

**2017 SAA Seminar: Cosmological Bodies Abstracts**  
**Leaders: Rebecca Totaro, Florida Gulf Coast University**  
**and Darryl Chalk, University of Southern Queensland 1**

**Connie Bubash, Pennsylvania State University**

**Melancholy and the Politics of Courtesy Literature in  
Shakespeare's *As You Like It***

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare satirizes the codes of good government endorsed by contemporary courtesy literature in an effort to provide a more efficacious prophylactic against melancholy and political dysfunction. Out of a renewed interest in the classical theory of the body politic emerged a conception of health that linked social misconduct and political dysfunction with the medical condition of melancholy; as such, melancholy became not simply a personal affair, but a matter of national concern. The correlation between bodily and national health undergirding this theory precipitated a proliferation of conduct manuals united by a common political agenda: the construction of a nation-based conceptualization of health. Within the play, Touchstone and Rosalind recite precepts commonly found in manuals of courtly etiquette. In showcasing the high esteem in which characters hold the practice of civility and good manners outside the court in the natural setting of Ardenne, Shakespeare illuminates the foolishness not only of the artificial mannerisms themselves, but also of the characters who allow such codes of conduct to shape their role in society. In his comedy of manners, Shakespeare offers a dramatic revision to the traditional courtesy book that maintains the political agenda of remediating melancholy without sacrificing the potential for audience members to assume complex and fluid subjectivities within society.

**Jacqueline Cowan**  
**Stephen F. Austin State University**

**Magnifying God: Milton, Wilkins, and the Galileo Problem**

Milton's depiction of Galileo in *Paradise Lost* polarizes scholars between those who claim Milton either as an adversary or as an advocate of the new natural philosophy. This paper shifts the debate away from Galileo's celestial observations in *The Starry Messenger* (1610) to his more incendiary claims about the primacy of natural philosophy in his "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" (1615). While Milton himself may not have read the "Letter," he was apprised of the Restoration experimentalists who adopted Galileo's argument. My paper shows how *Paradise Lost* reframes Galileo's early seventeenth-century heliocentric debate to address the larger Galilean controversy between natural philosophy and theology that Royal Society fellows reinvigorated in the decade that Milton crafts his epic.

**John Estabillo, University of Toronto**

**Atheism and the Lustful Mother in *Hamlet* and *The Atheist's Tragedy***

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* does not name atheism as one of the many objects of its attention, but its preoccupation with the failure of familiar social, doctrinal, and cosmological orders as consistent or coherent sources of philosophical resolution

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nonetheless suggest the possibility and even likelihood of a world without divine guarantor. The central claim of this paper is that Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, a closely related descendent of Shakespeare's play, reworks the doctrinally problematic materials of its dramatic predecessor by engaging *Hamlet* as a source text for the performance of atheism. Where Gertrude's characterization as the lustful mother in *Hamlet* poses troubling questions for the moral and philosophical systems that work to circumscribe the reproductive power of the female body within systems of moral and spiritual authority, these trends in *The Atheist's Tragedy* are isolated and concentrated into the figure of the female libertine Levidulcia. As part of how the play attempts to reorganize the conventions of the revenge tragedy according to an overt opposition between orthodox doctrinal action and atheism, anxieties about feminine sexuality give form to a variation of the atheism embodied in the play's titular villain.

**Emily Jones, University of South Florida**

**‘Art to enchant’: Shakespeare's Worldbuilding**

"World-building"--the playful and often painstaking art of constructing an imaginary world different from our own--is typically regarded as a phenomenon originating in the twentieth century with science fiction and fantasy writers such as Isaac Asimov and J. R. R. Tolkien. The creation of worlds with their own alternative cosmologies, histories, and cultures is of course not new: Plato did it in his *Republic*, Thomas More in *Utopia*, and Francis Bacon in his *New Atlantis*. However, these didactic/utopian efforts are not primarily directed to what Tolkien saw as the chief end of worldbuilding: immersion, delight, "enchantment." I'd like this paper to consider Shakespeare's investment in worldbuilding, particularly in *The Tempest*. Crucially, worldbuilding requires rigorous commitments to natural philosophy, cosmology, and historiography as well as a passion for magic; audiences--and sometimes the worldbuilders themselves--are meant to be captivated not merely by fantasy but by the realism of the created world. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare and Prospero build worlds like, and also enchantingly unlike, our own: worlds that merge magic with natural science and where the possibility for sociopolitical utopia is ultimately secondary to the pleasures and perils of immersion.

**Kristen Poole, University of Delaware**

**‘My Hand Would Dissolve, Or Seem to Melt’: Poetic Dissolution and Stoic Cosmology**

This paper explores the pervasive references to “melting” and “dissolving” in English literature around the turn of the seventeenth century. A survey of these words reveals a sense that the world was in various states of liquidation: human bodies, mountains, the planet, and the cosmos are all in a continuous process of melting/dissolving. Today, it is purely figurative to speak of a melting heart, but this phrasing could truly express an early modern understanding of the body and of material cosmic physics. Those physics, as far as melting and dissolving are concerned, derive from the ancient Stoics. The inheritance of Stoic theories of cosmology and material physics provided early moderns a vibrant and dynamic way

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of understanding matter; this material understanding inflected the experience of the body as well as expectations of the behavior of the earthly environment and the wider cosmos. While recent literary scholarship has emphasized the atomic physics of Lucretius, the popularity of the poetic idiom of melting reinforces the recent assessment of historians of science that Stoic physics dominated natural philosophy. Like his contemporaries, Shakespeare frequently turns to images of melting/dissolving as a descriptor of the natural world, and his use of the terms allies physical and affective states, as seem most clearly in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

**Eve Preus, University of British Columbia**

**Disappearing Richard: The Character Shadow**

This is a selection from the first chapter (very much in draft form) of my thesis, *Admission: Figuring the Theatre in Early Modern Drama*, which develops a theory of early modern theatrical form that takes into account its penchant for metatheatrical device and its obsession with the incorporation of strangers. In this chapter, I argue that Shakespeare's Richard II metatheatrically doubles as a character who must play a character—the first comes from history, while the second comes from tragedy. What he is up against, then, is two models of time: the linear, successive model of monarchical time and the cyclical, iterative model of compressed theatrical time. The imagery of Shakespeare's play overwhelming links Richard's "disjuncture of time," as Judith Brown has called it, to planetary spheres and the watery transmutations that ensue when they disturb each other's orbits—planets, those perfect metronomes of time and order, and of course, forecasting and prophecy (290). Richard, I argue, is eclipsed by the "symbols and rituals that tend to bind the protagonists to courses of action that they would be better to avoid" (Dawson and Yachnin 89). His person becomes an absence, a shadowy presence, or in his own words, a "nothing."

**Megan Snell, The University of Texas, Austin**

**Pythagoras's Celestial Proportions and the Sovereign Moon of *Endymion***

John Lyly's *Endymion* employs music prominently, features a man intensely affected by the moon, and concludes with a celestial body restoring order. The setup alone of this dramatic universe appears to reflect a classical understanding of the cosmos that persisted through the Renaissance: the music of the spheres. Pythagoras, historically regarded as the discoverer of this universal organizing harmony, even appears onstage in *Endymion*. The connection between the character and his prevalent cosmological theories, though, remains unacknowledged in Lyly's play. Rejecting the notion of a universe controlled by proportioned, harmonious forces, the sovereign moon Cynthia wields the powers of multiple celestial beings. In *Endymion*, Pythagoras pales before the glory of Cynthia. Pythagorean notions of scale, however, define and enable the final relationship between Endymion and his beloved. Cynthia's invitation for Endymion to "persevere" in his distant, "sweet contemplation" of the moon exemplifies a Pythagorean harmony, not necessarily of blending, but of relative proportion. Pythagoras lives in Cynthia's cosmos, on her terms.

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**Kay Stanton, California State University, Fullerton**

**Big Bang Bard: Shakespeare and the Creation of the Universe**

Literary works create “parallel worlds,” as Sidney and Shakespeare demonstrated, with the poet/author as God-like “maker.” Extrapolating from that premise in the context of ancient and early modern views on cosmology and physics that anticipated twentieth-century findings, notably the Big Bang creation of the universe, atoms as indivisible building blocks of matter, and relativity, this paper shows Shakespeare depicting the most currently verifiable theories, including those of quantum physics, which posits the scientific likelihood of parallel universes. In particular, the speech in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* representing the poet as looking from the known into the unknown to create from “airy nothing” (empty space) a realm that through poetic art manifests a “local habitation and a name” perfectly aligns with cosmological principles of the Big Bang and quantum theory of the observer.

**Susan C. Staub, Appalachian State University**

**Shakespeare’s ‘Baleful Mistletoe’**

In this paper, I probe the connection between human and botanical bodies in *Titus Andronicus* as illustrated by Shakespeare’s mistletoe image, a plant that is provocative for its mythology, its seeming occult properties, and its material existence. I argue that as a figure of sympathy, antipathy, and similitude, mistletoe provides a referent for the interconnectedness of human and plant life, but also symbolically, exposes the faultline upon which Shakespearean tragedy is based, complicating what Linda Woodbridge calls its “anti-fertility agenda.” Although scholars have noted the connection between Lavinia and the body politic, trees in the play serve as important signifiers of the social order as well, of bloodlines and genealogy cut off or diverted. The mistletoe that infests the trees functions to exemplify that process through its complex morphology and growth habits. If, as Randall Martin has argued, “extinction rather than genetic inheritance is the biological norm of Shakespearean tragedy,” in *Titus Andronicus* that extinction is actualized through a strange, excessive, and deadly fertility. Finally, by considering the concept of mistletoe as a keystone species, I suggest that the mistletoe image provides at least a partial reconfiguration of tragedy’s sterile paradigm, and perhaps a potentially regenerative one.