst the intertextual babble of the House of Fame. This polyvocal mock-encomium informs *The Anatomie*'s overarching attack on the abuses of knowledge perpetuated by those who have dissected “arts at the expense of eloquence,” and have subsequently sacrificed the practice of moving auditors toward sound thinking. Throughout, Nashe participates in the culture he condemns as he generates excessive textual noise to both deliver and disguise vicious subtexts of Crown criticism. Ultimately, *The Anatomie* articulates a scene of post-Iasparian babel that has been transposed on to late sixteenth-century English soil.