

## **SAA 2016**

### **Seminar 57: Vision and Emotion in Early Modern Literature**

Organizers:

**Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)**

lesel.dawson@bristol.ac.uk

**Eric Langley, University College London (UK)**

eric.langley@ucl.ac.uk

#### **Seminar Description**

How do theories of sight shape psychology in early modern literature and culture? What role does vision play in fear, jealousy, lovesickness, joy, aesthetic pleasure, and trauma and how do these emotions impact upon perception? Does Neoplatonism, in which eyebeams penetrate and infect the body through spiritus, offer a radically different model to that found in early modern faculty psychology, in which visions (real or imagined) are engraved on the mind as phantasms? And in what ways do competing theories of vision relate to early modern ideas of contagion, sympathy, and theatre-going? If, in her foundational work on the transmission of affect, Teresa Brennan sought to counter ‘the fantasy of self-containment’ with the recollection that ‘there have been more permeable ways of being’, it is crucial to consider how sensory stimulation works on the early modern ‘empassioned’ subject. Current criticism – informed by the work of Gail Kern Paster, Mary Floyd Wilson, Katherine Craik, Tanya Pollard, Nancy Selleck, Timothy Reiss, and Bruce Smith, for example – continues to call into question the bounded nature of early modern subjects, by situating them within their sensory, communicative, and contagious environment, placing them at what Michel Serres has described as the ‘crossroads,’ among ‘a nexus of relations, an exchange’ of sights, sounds, emotional influences, and infectious transmissions, in order to consider how ‘relation is transformed into being, and being into relation.’ The seminar aims to open up interdisciplinary dialogue about these ideas, generating discussion about some of the ways that early modern debates about sight and intersubjectivity are distinct from, and continuous with, our own. Papers are welcome on all aspects of vision and the history of the emotions, including but not limited to: natural, occult, and divine theories of vision; how seeing impacts emotional arousal and mental fixation; the infectious or therapeutic aspects of vision; the role emotion and the imagination play in constituting external reality; perceptual distortions and hallucinations; how infectious models of vision relate to early modern ideas of sympathy, and to the dangers and pleasures of aesthetic experience.

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

**Sallie Jean Anglin**  
Penn State Altoona  
[sallie.anglin@gmail.com](mailto:sallie.anglin@gmail.com)

**“Missing in Action: Vision and Loss on the Early Modern Stage”**

In *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, George Chapman writes, “Obscurity in affection of words and indigested conceits, is pedantical and childish; but where it shroudeth itself in the heart of his subject, uttered with fitness of figure and expressive epithets, with that darkness will I still labour to be shadowed” (21). Among other things, Chapman’s passage reveals an anxiety over the relationship between existence and the visible. The passage may be read in at least two ways. The first suggests that even without the possibility of sight or of being seen, the speaker still tries to maintain a physical presence that is capable of creating a shadow. The second suggests the speaker will use the darkness as his shadow, thus blending space, the body and vision. The speaker emphasizes that the process of finding expression through discursive manipulation is difficult, and requires “labour.” Chapman’s comment is surprisingly useful when considering actions that occur in plays, in off-stage spaces, because it highlights the relationship between space and the unseen. My paper will examine the off-stage rapes in Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women* and Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. My claim is that the unseen actions alter the relationships between the characters and the audience, affectively and materially. Bianca and Lavinia both experience traumatic events offstage, but it is what we see on the stage that shapes who they are and who they become for the remainders of the plays. In the case of Bianca, her personality is completely altered after the Duke accosts her offstage. Both women experience a loss that cannot be corroborated or testified to; from that darkness with no witnesses, both Lavinia and Bianca attempt to find a shadow of an expression on the stage and in the eyes of the audience.

**Naomi Baker**  
University of Manchester  
[naomi.baker@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:naomi.baker@manchester.ac.uk)

**Seeing the Spider: Curious Perspectives in *The Winter's Tale***

To Leontes, in Act 2 of *The Winter's Tale*, the fact that Hermione has committed adultery is as plain as is the nose on his face. If others demur, it is because they are idiotically oblivious: ‘you smell this business with a sense as cold/ As is a dead man’s nose.’ (2.1.151-2) His senses, on the contrary, are alive to the truth of the situation: ‘I do see’t and feel’t/ As you feel doing thus’ (2.1.153). His ‘knowledge’ triggers nauseating disgust:

There may be in the cup  
A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,  
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge  
Is not infected; but if one present

Th’abhorr’d ingredient to his eye, make known

## SAA 57: Vision and Emotion in Early Modern Literature

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides,  
With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider. (2.1.39-45)

Leontes therefore presents the violent aversion that he develops for his wife in the first acts of the play as an instinctive response to his sensory 'knowledge' of her unfaithfulness. The 'vision so apparent' (1.2.267) to Leontes, that which can be seen 'plainly as heaven sees earth and earth sees heaven' (1.2.311), to everyone else, however, is an illusion generated by 'his opinion, which is rotten' (2.3.88). Disgust is therefore staged from multiple perspectives in the opening acts of *The Winter's Tale*. To those experiencing the emotion, it is an involuntary, visceral reaction to the sight of that which is loathsome. From another point of view, however, it is more of an 'opinion' than a physiological response to sensory data. In its study of the distorting perspectives generated by, and in turn generating, aversion, *The Winter's Tale* intervenes in contemporary concerns about the relationship between the senses, cognition and emotion. Exploring the dangerous solipsism of disgust, a passion grounded in the senses, particularly sight, yet one which calls our reliance on sensory information into question, Shakespeare anticipates aspects of Descartes's theories of abhorrence as put forward in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649).

In this paper, I explore the representation of aversion in *The Winter's Tale* in the light of contemporary discussions of abhorrence as well as wider debates concerning subjectivity. Descartes argues that abhorrence works to shore up a sense of the self as a discrete individual: when experiencing abhorrence, he states, 'we consider ourselves alone as a whole, entirely separated from the thing for which we have the aversion' (René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989], article 80). While Leontes' disgust betrays his frantic effort to maintain this ideal of a 'whole', discrete self, uncontaminated by the ugly other, Shakespeare depicts such models of subjectivity in pathological terms. Instead of using the loathsome as that against which he can define himself, Leontes must learn a different response to that which he perceives to be ugly. Hermione's statue, I suggest, functions in the play as an anamorphic image, one of the optical tricks or 'curious perspectives' fashionable in Shakespeare's day, in which ugly 'confusion', when viewed from another perspective (when 'ey'd awry'), resolved into (temporarily) beautiful 'form' (*Richard II*, 2.2.19-20). Potentially ugly, in its wrinkles and its leaky propensity to 'stain', as well as in its uncanny animation, Hermione's statue elicits Leontes's wonder rather than his disgust in the final act of the play, illustrating the extent to which he has learned to embrace alternative models of the self, premised on interconnectedness rather than autonomy, and has become open to the co-existence of irresolvable points of view. In its staging of alternative responses to the ugly, then, *The Winter's Tale* suggests that there may be no such thing as 'plain sight'. In so doing, it challenges the ontological stability of beauty and ugliness, making such categories a matter of 'curious', as well as of political, perspective.

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

**Jennifer Drouin**  
University of Alabama  
[jennifer.drouin@ua.edu](mailto:jennifer.drouin@ua.edu)

**Queer Eye for the Not So Straight Guy:  
Ocular Excesses and Triangulated Desire in *The Two Noble Kinsmen***

Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a play of ocular excesses, multiplicity and divided subjectivities. Set in polytheistic ancient Greece under the watchful eye of conflicting gods, the complex web of celestial gazes overseeing the play's action resembles the multiple and overlapping erotic gazes within it—homoerotic, narcissistic, mimetic, heteronormative, and in the mind's eye. The play's three-tier layout on stage contributes to this web of gazes in which the gods Mars, Venus, and Diana look down on the action, Palamon and Arcite look down from their prison window on Emilia, and, conversely, the Jailer, his Daughter, and her Wooer look up at the prison window, while various characters look up to the heavens. Hippolyta, Emilia, her waiting woman, and her dead lover Flavia all engage in homoerotic gazes at each other, as do Palamon and Arcite, and Pirithous and Theseus. Often at the same time, Palamon's and Arcite's gazes become narcissistic, mimetic, and heteronormative as well, sometimes in relation to the same object. Emilia and Arcite gaze in their mind's eye at characters in the past and future. The Jailer's Daughter embodies the problem of excessive erotic gazing; "her eye hath distempered the other senses," which divides her subjectivity and drives her mad (4.3.69-70). The Jailer's Daughter's multiple personalities are not unlike the multiple personalities of the deities who cannot coexist without producing madness, resulting in the play's absurd ending that mirrors its beginning by mixing a wedding with a funeral. The excessive, overlapping gazes and resulting divided subjectivities that characterize *Two Noble Kinsmen* are not surprising given that the text was composed under the eye of two different author-gods—with Shakespeare and Fletcher operating much like the Greek gods, as puppeteers pulling the strings that determine their character's fate as they compete to rewrite Chaucer's history.

**Jennifer Forsyth**  
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania  
[forsyth@kutztown.edu](mailto:forsyth@kutztown.edu)

**'It is a basilisk unto mine eye':  
Averted Gaze and the Dangers of Sight in Early Modern Drama**

The attention over the last few decades of criticism by such authors as Gail Kern Paster and Mary Floyd-Wilson regarding the permeable early modern body, subject to penetration by sensory stimuli and other elements, has illuminated the significance of understanding theories of embodied affect. Following in the same vein, this paper will focus on the role of will in early modern subjects who might follow medical advice in electing to prevent, or attempting to prevent, such influences from unduly affecting their bodies. Even apart from vision's privileged location as a higher sense, because vision is unusual in that multiple mechanisms such as closing one's eyes, averting one's gaze, or turning one's back allow such a rejection

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

of influence according to one theory of vision, the sense of sight offers the most prominent examples of the intersection of choice and deflected stimuli. I will further draw upon such early modern texts treating of the senses and embodied emotions as Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* to explore contemporary ideas about refusals to see, especially regarding sexual knowledge, applying them to a variety of William Shakespeare's plays and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. Ultimately, I argue that Shakespeare and Webster present evidence that the early modern subject benefits more from being willing to gaze upon even the most unpleasant or horrifying sights and having the capacity to process the complex emotional and moral consequences of that contemplation than by turning a blind eye to unwelcome sights.

**Bronwyn Johnston**  
University of Toronto  
[bronniewjohnston@utoronto.ca](mailto:bronniewjohnston@utoronto.ca)

**“Make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight”:  
Love Magic as Infection on the Early Modern English Stage**

In early modern English magic plays, bewitching or enchanting someone to induce a state of passionate love is more than metaphor. Love magic is central to the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and also features in several other plays, including *The Witch of Edmonton*, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, and *Arden of Faversham*. In all of these texts, love magic is centred on the bewitchment of the eyes. Magically manipulating somebody's vision can implement a radical change in their emotional state. While a source of comedy, such acts of bewitchment often adopt the language of contagion. In this paper I discuss how ocular bewitchment is a process dependent on an extramissive understanding of visual cognition. I also discuss how the passion induced is treated as an infection or poison, and consider some of the various cures and antidotes suggested in early modern dramatic texts and demonologies.

**Emily King**  
Louisiana State University  
[emilyk@lsu.edu](mailto:emilyk@lsu.edu)

**“Fierce Looks” and “Crafty Love”:  
Emotions and Shared Feeling in Shakespeare's *King John***

In recent years, literary scholars have generally regarded emotion as a physiological phenomenon. This perspective anchors emotion to the body, viewing it as the result of complex biological and chemical reactions. Early modern scholars have embraced this medicalized perspective, focusing on, for instance, humors as the agents of emotion. Yet in underestimating the mediating effects of other factors – theological, cultural, literary, and even theatrical ones – early modern subjects are presumed to lack agency in their experiences with and expressions of emotion. Put simply, feelings *happen*. And when scholars articulate how emotions circulate within social bodies, such discussions are couched in the defensive language of contagion and infection such that feelings not only happen to passive subjects,

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

they also attack (see, for instance, Darryl Chalk's "'To Creep in at Mine Eye': Theatre and Secret Contagion in *Twelfth Night*", in *Rape in Secret Studies: Emerging Shakespeare* [Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010]: 171-93; and Allison P. Hobgood's "Feeling fear in *Macbeth*", *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, Eds. Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013]: 29-460). Might we envision alternative modes of emotional communication, circulation, or transmission? Might there exist modes of emotional transfer that are neither infectious nor deadly?

Heeding Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan's appeal to pursue "more active and willful experiences of emotion," this paper explores the alternatives of sympathetic communication offered by Shakespeare's *King John*. In particular, I focus on 4.1 in which Hubert attempts to carry out the orders of King John to murder young Arthur and burn out his eyes with irons. Of this scene preoccupied with vision, eyes, and tears, I suggest that it troubles the typical visual markers of emotion (i.e., the notion that one could "read" another's emotion state based on visual cues). Moreover, I argue that the scene foregrounds emotion as a willful construct, as something that is manufactured for an intended effect and not wholly locatable in the physiological body. Yet, in the relation between Arthur, Hubert, and his unwilling executioners, this stylized emotion is nevertheless efficacious and transferrable.

**Peter Kuling**  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
[kuling@gmail.com](mailto:kuling@gmail.com)

### **The Affective Power of Special Effects: Audience Responses to Fantastical Stage Properties in the Early 1590s**

"Here the Head speaks and a lightning flasheth forth, and a hand appears that breaketh down the Head with a hammer". Stage directions like this one from Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1594) bring to mind a variety of possible visual, aural, as well as affective experiences for early modern audiences in the 1590s. While we continue to imagine the full accounts of early modern theatregoers, plays by Greene and others help us decode/deduce some of the ways audiences responded affectively to on-stage moments beyond poetry and prose. My research explores unintended dramaturgical effects due to audience responses to on-stage special effects of magic, disease, and mystical powers. While much of Greene's play emerges as a comedic palimpsestic dumb show version of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, particular performance choices by The Queen's Men transformed the surviving stage directions of the Q1 text to leave us with a rare glimpse into execution of early modern practical special effects. I'm particularly interested in the visual and verbal treatise of Greene's divining brass head Belcephon and will focus part of my paper on speeches used to enhance it as an on-stage visual effect. Greene's play also contains performance of fire, divination, summoning, as well as appearances by gods and creatures all eliciting affective responses from audiences. Research by Lawrence Manley, Sally-Beth MacLean, Kathleen Stewart, Jennifer Low, and Philip Butterworth informs my new work into the visual and emotional echoes of early modern special effects. My SAA paper focuses on Greene's text but also discusses the Lord Strange's men as well as other plays from the period such as

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Where playgoer accounts are irrecoverable or unreliable, printed texts and company accounts will fill in gaps in our collective knowledge of affective audience experiences.

**Stephanie Moore**  
University of California, Berkeley  
[stephaniemoore@berkeley.edu](mailto:stephaniemoore@berkeley.edu)

### **Imagination and Intention in Spenser and Shakespeare**

This paper will be about the mediating role of mental images in the passage from intention to action in Shakespeare and Spenser—particularly Spenser. Basically I'd like to use Shakespeare to think through the final episode of the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, in which Britomart, the knight of chastity, enters the Castle of Busirane to rescue the captive Amoret, but has to run a gauntlet of erotic imagery and spectacle before she can reach her goal. Spenser problematizes the relationship between Britomart's "first intent" and what she sees on the way to the "prosecuting" of that intent—images that may or may not represent her own fantasies, and that may or may not deflect the path she takes toward eventual action. It is difficult even to determine if she succeeds because she ignores what she sees, or because she attends to it. To gain some traction on this question, I am turning to Shakespeare, who gives us a number of characters who linger unhappily in an image-haunted "interim" between impetus and action—Brutus's "Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion," which is "Like a phantasma or a hideous dream." The hallucinatory or enargeiastic images that visit Brutus, the Macbeths, and Othello all have the effect of estranging them from their own wills, of invading or possessing them, while also seeming to give shape to a potential or a latent notion that was already present in their minds—a situation not unlike the one Britomart is in, however little else she may have in common with those characters. I don't yet know where this comparison is going to lead but I hope it will be productive.

**Kate E. Myers**  
University of Oregon  
[kmyers@uoregon.edu](mailto:kmyers@uoregon.edu)

### **Reading "like the haggard": Imaginative Affect, Distorted Perception, and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night***

Though much of the critical work on early modern affect has hinged on assessments of humoral theory, a relatively recent shift in early modern affect studies has been a turn away from these embodied treatments of emotion and a turn toward affect's rhetorical underpinnings for early modern writers (Benedict Robinson, Daniel Gross, and Thomas Dixon are a few of the critics who have recently called for a rhetorical approach to early modern affect, in contrast to the work on early modern humoral theories of the passions by theorists like Gail Kern Pastor, Mary Floyd-Wilson, and others). Participating in this shift, this essay investigates the ways in which textual elements negotiate shortcomings of



Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

perception in relation to textual—rather than readerly— affect. Shakespeare’s fool in *Twelfth Night, or What you Will*, Feste, is one such textual element. In exposing the limits of first person perspective, his own and Duke Orsino’s, Feste models an attempt to reorient his perceptions—how he thinks about what he thinks he knows, especially when what he knows is strange, counter-intuitive, or incomprehensible to others. In their final encounter, Feste abuses Orsino’s interpretive sensibilities when the fool says, “Marry, sir, [my friends] praise me, and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass, so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused” (5.1.15-20). The duke finds this claim incongruent and incomprehensible. Yet Feste’s explanation reveals his attempt to perceive his own blind spots. In both cases, Feste must read what is said and also what is not said, what is indicated and what is evoked. If he reads praise as abuse or abuse as profit, he cannot arrive at those readings by attending to content alone. He must also attend to the limits of what that content can say, to costs and benefits for himself and for those speaking to him, and to the rhetorical affect implicated in his textual audience. In order to profit from abuse, Feste must be willing to entertain criticism, not just withstand it. He must be willing, in other words, to make himself vulnerable. This essay will explore the ways in which Feste’s ambivalent, liminal perspective frames the vulnerable orientations by which the play imagines, situates, and distorts both perception and spectacles of emotion.

**Tripthi Pillai**  
Coastal Carolina University  
[tpillai@coastal.edu](mailto:tpillai@coastal.edu)

### **The Visible and Invisible Hyperobject: Sacrifice in *The Merchant of Venice***

I am interested in exploring the connections of affective violence and visual and sensory perception in performances of sacrifice in *The Merchant of Venice*. In particular, I am keen to map the aesthetics of violence that, in the play, prefigure gestures and acts of sacrifice. Sacrificial violence is the most palpable—as concept or emotion, action, and value—when it is invisible, that is, when it is visually unavailable to inform or limit characters’ imagination of their own or others’ suffering, literal and metaphorical.

**David Strong**  
University of Texas at Tyler  
[cstrong@suddenlink.net](mailto:cstrong@suddenlink.net)

### **The Emotional Intelligence of Lear’s Fool**

In *The Tragedy of King Lear*, its titular character loses his sense of self through a series of mistakes stemming from his imprudent attempt to quantify an elusive quality, namely the surety of familial love. The severity of these faults threatens his sanity to such a degree that an outsider must step in and redirect his thoughts towards something emotionally constructive. Though at the opposite end on the social spectrum, the Fool assumes the mantle forsaken by the King’s ungrateful daughters, Goneril and Regan, and extends a filial compassion that engenders an empathetic bond with his king. This empathy manifests itself



Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

via the Fool's sarcastic barbs. These barbs are not designed to weaken his resolve, but emphasize the reality of Lear's condition. Its graphic descriptions require an intellectual and emotional assessment and, as such, implicitly laud Lear's ability to act rationally. This paper, therefore, will conduct a close analysis of the Fool's visual images as a means to grasp the efficacy of his attempt to understand Lear's mental and emotional states.

The critical approach follows the tenets of simulation-theory to explicate the metaphors found in their dialogue. Simulation theory maintains that by imagining what the other thinks and feels, the observer can use this information to explain that person's behavior. The Fool adeptly identifies the disbelief and distress undermining the King's lucidity and his speech reflects this frustration through its directness. The borderline insults parallel the internal blame corroding Lear's belief in himself. The descriptiveness of its metaphors highlights Lear's difficulty to articulate the problem. That they require interpretation demonstrates a desire to exercise the mind productively, but Lear's struggle to grasp what they signify shows how the mistreatment inflicted by his daughters has obscured his cognitive ability to manage his affective responses. These images show how the Fool simulates the psychological etiology of Lear's actions and fosters a positive interpersonal interaction that disregards any socially imposed divides or expectations.

**J. Case Tompkins**  
**Purdue University**  
[jctompki@purdue.edu](mailto:jctompki@purdue.edu)

### **Language and Perspective in *Macbeth* and the *Chester Gouldsmythes Playe***

The relationship between late medieval civic drama and the development of the London stage in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries has never followed a clear developmental line, with the latter evolving from and superseding the former. This essay examines that relationship by considering how two representative works direct the attention of their audiences. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, I look at how the captain's report in 1.2 and the murder of Macduff's family in 4.2 ask the audience to imagine events contributing or consequent to the main action of the play. Then, turning to the *Gouldsmythes Playe* from the Chester mystery cycle, I show how that play's depiction of the Massacre of the Innocents directs the gaze of the audience towards, and perhaps into, the violence depicted on stage.

In comparing the way these disparate plays depict a similar kind of violence (child murder), I hope to highlight what I see as a cultural rupture in the approach to representation; a rupture in consonance with, though I doubt directly occasioned by, the larger currents of the Reformation. Specifically, the mystery play ignores or flattens elements like plot and character so recognizable in early modern drama. By way of suggesting an explanation for this difference, I suggest that the sixteenth century saw a radical change in what might be called dramatic perspective. To illustrate this point, I draw upon the extensive theological and philosophical tradition governing the creation and use of icons in the Christian East. This tradition, while it has relatively little to say directly regarding drama, offers an understanding of representation that shares more implicitly with the popular lay piety of the medieval West than the vast differences in geography and culture might suggest.

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

**Jennie Marie Votava**  
Allegheny College  
[jvotava@allegheny.edu](mailto:jvotava@allegheny.edu)

**“This Sympathized One Day’s Error”: Contagious Sensations in *The Comedy of Errors***

This essay explores how early modern interest in sensory operations in the playhouse is inextricably bound up with emerging discourses of contagion. I argue that Shakespeare’s plays adapt the antitheatrical notion of theater as sensory contagion in order to explain (and not necessarily pejoratively) drama’s emotional effects. Operating at the boundaries between mind and body, internal and external worlds, vision as well as the other senses do not only work LIKE contagion, but, in early modern medical treatises, antitheatrical literature, and plays alike, themselves ARE conceived as modalities of contagion.

An important early example of this treatment of the senses in Shakespearean drama is *The Comedy of Errors*. Recent scholarship agrees that this play, the product of a culture increasingly concerned with an emerging global market economy, is preoccupied with material things. Jonathan Gil Harris has noted intersections between the play’s representation of commerce and another, closely related, material concern: the realm of infectious disease. Overall, *The Comedy of Errors* is a play deeply interested in its own materiality as theater, and, especially, the bodily targets of theatrical performance: namely the often perplexed eyes of audience members subject to the play’s endless spectacles of doubling. In this paper, I return questions of disease to the front and center as I show how *Comedy of Errors* interrogates the sensory bases of its production. The mistaken identities central to its plot have often been read as matters of visual misrecognition. Identity slippage, however, is also contingent upon unseen social and emotional bonds rendered in the predominantly tactile language of contagion. The dynamics of contagion (from the Latin meaning “to touch together”) pervade the comedy’s ambivalent understanding of the ties that bind self, other, and community, particularly in the early modern theater.

**Rebecca Yearling**  
Keele University  
[r.yearling@keele.ac.uk](mailto:r.yearling@keele.ac.uk)

**‘My scars can witness’: Seeing and judging the violated body in *Titus Andronicus***

Modern audiences may respond to the figure of the mutilated Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* in extreme ways. Accounts of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century productions frequently tell of spectators fainting or vomiting; but even more strong-stomached theatregoers may find her hard to contemplate with complete equanimity. She may make us flinch or want to look away; paradoxically, meanwhile, she may also encourage a kind of appalled fascination, or even a perverse sense of pleasure. We desire simultaneously to look and not to look.

In this paper, I want to focus on the question of how early modern spectators might have reacted to Lavinia, and the question of how that spectator response might be understood in the larger context of Shakespeare’s exploration of violence and bodily harm in this play. I will consider how spectators might have been ‘cued’ in their responses to Lavinia by the

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

reactions of characters within the play to her, and also examine the early modern social, political and religious contexts that might have shaped audience response, such as the early modern understanding of martyrs, wounded soldiers, state-mutilated criminals and the physically deformed. I want to argue that Lavinia is troubling partly because she is uncannily over-determined: a figure seen as both human and other, both guilty and innocent, both alive and dead, both victim and threat. As such, she resists our scrutiny, even as she seems to demand it. In the play's final scene, her uncle Marcus and her brother Lucius both employ the idea of the body as a form of evidence by which individuals may be judged: '[M]y frosty signs and chaps of age, / Grave witnesses of true experience'; 'My scars can witness, dumb although they are, / That my report is just and full of truth.' The unreadability, or undecidability, of Lavinia's body, however, problematizes this notion. Not only do we not know how to interpret Lavinia, but the play emphasises her as an inherently destabilising presence, who troubles the notion of a clear boundary between reality and representation and exposes our own inadequacies as spectators to violence.

**Paul Joseph Zajac**  
McDaniel College  
[pzajac@mcDaniel.edu](mailto:pzajac@mcDaniel.edu)

### **Ambiguous Affects: Seeing, Seeming, and Contentment in *Faerie Queene I***

Within the first two stanzas of the *Faerie Queene*'s first canto, Spenser describes the Redcross Knight as apparently experiencing two contradictory emotions: happiness and sadness. After claiming "Full iolly knight he seemd" (I.i.1.8), the narrator adds that "of his cheere [he] did seeme too solemne sad" (2.8). Editors often push past the disparity by stripping one or both words of these affective significances: "iolly" becomes "brave" instead of "mirthful," and "sad" becomes "serious" instead of "mournful." However, attending to this juxtaposition of emotions, instead of glossing it away, can have important interpretive consequences. First, by maintaining, in particular, the possibility of a jolly/joyous Redcross Knight in his introductory moments, we can begin to complicate the scholarly privileging of negative affect in Book I. For example, Douglas Trevor diagnoses Redcross Knight with a "non-humoral sorrow" and a "rigorous sadness" that "indicates moral uprightness and Christian devotion" (*The Poetics of Melancholy*, 57 and 48). Such a reading risks obscuring the affective telos of Book I, a union of holiness and happiness, and it reinforces common associations between English Protestantism and negative affect. Second, by allowing the contradictory emotional descriptions to coexist, we can acknowledge and even experience the challenge of reading the emotional states of others—and of oneself. The slipperiness of "seeming" in the Spenser canon is well known, but the first three instances of the word in the poem are all attached to affects. If the poem repeatedly exposes the gap between appearance and reality—and with it, the limitations of the senses—then affect is particularly difficult to discover.

In this paper, I will explore the ambiguous, ambivalent emotional landscape of Book I and address the scholarly emphasis on negative affect by focusing on Spenser's representation of contentment. Derived from the Latin *contentus*, which means both contained and satisfied, contentment in the early modern period signified an affective state that holds the individual together—a defense against fickle fortune and unruly passions.

## SAA 57: Vision and Emotion in Early Modern Literature

Lesel Dawson, Bristol University (UK)  
Eric Langley, University College London (UK)

Spenser's contemporaries represented contentment as a means to preserve the self in times of crisis, preparing the individual to endure and engage the outside world. Contentment was a stable emotional state for the individual, as well as a relational principle governing the exchanges between individuals. Through the complexities of his allegory, Spenser considers these dual, and potentially dueling, valences of contentment, and he folds it into Book I's representation of seeing, seeming, and affective ambiguity. While vision can only reveal so much about an individual's emotional state, it may be an especially bad barometer of contentment.