

## SAA 14, Seminar 04: *The Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and his World*

Seminar Leaders:

Subha Mukherji

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Confirmed participants and their abstracts:

1. Barbara J. Bono

What's Obscene?

"Her honour is an essence that's not seen."

*Othello*, Iago 4.1.16

*Othello* takes Shakespeare's driving concern with the will to knowledge and brings it to bear generically and epistemologically on the sexuality of woman. The uncritical misogyny of patriarchy—which, coupled with humoral physiology and the early modern understanding of sexual difference, focuses anxiously on the hidden site of women's sexual pleasure and therefore on their control of reproduction—is here exposed as self-generated male paranoia. In the process, what happens on-stage, which is largely composed of a tissue of verbal suggestion, is projected off-stage as an image of obscenity. At the end of the play this obscene, *ob-scaena*, action is brought on-stage as a "bloody period" (5.2.364), "the tragic loading of this bed" (5.2.373): a cluster of murders, and not a sexual consummation or a fruitful pregnancy and birth. My paper will trace the tissue of verbal suggestion and off-stage action in the play's central seduction scene (3.3). If time and space permit, it will also address the way in which this tragedy is reshaped and averted in film director Mike Figgis's contemporary re-working of *Othello*, the los-angelino cop B-movie, *Internal Affairs* (1990).

2. Mary Baine Campbell

'Playing at Dreaming of Knowing'

Historians of early modern England, including its colonies, have recently directed us to the value of dream records and dream texts of various public kinds—transcribed prophecies, political allegories, stage plays, diagnostic manuals, essays in the skeptical voice—for recovering information about the period, its affective topography and social forms. I'm thinking of Carole Levin's *Dreaming the English Renaissance*, Carla Gerona's *Night Journeys* (about dream-sharing between Indians and English Quakers in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Pennsylvania) and Ann Marie Plane's forthcoming *Invisible Worlds: Colonialism and the Cultural Meaning of Dreams in 17th-century New England* (in press). But even the best historians tend to read denotatively: the desire they bring to texts is that they be evidence. The time is ripe to consider dreams and dream theory in contexts that permit acknowledgement of both their ontological and epistemological *challenge* and their primacy as acts of the narrative imagination. In the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup>-century, the stage is an ideal location for, precisely, staging contemporary transformations of epistemological authority and the drama of dream's challenge to what we now call, in a stripped but pragmatic usage, "vision." Unlike other art forms, a stage play takes place in real time, but an unreal place: with our corporeal eyes we see actors seeing things invisible to us; we fail to see the things they see; we see things we know to be impossible and, even where possible, unreal. The modality through which the theatrical art is conveyed is challenged by a theatrically enforced inability to believe our own eyes. Ghosts and dreams are, by the nature of the experience of watching them or watching others see them, undecidable. Whereas they could still get you a prison term in real life.

However contested, the relation of manifest dream content to knowledge was understood to be direct, if not always simple to decipher in an individual case, across a wide region from, at least, Iran to Ireland before modernity arrived: the undoing of that relation might even work as a metonym for modernity. In Renaissance England, as Levin shows, dreams—understood as transparent—could still get you in real trouble, and in Germany Kepler's ludic astronomico-fictional *Somnium* put his mother in prison for witchcraft in 1615. The belief in direct access to knowledge through dream and vision was still alive when August Kekulé dreamed his benzene ring in 1865, but outside the circle of mathematicians, dreams had come at last to be understood as trivial somatic illusions rather than as a form of vision, or possession by a god with a message.

While Catholic missionaries in the New World tried to convince Indians that their powerful and influential dreams were meaningless (and Jesuits in French high schools staged ballets that mocked the truth of dreaming for home consumption), people of means took to

writing their dreams down, to buying and reading translations of Artemidorus's 2<sup>nd</sup>-century Greek dream interpretation manual and, as Puritan resistance rose under James and Charles (and Huguenot resistance in France), to having and transcribing prophetic dreams that could rouse a restless population to action. Mathematicians Cardano and Dee sought immediate philosophical knowledge of reality through angelic mediation in dream; even Descartes dreamed his way into a philosophical career, on the night of November 19, 1610.

But in 1595, the year of Nashe's complicated rhetorical performance, *Terrors of the Night*, Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Though many prophetic dreams would still be dreamed, and many dreams that uncovered clues for police investigations and scientists, the playwright here inserted into the conversation—into the experience of dreaming, one might even say—a vivid representation of the skepticism that dream knowledge could both provide and be doubted out of sight with. My paper will look at the representations in Nash's "Terrors" and Shakespeare's *MND* of a world to which knowing was inadequate, or of human knowledge at a threshold--losing a form of knowledge in the act of losing a form of ignorance. "Terrors" enacts the inescapability, however furiously and hilariously resisted, of dream as the envelope of human consciousness; *Midsummer Night's Dream* asks us to imagine what that might feel like if we knew it.

### 3. Jacqueline Cowan

#### The Scientific Imagination in Bacon and Shakespeare

When Bacon and Shakespeare wrote, poetry and natural philosophy were both considered "sciences." In keeping with the seminar's goal to "examine forms and processes of knowledge that elude existing categories, but which Shakespeare and his contemporaries exploit and posit," this paper argues that the poet and the natural philosopher perform the same political and "scientific" work, albeit in different ways. In focusing on the shared goal that underlies poetry and natural philosophy as sciences, this paper shows that the work of the poet and that of the natural philosopher were complementary for Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Poetry makes an imaginary world that displays the lineaments of an ideal order. Natural philosophy makes visible the causes of that order in the natural world. And together, poetry and natural philosophy make intelligible the divine order and man's place within it.

My paper identifies this complementary relationship in *The Tempest* (c. 1610) and Bacon's 1626 *Instauratio magna* (and the works contained therein). Both concern the restoration of sovereign power, the former of an illegitimately deposed Duke and the latter of an Adamic sovereignty over nature. Shakespeare's and Bacon's shared goal drew upon the labors of both the poet and the natural philosopher, demonstrating that these professions were complementary during their day. The magical art of Shakespeare's Prospero at once fabricates spectacles and simulates natural phenomena to dramatize sovereignty over the imagination and nature. In this way, the play renders the domain of the poet and natural philosopher virtually indistinguishable from each other. Bacon, too, would restore a state of Adamic sovereignty over nature where man's art is largely indistinguishable from natural phenomena. To reform natural philosophy, I argue, Bacon appropriated the poetic imagination, without which man could not invent the marvels he used to exert dominion over the natural world. Bacon's reform, then, codifies what Prospero's art dramatizes: poetry and natural philosophy become expressions of sovereignty only when working together.

#### 4. Amrita Dhar

##### The Safer Sense and the Case of Eyes: Lear and Gloucester at the Cliffs of Dover

Having allowed his father to 'leap upright' (4.5.27) in a place where he claims to have himself turned away from the high vision of the cliffs of Dover lest his own 'deficient sight/ Topple down headlong' (4.5.23-24), Edgar runs to him after to explain to the blind Gloucester that the preservation of his life is a very miracle (4.4.55). To his relief, the blind old 'happy father' (4.5.72) can, it seems, now be persuaded to '[b]ear free and patient thoughts' (4.5.80). But immediately, 'who comes here' (4.5.80) but another old man, this one 'every inch a king' (4.5.103), who will proceed to charge Gloucester of squinting at him (4.5.132), of refusing to look with his ears (4.5.145), and ultimately, of being Gloucester (4.5.169). In the last instance, he will even offer the blind man his eyes (4.5.169)—before explaining to him the world in which 'we are come/ To this great stage of fools' (4.5.174-175). Thus, with the diverted self-delivery of a blind man led by an apparent fool, and his consequent meeting with a mad king, begins one of Shakespeare's most extended and moving explorations of what it means to be in knowledge and on the thresholds of it—of different kinds of knowledge, of knowledge in its relationship to the senses, of knowledge that *hurts*,

and particularly of knowledge that is profoundly contingent upon the body and its different abilities, wants, and desires. My paper, in a consideration of mainly *The Tragedy of King Lear*.4.5<sup>1</sup>, will examine the conditions of knowledge as appear in this remarkable scene of heartbreak and peculiar insight. In particular, I shall assess the role of vision in the making—or unmaking—of knowledge: what is it to see? What is it to fail to see? What is it to see wrong? What is it to see through? What is it like for vision to fail? What is it like for vision to fail *sense*? And what is it to see—as the blind man puts it—*feelingly* (4.5.143)?

5. Erin Kelly

Risk-assessment in *The Merchant of Venice*

Antonio's opening declaration in *The Merchant of Venice*—"I know not why I am so sad"—presages more than his uncertain emotional state. Characters in the play are bad at knowing not only themselves, but also the risks—economic, social, and even bodily—they face in their very chancy world. Hence, the play constitutes an effective test case for Fortune as a significant blind spot in Shakespeare's plays and his world, not in the sense that it "eludes existing categories and paradigms" of knowledge, but in the sense that it is a category for knowledge that resists generalization. Characters in this play seem inclined to attribute to chance outcomes that are under human control, or to underestimate the degree to which seemingly sure things can be subject to change. As a result, there can be no hard and fast rules about how Fortune behaves, or how one should respond to it.

Fortune is a central component of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, both in the sense that its central characters are concerned about their material fortunes and in the sense that many outcomes seem (at least initially) to be subject to the whims of chance. There is considerable confusion among characters in the play about the extent to which fortune can be known, managed, and controlled. Antonio's incomprehensible sadness in the opening scene is not, as Salanio assumes, because his ships are at sea. He "thank[s] his fortune" that his "ventures are not in one bottom trusted" and that his estate does not depend "upon the fortune of this present year" (1.1.41-44). In short, he trusts that his distributed risk strategy will shield him from misfortune. In the same scene, Bassanio expresses absolute confidence in his ability to woo Portia if he can only secure the means to outdo his rivals (with Antonio's help, of

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<sup>1</sup> Although *The History* will possibly enter the discussion too. My numbering of the scene in *The Tragedy* and its line numbers is drawn from the play as edited by Jay Halio for Cambridge University Press, 1992.

course): “I have a mind presages me such thrift, / That I should questionless be fortunate” (1.1.175-176). Both characters assume the outcomes of fortune to be completely knowable to some extent: even if a mishap should mar some portion of his ventures, Antonio cannot foresee an outcome where he is truly at risk. Bassanio’s confidence seems to be better founded, since the apparently neutral casket test ends up being rigged in his favor thanks to Portia’s hints.

Predicting the outcomes of fortune tests the limits of knowledge in a manner that also has implications for the audience’s apprehension of the work. Aristotle suggests that plays that have the most impact are those which do not rely on chance or fortune, except when “incidents that come to be through fortune... appear to arise purposely.” In sharp contrast to this stricture, Shakespeare’s play seems to revel in upsetting the audience’s expectations of what things are likely or probable. The play’s resolution, for instance, seems overdetermined: not only does Portia masterfully turn Shylock’s contract against him, but the Antonio’s wrecked ships—the very source of the default—inexplicably return unscathed. Fortune doesn’t only test the characters’ capacity for risk assessment, but it also reveals the audience’s blindness to their own assumptions about fortune.

## 6. Jennifer Feather

### Torture, Terror, and Truth in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy

In the decade or so since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the “war on terror” has brought the intricate relationship between torture, judicial punishment, terror, and knowledge under particular scrutiny. While each of these acts is at least theoretically distinct from acts of revenge, they share with the spectacles of revenge found in early modern revenge tragedy the use of violence to constitute, assert, display, or confirm knowledge. In early modern revenge tragedy, the revenger often claims that the spectacle of revenge is crucial to revealing the truth of the injustice perpetrated against him. However, spectators both inside and outside of the drama understand the deaths staged by the revenger as unnecessary, suggesting that spectacles of revenge constitute as much as uncover knowledge. Similarly, acts of bodily damage such as torture, judicial punishment, and terror claim to uncover or display a truth they actually create. While culminating acts of revenge typify the genre, many of the plays

that come most readily to mind - *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* – arguably include one or more of these other powerful modes of constituting truth. This essay will examine staged acts of revenge alongside instances of torture, judicial punishment, and terror in these plays as a way of interrogating the relationship between spectacular violence and knowledge. Specifically, it will examine how these acts translate the bodily suffering of the object of terror, torture, or vengeance into a persuasive affective experience for the viewer of those spectacles, and how this affective experience shapes the spectators' epistemologies. The essay will link the forms of knowledge production in revenge tragedy to those of torture, punishment, and terror, asking questions such as: To what extent do such displays rely on the affective position of the viewer for their truth-producing effect? How does such a reliance on affect shape our understanding of knowledge?

7. Jonathan Gil Harris

Shakespeare's Nuts: The Blindspots of Early Modern Nuxology and the Edible Contact Zone

Shakespeare's references to plant-life are often understood through a pointedly localising prism. The gilly-flowers and cow-slips mentioned in *A Winter's Tale* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, are supposed to bespeak his deep intimacy with the Warwickshire countryside of his youth. This paper turns to another form of plant-life in his plays – the nut – and teases out its global valences. The simple nut might be read just as a nugatory snack. But its implications ramify beyond its small size. When Hamlet claims that “I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space,” he hints at the capacious world within the seemingly humble nut. Indeed, Shakespeare's nuts are generally portals to other worlds. When Caliban promises to pick “pignuts” for his new master Stephano, he offers him just one item from a menu of exotic island delicacies that also include “clustering filberts,” or hazelnuts. Even the everyday “walnut,” to which Petruchio disparagingly compares Katherina's hat, points to foreign lands: although the walnut grew in England, it was commonly believed to be of Persian origin, and the first syllable of its name derives from the Old English “wal,” meaning “foreign” – also the etymological root of “Welsh.” This paper takes Shakespeare's migrant nuts as a pretext for regarding early

modern literary nuxology, i.e. the poetics of nuts, as a means of theorising what Mary Louise Pratt calls the contact zone. Seventeenth-century English poets such as George Herbert rarely think of nuts simply as local snacks. They see them instead as dynamic nodes within larger global actor-networks – i.e. as points of contact, even contagion, between different worlds. Paying particular attention to the early modern English fascination with the Indian coconut, my talk also considers a much neglected poem by a contemporary of Shakespeare's: the *Kristapurana*, an 11,000-stanza Marathi and Konkani *purana* written in *ovi* form by the Catholic dissident and Goan immigrant Thomas Stephens. Ostensibly a poem about the history of creation and the life of Christ, it is also Stephens's extended homage to the miraculous transformative power of the coconut. In light of Stephens's coconut, then, we can revisit Stephano's pignut and see the Marathi poem as a nutty counter-*Tempest* that reveals the blindspots of Shakespeare's understanding of the agency of nuts and the edible contact zone.

8. Laura Levine

Spectacles of Doubt

Early in King James's 1597 *Daemonologie*, Philomathes, the questioner in the dialogue, suggests that the witch of Endor could no more have summoned up the devil disguised as Samuel, than she could have summoned up Samuel himself. If Satan could impersonate Samuel so convincingly, Philomathes argues, no one would ever know which revelations to trust and which not to. Epistemon, the spokesman for James in the book, insists that the witch of Endor did summon up Satan. Furthermore, this should pose no "inconvenience" to the prophets, because God only allows those who first deceive themselves to be deceived. The book begins then by arguing that certainty is possible.

But if the book begins this way, every repetition of its insistence is punctuated by a rising and often unacknowledged doubt. What relation exists between such doubt and assertions of certainty in demonological treatises of the period and the dramatic texts that stage their anxieties? "Spectacles of Doubt" traces such problems in one or more of these works.

9. Rhodri Lewis

Sweet Misprision? Shakespeare on Love, Delusion, and Error



In this paper I will examine moments of being “in love” in three plays (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *Troilus and Cressida*). My starting point will be early modern theories of cognition – specifically, the three operations of the understanding (apprehension, judgement, and discourse of reason), ultimately traceable to Aristotle, but a staple of both university curricula and writing on human psychology in early modern England. While people could differ on questions of judgement (which relied on the appropriate use of grammar and rhetoric) and discursive reason (which relied on the appropriate use of logic), apprehension was taken to be basic, pre-linguistic, and common to all rational beings. It depended on the external senses working in tandem with the so-called “internal senses” (normally at least imagination, judgment/estimation, memory, and common sense), and produced the imagistic representations of experience with which the mind’s higher faculties were able to work.

The core of my argument is that Shakespeare is preoccupied by the threat of misapprehension. Which is to say, of things and experiences that exist only in the imagination, or that become distorted in the act of beholding them – what Gertrude will call “brainish apprehensions”. In traditional scholastic-humanist theory (as much of the work on literature and embodiment over the past two decades has reminded us), the act of apprehension could fail if one was, say, melancholy, jealous, resentful, or angry – or in any way passionate/humourally imbalanced. Moral philosophy was intended to insulate against these threats, in particular through its urgings to self-knowledge and, through self-knowledge, to physiological and psychological self-governance. Another prime threat to apprehensive integrity was the condition of being in love. Here, desire and appetite (whether thwarted or fulfilled) cause the senses to produce a warped version of reality, principally because the imagination dominates the vision. Hence the blind rascally boy abusing everyone’s eyes, sweet misprision, shaping fantasises, and so forth.

With all this in mind, my paper seeks to gesture at two related lines of interpretation. First, that Shakespeare is mocking those who, like Helena, believe that their love sees with anything other than the senses, or that it has some kind of metaphysical integrity. Rather, love makes us momentarily stupid. And yet as the Shakespeare of the middle comedies, like Erasmus, takes such stupidity to be an index of the healthy irrationality of mortal love, this is a topic for wryly amused acceptance. My second claim is that this tolerant optimism soon changes. By the time he wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare had grave doubts about the possibility of reliable apprehension in *any* circumstances. The misapprehensions that arise

from the frenzy of love cease to be forgivable aberrations from a cognitive gold standard. They become instead the emblem of an epistemological and moral order that is ruptured beyond repair.

10. Jillian Linster

“Ibi incipit medicus”: Doctors and Dangerous Knowledge in Early Modern London

In June of 1628 an infamous figure known as “Doctor Lambe” left a London playhouse and was brutally beaten by an angry mob; he died of his wounds that night in prison, where he had been taken for his protection. Although he “professed Physick,” Lambe was not a licensed physician and did not have university training. According to an anonymous biography published the year of his death, shortly after Lambe started practicing medicine he began “to fall to other mysteries”—in other words, “the Deuillish Art of Coiuration” of which the Worcestershire assizes found him guilty in 1608. In and out of legal trouble for the next two decades, by 1623

Lambe was permanent ensconced in King’s Bench prison, where a steady stream of “laundresses” attended him and learned his craft, which they practiced at large in London. His growing reputation earned him audience with George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who became Lambe’s patron and helped secure the conjuror’s release from prison in 1624. Lambe’s gruesome death four years later went unpunished, as no one would stand witness against anyone who might have been involved. The demise of “Buckingham’s wizard” seemed to presage the downfall of his patron just two months later. The death of Doctor Lambe inspired the aforementioned biography; a now-lost play, *Doctor Lambe and the Witches*; several songs and poems; and a broadside ballad by Martin Parker, “The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe,” printed in 1628. Intriguingly, as its primary illustration the ballad makes use of the same woodcut that decorated the 1616 quarto of Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. Not only does the description of Lambe’s death in the ballad recall the final act of that same play, but Faustus’s opening lines in which he remarks on his dissatisfaction with practicing medicine as one of his reasons for turning to magic seem to describe Lambe’s own professional choices. The resonance between real life and fiction in the lives of these “doctors” represents an underlying tension in the public’s perceptions of

doctors' medical knowledge in early seventeenth-century England. Portrayals of physicians in ballads and drama tend to arrange doctor-characters into three types of roles: a comedic buffoon, a small supporting character, or a dangerous conjuror (like Faustus and Lambe). This paper explores the ways in which early modern anxiety about the specialized.

11. Lauren Robertson

“Thou seest shee’s dead”: Ambiguous Visual Spectacle in *King Lear* and *The Night Walker*

When *King Lear* was performed by the King’s Men on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1606, at Whitehall, James I and the other spectators in attendance witnessed, toward the close of the play, a confusingly ambiguous visual spectacle. A mature player emerged on the stage, counterfeiting the aged sovereign. But to those watching him, his vitality would have seemed miraculously evaporated, because in his arms he carried a boy actor—counterfeiting Lear’s daughter—whose bodily limpness would have indicated death. What would the early modern spectator of this play have made of these conflicting signs—of player and sovereign, debility and vitality, and life and death? *King Lear* does not allow these contradictions to be overlooked; indeed, the play draws the spectators’ attention to them, calling into question the visual certainty of Cordelia’s death. Lear’s insistence to “Look on her [Cordelia]: look, her lips” (V.iii.309), as much a direction to the spectators of the play as the other characters onstage, serves to break the connection between visual signs of life and the inner nature they seem to represent. Spectators following Lear’s direction would have seen the very exhalation of breath to which Lear gestures, though it would not have been clear whether that sign of life referred to Cordelia, or only to the boy actor playing her.

Over and over again, the early modern English theater used the conflicting signs of life and death to create ambiguous visual spectacles, placing on stage characters who were neither clearly alive nor dead because they seemed both alive *and* dead at the same time. Using *King Lear* and John Fletcher’s c. 1611 play *The Night Walker* (revised, by the time of its first performance in 1633, by James Shirley) as touchstones, I argue that the early modern theater adopted a skeptical standpoint regarding visual signs by creating spectacle that contained, at once, contradictory characteristics of life and death. This paper examines how the early modern English theater participated in a culture of doubt—ignited by, among other things, the Protestant Reformation, the Calvinist doctrine of salvation, the succession crisis, and the emergence of new scientific practices—through the staging of ambiguous visual

spectacle. I argue that the early modern theater made a show of visual skepticism by putting uncertainty on display, and its spectators experienced that uncertainty by witnessing what doubt itself looked like.

12. Adam Zucker

BAFFLING TERMS

This summer, I'll be participating in a symposium at King's College London entitled "Gossip and Nonsense in Early Modern French and English Literature." The organizers of the symposium and the majority of its participants are comparativists who work mainly in French. While my current project meshes with the topic well – I'm working on a book about stupidity in early modern English drama and culture – I myself have only the barest competency in spoken French. (I immediately told the organizers this when they invited me, and they've kindly agreed to have me along in any case.) In an effort to make the best of my own unenviable situation, I am working on an essay about characters whose stupidity is made clear by their inability to understand French and other foreign languages on the early modern stage. Can we -- modern audiences, scholars, teachers, students – find productively revealing versions of ourselves in the unknowing idiot of Shakespeare's comic stage? How do their blind-spots mirror ours? Along with the ideas explored in the opening chapters of Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, I will use these questions to reflect on the project of historical philology itself, and to illuminate (or, as the case may be, to un-illuminate) linguistic practices and dramatic performances that are rendered nonsensical by temporal and cultural distances. The term "baffle" will be my keyword and my organizing mode, but I will also deal with a few of early modern English drama's 'foreign' phrases such as "pourquoi," "*Quisquinikin Sadlamare*," and "Castiliano vulgo!"

13. Debora Shuger

Exceptional Knowledge

The paper deals with one strand of non-classical republicanism, focusing on a single text—Jacque Almain's *Expositio de suprema potestate ecclesiastica et laica, circa quaestionum decisiones Magistri Guillermi de Ockham* (c. 1512)—which sets forth Ockham's position but

also the positions of the major conciliarist writers of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (e.g., Jean Gerson). All this material crops up repeatedly in the notes to Tudor-Stuart writings on church history/polity, although barely mentioned in the scholarship on early modern political thought.

Almain's position is "republican" in that he, like all conciliarists, maintains the superior authority of a representative body (in this case, a General Council) to an individual ruler (in this case, the Pope), but the approach and reasoning is very different from that characteristic of *classical* republicanism (e.g., Aristotle and Polybius). Classical republicans tend to focus on what one might call constitutional structure: the relation among a polity's courts, assemblies, and magistrates—e.g., the relation of the Roman Senate to the Tribunes and Consuls. Almain (following Ockham) centers his analysis not on structures but on exceptions--situations the ordinary workings of government, the ordinary structures of authority, and/or the laws ordinarily governing disputes cannot deal with: e.g., when rival kings both lay claim to one's obedience, or when the reigning king turns out to have gained the throne by murdering his predecessor. Moreover, virtually Almain's entire argument is devoted to countering, some centuries in advance, Schmitt's notorious dictum, "sovereign is he who decides the exception," and his underlying point that without an absolute sovereign, one who can override the law, a polity has no means of dealing with exceptional circumstances but is paralyzed by the emergency. Rather, Almain argues, dealing with exceptions requires not the concentration of power but its diffusion into multiple potential sites of emergency authority. At one time or another, depending on the circumstances, the civil community, its representatives, the emperor, the pope, a General Council, a private individual, a local magistrate, those generally recognized as the community's moral leadership may act outside the normal framework of laws, jurisdictions, and procedures. Although Almain, like all medieval thinkers, assumes the existence of kings, this is a republican politics of the exception.

It pertains to epistemology because Almain (like Ockham) argues that if an authority ordains something clearly wrong—i.e., harmful to the community, in violation of an individual's liberties, etc.—without compelling justification, the ordinance need not be obeyed. This raises the obvious question of who decides what is or is not clearly wrong. The answer given is itself less than clear, but it seems in part to anticipate the rational-man principle of modern jurisprudence, and in part to anticipate the principle implicit in Hooker's declaration that "although ten thousand general councils would set down one and the same

definitive sentence concerning any point of religion whatsoever, yet one demonstrative reason alleged, or one manifest testimony cited from the mouth of God himself to the contrary, could not choose but overweigh them all" (*Laws* 2.6.6).

14. Stephen Spiess

The Epistemology of Violence in Shakespeare's England

Drawn from a manuscript chapter-in-progress, this essay connects problems of sexual signification and knowledge production to acts of sexual and gendered violence in the period. Reviewing the "comedic" aggressions of *The Comedy of Errors*, I argue that the play renders masculine rage as an expected and troubling response to problems of signification. When barred entry to his house, for example, Ephesian Antipholus assumes that his dwelling has become a brothel, his wife a whore; he then threatens to destroy the former and disfigure the latter. To unpack these spatial and sexual epistemologies, I read this scene in light of London's notorious brothel house riots, where apprentices ritually sacked the (supposedly unmarked) houses of prostitution they patronized. Traditionally read in terms of disorder or subcultural rites of passage, these riots also encourage consideration of how sexual, gendered, and structural violence emerges to settle instabilities of sexual knowledge in Shakespeare's England.

This essay will provide, I hope, the groundwork for a concluding chapter to my current book project, *Shakespeare's Whore: Language, Prostitution, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*. In that work, I demonstrate the immense cultural labor necessary to produce and sustain the fiction of the whore as a stable, legible, and fixed object of knowledge in Shakespeare's England. Rather than a consistent entity, against which other relations might be defined, I argue that the term and conceptual category of "whore" activates not only to questions of signification and interpretation in the period, but leads to problems concerning the stability and transparency of the linguistic substrate upon which such hermeneutic and historiographic procedures depend. In this essay, as in my other chapters, I focus specifically on those cultural practices and/or logics – in this case, acts of physical and gendered violence – that emerge to mediate such instabilities, paradoxes, and problems of sexual knowing.

15. Rebecca Wiseman

Apprehension and Revelation in Shakespeare's Romances

*What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming? And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent? Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning, since it is ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent.*

Plato, *Timaeus*<sup>2</sup>

It is required of every judgment that is supposed to prove the taste of the subject that the subject judge for himself, without having to grope about by means of experience among the judgments of others and first inform himself about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the same object, and thus that he should pronounce his judgment not as imitation, because a thing really does please universally, but *a priori*.

Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*<sup>3</sup>

While it is unlikely that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were familiar with the above passage from Plato's *Timaeus* – and, of course, impossible for them to have read the account of judgment in Kant's Third Critique, published in 1790 – I would like to use both Plato and Kant as conceptual foils for my discussion of apprehension in Shakespeare's romances. Plato's key distinction between rational and non-rational understanding, and Kant's notion of subjective, idiosyncratic taste, both help to illuminate the scenes of revelation, recognition, and moral reorientation that occur at the end of many of Shakespeare's romances. Beginning with *The Winter's Tale*, my paper will explore exactly what it meant to apprehend – to grasp intellectually, intuit imaginatively, seize physically – on Shakespeare's stage. Moments of apprehension, I would like to suggest, have much to tell us about the status of sense-experience, aesthetic judgment, and moral development in England during the early seventeenth century.

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<sup>2</sup>Plato, *Timaeus* 28a2-4, trans. R.G. Bury (Harvard, 1966), 49.

<sup>3</sup>Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 162-163.

Hermione's re-appearance at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, and the reactions she elicits from her onstage spectators, tie together a number of early modern preoccupations: the relationship between art and magic; the suasive power of the spectacle; the superiority of the depicted to the recounted (as Paulina tells Leontes as Hermione steps off of her pedestal: "That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale; but it appears she lives, / Though yet she speak not"). I am most interested in the scene as a staged moment of apprehension: a tableau that demands of its viewers first an immediate recognition, then a revision to one's long-held assumptions, and finally a moral reorientation. Because its onstage spectators recognize it as a demonstration of an undeniable truth – the fact that Hermione is alive seems to be proven beyond any doubt by her appearance – the scene forecloses skepticism, culminating in a powerful moment of catharsis and repentance. Most significantly, the scene at once depicts and models apprehension, a versatile and contested concept during the late sixteenth century. Joining aesthetic experience, emotional response, and a suggestion of intellectual appropriation, apprehension encapsulates early modern anxieties about the verifiability of our perceptions and the power of the sensed to affect ethical decision-making. Most significantly, as my paper will demonstrate, Shakespeare's scenes of apprehension dramatize the fraught processes of learning and doubting, questioning and verifying, on the early modern English stage.

16. Katharine Eisaman Maus: respondent, confirmed.