

Writing the Professions: Letters, Law and Administration in Early Modern England

Edward Gieskes

First Reader: Prof. Siemon. Second Reader: Prof. Klancher

This dissertation examines the emergence of a recognizably modern literary field in sixteenth-century England. In pursuing this project, it reads plays by Shakespeare, Jonson, Marston, Middleton, and Dekker in conjunction with non-canonical texts such as legal manuals, pamphlets, and handbooks for administrators. The work of Pierre Bourdieu provides a theoretical framework for analyzing developments in literature, law, and administration in relation to broad changes in early modern culture, prompting a definition of what is modern about the early modern professions. Since Weber, analysts have linked the professions to a modernity defined by the rise of capitalism and economic rationalism, and they have generally opposed modern dynamism to pre- and early modern stasis. Through an analysis of literary and non-literary texts, this dissertation argues that the early modern professions were dynamic and that their dynamism was characteristically modern.

The first chapter argues that the process of professionalization did not spring up with the Industrial Revolution, but grew out of changing practices in administration, law, and writing in early modern England. The following chapters take up each of these three fields in turn, beginning with administration. The second chapter argues that the Bastard in Shakespeare's King John represents an early example of the professional administrators that could be seen in the secretariats of Privy Councilors such as William Cecil, Nicholas Bacon, and Sir Thomas Walsingham. The third chapter discusses the transformation of the legal occupation from a small guild into a large and influential profession, relating this change to status conflicts in Jacobean city comedies, such as Middleton's Michaelmas Term and Massinger's New Way to Pay Old Debts, which are concerned with legal practice and practitioners. The final chapter demonstrates that the Jonson-Marston-Dekker War of the Theatres embodies a struggle over legitimate claims to the title of author.