

2018 SAA Seminar: Object Lessons in Renaissance Personhood 1
Seminar Leader: Kevin Curran, University of Lausanne

Discussion Leaders:

Amanda Bailey, University of Maryland

Joseph Campana Rice University

Kevin Curran, University of Lausanne

Benjamin Bertram, University of Southern Maine

Sympoiesis, Action, and Personhood in *Hamlet*

The relation between action and personhood in *Hamlet* is worth revisiting now that ecocriticism, actor-network theory, and posthumanism have taught us to be more skeptical about the stability of the human as an ontological category. Warfare shapes human action in the play, but it also creates an ecology of war in which Latourian allies, mediators, and translators, or what we could more simply call “relations,” should be taken into account. Shakespeare follows the lead of military writers in the way he addresses the relation between action and personhood in a time of war, but in the graveyard scene, I will argue, Hamlet’s encounter with Goodman Delver and the objects and organisms of the graveyard allow for what Randal Martin calls a “terrestrial ecology” to emerge, one that opens up profound questions about the warfare that is seen as essential to personhood elsewhere in the play. In a discussion of Hamlet’s witty lines about Alexander and Caesar’s earthy fate, I work with Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian thinking about poiesis, sympoiesis, and personhood (Latour, Haraway) as a contribution to “Brown” ecocriticism.

Bio: Benjamin Bertram is Associate Professor of English at the University of Southern Maine. His areas of interest include sixteenth and seventeenth-century English literature and culture, Shakespeare, early modern studies, ecocriticism, animal studies, film studies, and critical theory. His new book, *Bestial Oblivion: War, Humanism, and Ecology in Early Modern England* is forthcoming from Routledge as part of the “Perspectives on the Non-Human in Literature and Culture” series. His most recent publications are “Webster’s Geometry” (*English Literature* 1, 2014), “Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* and the Discourse of Husbandry” (*Modern Philology* 110:4, 2013) and “Falstaff’s Body, the Body Politic, and the Body of Trade” (*Exemplaria* 21:3, 2009). His first book, *The Time is Out of Joint: Skepticism in Shakespeare’s England*, appeared in 2004. He has also published essays on postmodernism and politics.

James M. Bromley, Miami University

Masculinity and Objects in Humours Comedies

Critics usually understand that one of the satiric aims of humours comedies is the shoring up of distinctions between authentic forms of masculinity (gallants and tricksters) and their inauthentic others (gulls, fops, braggart soldiers). Less attention has been paid to how these distinctions of gendered personhood pivot around the nature of one’s attachments to objects, especially sartorial ones. In these plays, it would seem, authentic masculinity involves treating others as objects while inauthentic masculinity treats the self as an object or is overinvested in the non-human objects of others. Yet this pivot point is also the point at which the genre’s perceived aims founder. When Ben Jonson, in *Every Man in His Humour*, takes up questions about authenticity and masculinity, he destabilizes these distinctions by showing that they are propped up by homosocial violence and an ethically suspect juridical fiat and that these supports are implicated in the same behaviors that they target for

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punishment. By challenging Jonson's investment in these distinctions, I argue, we can explore the social and sexual alternatives attendant upon inauthentic masculinity's attachments to objects. Tracking characters' investments in stuffed breeches, sword hangers, and other objects, I show that the genre and Jonson are more tolerant of variation in forms of embodiment, masculinity, and eroticism than has been hitherto understood.

Bio: James M. Bromley is Associate Professor of English at Miami University specializing in early modern literature, the history of sexuality, and queer studies. He is the author of *Intimacy and Sexuality in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 2012) and the co-editor of *Sex before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England* (Minnesota, 2013). In 2014-2015, he was a Solmsen Fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, and he is currently a Mellon Foundation Fellow at the Folger Shakespeare Library. His current book project on male clothing in city comedy is entitled *Style, Subjectivity, and Male Sexuality in Early Modern English Drama*.

Rob Carson, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Collaborative Action in Julius Caesar

We tend to imagine subjectivity and objectivity as if they constituted a binary — either as a dichotomy (with the one diametrically opposed to the other) or else as a spectrum (running from the one pole to the other). Our fondness for binary models is such that once we have two ideas comfortably counterpoised in this way, we often fail to look any further than this; our hands, it seems, are already full. My current book project proposes that "third thoughts" — alternatives that stand alongside familiar binaries — frequently do exist, not just as shades of grey that fall somewhere on a binary spectrum, but entirely on their own terms, in the way that yellow stands as a third primary color alongside red and blue, or the way that depth stands as a third dimension perpendicular to both height and width.

For this seminar concerned with persons and things, subjects and objects, I would like to explore the idea that collectivity is an idea that exists outside of the binary of subjectivity and objectivity, a third thought in its own right. We often struggle to account for collectivity (or to put this another way, for our shared cultural practices, what Wittgenstein calls a *Lebensform*), I suggest, because cultures are neither persons nor things, neither subjects nor objects, neither real nor constructed, neither material nor ideological, neither factual nor theorized. Instead of discussing cultural practices in terms that fit them ill, my proposal is that we should recognize them as occupying a third dimension of their own.

With this in mind, I would like to look at the way that collaborative action is portrayed in *Julius Caesar*, as something that poses a problem to our reading of early modern subjects and early modern objects. And in particular, I would like to ask what it would mean to read the play specifically in a pre-Cartesian light, probably by turning sideways toward Montaigne.

Bio: Rob Carson is an Associate Professor of English at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY. He has published articles on early modern resistance theory and Richard III, on early modern skepticism and Coriolanus, and on the linguistic and the cultural turns in Shakespeare studies. He has two books projects on the go, *Every Third Thought: Shakespeare and the Early Modern Play of Ideas* (which is long overdue) and *Shakespeare and the New Elizabethans*, a new project about the role Shakespeare played in Britain's post-war redefinition of itself "Connective and

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Justine DeCamillis, University of Maryland

**Compounded Attention:
The Linen Network in Shakespeare's *Othello***

Attention's Latin root, "*ad-tendre*," means "to stretch" -- a motion that reaches out from the self to the other. To attend is to reach out to another body, a kind of giving over of the self to the other. In a way, to give your attention entails a temporary relinquishing of one's subjectivity to someone or something outside of oneself. Attention, therefore, is a transubjective mobile act, one that involves a movement of body through space. The materiality of attention, therefore is realized if it is considered an act of creative labor, a concept that exists in many models of early modern thought from translations of Lucretius to Galenic theory to Puritan outcries of idolatry. In the early modern theater, playwrights employed this concept, experimenting with classical and contemporary preoccupations with attention's ability to animate the inanimate.

My paper titled "Connective and Compounded Attention: The Linen Network in Shakespeare's *Othello*" puts into play the concept of connective networks of objects that are the central focus of attention in this tragedy. Rather than view an object in isolation, I propose that a calculus of like objects, recurring visually and in name throughout a play continually demand our attention. This repetitious call to attention builds layers of meaning into each object and links bodies and characters in nuanced ways. While connections have been drawn between the handkerchief and the marriage sheets, no one has considered the network of linens present in *Othello* in more than gesture. I am attempting an investigation of the resonances these intimate textiles exude and participate in as they make their untimely appearances. Reconsidering attention as labor offers an entirely new theory of performance experience as well as opens up possibilities of expanding the definition and history of labor studies while offering a potential solution to the current rift in material culture studies.

Bio: Justine DeCamillis is a fourth year PhD Candidate in English at the University of Maryland, College Park. She also works part time as an administrative assistant for the Folger Institute at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. Specializing in early modern English drama, her work investigates renaissance ideas of attention as creative labor, material culture, and representations of empire on the stage. Under the direction of Dr. Amanda Bailey, Justine investigates human and nonhuman relationships in her dissertation titled "The Labor of Attention: Transformative Materiality in Early Modern English Performance" which attempts to create a dialogue between early modern and modern theories of attention and materiality.

Derek Dunne, Cardiff University

Hands

To say that 'hand' is a loaded term in early modern usage, and modern usage for that matter, is an understatement. Signatures remain as powerful symbolic acts, that nevertheless continue to have real-world consequences (the signing of Executive Orders comes to mind). In early modern terms, the hand is memory-system and microcosm all in one; emblem books, stage props and marginal manicules all attest to the prominence of the hand in Renaissance culture. The word's very multivalence is what attracts authors like Shakespeare: 'O handle

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not the theme to talk of hands' (*Titus Andronicus*). Strict definitions are neither practical nor desirable, when authors make no distinctions between the hand that writes and the hand that is written, the stationary hand of a letter and the moving hand of the theatre.

Drawing on the work of Jonathan Goldberg and others, this paper will investigate the relationship between hands, selfhood, and authority through a focus on *Sir Thomas More*. This is a play that survives in *manuscript*, containing not only the hand of Master of the Revels Sir Edmund Tilney, but also the disputed hand of Shakespeare himself. Meanwhile the protagonist of *Sir Thomas More* is caught between the conflicting imperatives of his king and his Church, dramatized through the staging of his non-signature. I will argue that *Sir Thomas More* offers us a case in point for rethinking how hands (and their absence) *signify* – in the theatre, in the office of the Master of the Revels, and in the wider textual culture of early modern England

Bio: Derek Dunne is a lecturer in English literature at Cardiff University. Previously he has worked at Shakespeare's Globe (London), Queen's University Belfast, and the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). His first monograph, *Shakespeare, Revenge Tragedy, and Early Modern Law: Vindictive Justice* (Palgrave, 2016) was in the area of law & literature. He has written articles on the mathematics of revenge, the forensics of the blush, and the early modern jury. His new research project on discourses of authority, forgery and bureaucracy has the working title "Rogues' Licence: Counterfeiting Authority in early modern England". This has been awarded fellowships by the Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington DC), the Huntington (California), and the Newberry (Chicago).

Ben Fuqua, University of Georgia

**Forms and Affordances:
Pythagoreanism in Renaissance Discourse**

One of Antony's last acts of solidarity with his fellow Romans, a drunken conversation, involves oblique reference to Pythagoras's doctrine of transmigration. Describing the Egyptian crocodile: "It is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates." The reference dramatizes the binary, East-West conflict at the heart of the play. He jokes about transmigration to belittle the Egyptian court and temporarily reaffirm his Roman confraternity, but his position at that court, and growing proximity to a world where transmigration carries (at least) legitimate social application, threatens Antony's Roman-ness. Rather than contextualizing Antony's subjectivity, examining how he performs or embodies multiple identities, I want to focus on the ordering potential of his words themselves.

Victorianist Caroline Levine has recently popularized interpolating the design concept of "affordances" in literary studies. To afford an action is to allow for the possibility of something without necessarily requiring it. I will use the rhetoric of affordances to explore the utility of Pythagorean doctrine, an immaterial philosophy concerned primarily with organizing the material world through recurrence. Simultaneously, I will plot Pythagoreanism as an entry of literary criticism, its insistence on return reflected equally in its dissemination.

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Bio: Ben Fuqua has recently earned his PhD from The University of Georgia. His dissertation, “How to Do Books with Things: Being and Reflecting in Renaissance Literature” explores the applicability New Materialist philosophies to Renaissance poetics, and whether or not Renaissance authors anticipated many of these approaches. Fuqua currently works as an Instructor at UGA.

Colby Gordon, Bryn Mawr College

Two Doors:
Legal Personhood and the Sanctity of the Home in
The Comedy of Errors* and *Semayne's Case

This paper considers the relationship between the physical structure of the house and the legal status of the citizen-subject in *The Comedy of Errors*, a play that explores the entanglement between personhood and the possession and occupation of domestic space. For this seminar, I focus on one particular object whose fate is closely connected to the rights and privileges enjoyed by a given subject: the door. In *The Comedy of Errors*, a play teeming with duplicates and body doubles jostling over access to a single home, doors mark a division of space that is both material and legal, separating public from private, sacred from profane, the asylum of sanctuary from the exposure of the street. These spatial partitions have consequences for the legal status of the characters; finding themselves on the wrong side of the door results in a state of extreme precarity and legal disability. In this respect, I argue that *The Comedy of Errors* is engaged with the potentials and limits of the legal concept of the sanctity of the home, the set of rights and privileges attached to domestic space whose origins date back the 1604 King's Bench decision in *Semayne's Case*, which centered on the question of whether it was legal for a subject to bolt his door against the sheriffs.

Bio: Currently an Assistant Professor of Renaissance Literature at Bryn Mawr College, Colby Gordon earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from UC Irvine. Selections from his work have been published in multiple journals, including articles on bleeding Eucharists and host desecration narratives in *Genre*; soft architecture and queer futurity in *Antony and Cleopatra* in postmedieval; Carl Schmitt, Sianne Ngai, and the aesthetics of political theology in the *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies*; soundscapes and political aesthetics; and, with Julia Lupton, a piece on Shakespeare and design theory in *English Studies*. He is currently at work on a manuscript that tracks the legal dimensions of dwelling in early modern literature.

Jeffrey B. Griswold, University of Maryland

Nonhuman Consent and the False Florimell

Marriage and erotic subjection loom large in the political imagination of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. These acts saturate the poem as characters pledge oaths to a beloved or are taken captive by an attacker. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that these allegorical scenes of desire and violence enter into sixteenth-century debates about dominion by examining questions of consent and coercion. Less explored, however, are the poem's frequent depictions of nonhuman sex. How might these episodes shift our sense of political participation or complicate the terms of personhood? My paper will examine Florimell and her automaton double (the False Florimell) in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, considering the philosophical implications of nonhuman eroticism. Whereas scholarship on

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the real Florimell tends to engage the political and sexual meanings of conquest and choice, writing on the false Florimell theorizes her in aesthetic and epistemological terms. My essay raises a simple but overlooked question: How does the False Florimell's apparent agency complicate the meaning of political consent? The replicant is afforded a degree of autonomy unavailable to her human counterpart, but the implications of this incongruity have gone almost completely unexamined. By putting Spenser's poem in conversation with works of early modern philosophy, such as Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* and Richard Hooker's *Of The Laws Of the Ecclesiastical Polity*, I will interrogate the political ontology of the human insofar as shared life is grounded in voluntary choice.

Bio: Jeff Griswold is a PhD candidate studying Renaissance literature at the University of Maryland. His dissertation traces Aristotle's claim that humans are the "political animal" through early modern drama, poetry, and philosophy, asking what it means for political life to be natural, or to be uniquely human. This project revisits human exceptionalism through the lessons of posthumanism, considering strange articulations of shared life that ground the polis in our deficiencies, rather than in the loftier capacities of language or reason.

Margo Kolenda, University of Michigan

**Mercurial Labor:
The Alchemical Logic of Personhood in John Lyly's *Galatea***

This paper considers John Lyly's use of objects and materiality in *Galatea* (1585) in order to explore a theory of personhood that relies upon an individual's potential productive capacity as its defining characteristic. Focusing on objects in *Galatea* situates them within their making and unmaking: the two main subplots stage scenes of labor upon objects. Rafe, the apprentice looking for a lucrative career, attempts the pseudo-science of alchemy, specifically depicted here in terms of transmuting base metals to gold. I take alchemy's operative logic, that objects hold the potential for greater value within them, as a central theory of both object and personhood. While theories of self-improvement are neither radical nor unusual, Lyly structures his ideas in an analogous relationship between object and person, means both for *Galatea's* conception of personhood and for our current categorization of objects, things, and people.

Rafe's quest parallels that of Cupid, tasked with untying love-knots as punishment for toying with Diana's nymphs. I use the alchemical logic of potentiality to read the scene with Cupid as an exploration of correctional labor, an experimental social concept that was enacted in sixteenth-century London at Bridewell Prison. Bridewell offered a means to reform the vagrant and idle by allowing them to achieve their potential as productive members of society, putting them to work making various objects that would enter into England's economy. Focusing on these objects allows us to understand the value of such labor not as a penal activity but as labor with the goal of producing tangible and usable objects. In this system, personhood depends upon one's productive material potential within a society. It reframes the social experiment as not just an ethical and legal one, but an economic system that, like the one in *Galathea*, unlocks the potential of its practitioners.

Bio: Margo Kolenda is a PhD Candidate in English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan. She is interested in issues of value, exchange, and labor in late medieval and early modern English literature. Her work disrupts periodization by investigating this larger period as a long moment that established a money economy in

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England (as opposed to the more traditional milestone of the market economy). She seeks to use both the historical economy and the economic metaphors within a particular text to understand how every work of literature sets up its own economic logic, one whose system of value serves as a useful organizing principle for such a text. Her current dissertation considers the economic imaginary of literature in order to ask questions about the value function of literature and literary labor. Her teaching interests extend to issues of form and genre as well as lyric poetry.

Megan Snell, University of Texas at Austin

Object Lessons from Dramatic Object-Persons

My paper for this seminar explores notions of personhood from the “outside in” by considering infants in Renaissance drama. We usually assume that a simple doll or a bundle of blankets played the part of an onstage baby, since the early modern theatre was not an ideal place for a newborn (and a newborn was not an ideal responsibility for a theatre company). Such a “casting” choice asks an audience to enact what grieving Constance wishes for in *King John*, to mistake, on some level, a “babe of clouts” for a real child (3.4.58). Unable to verbally express its own interiority, an onstage baby can remain stubbornly illegible via the traditional means of character analysis. As these babies change hands, their personhoods become jumbled with a variety of identities from across the subject-object spectrum. If a company reuses the same prop in other productions, a stage baby might lend its body to its fellow “doubled” infants, and even to *whatever* else the prop might be used for—a toy, a blanket, a grocery package. A baby-prop can be a material extension of its parents, or even purely “material” itself: Perdita is found “wrapped in the mantle of Queen Hermione’s,” borrowed fabric that perhaps is all that portrays baby Perdita (5.2.31-32). This paper explores some of the ways that these material identities both help and hinder the infant’s signification of personhood, while also revealing how “outside-in” identities overlap with various commodities on the Renaissance stage.

Bio: Megan Snell is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Austin. She is writing a dissertation about the baby-prop’s relationship to genre, character, and environment in dramatic literature. An essay from this project will appear in the edited collection *Shakespeare’s Things: Theatre and the Non-Human World in History, Theory, and Performance* (Routledge).

Jeff Theis, Salem State University

**Plant People:
Nature, Home, and Inter-Connected Identities**

Rather than advancing a sense of individualism and personhood where characters are distinct, autonomous agents, some of Shakespeare’s plays advance a more permeable, interconnected sense of self as the individual is defined with and through “natural” objects and sites. Perhaps most illustrative is Jupiter’s riddling tablet left on Posthumus’ chest in *Cymbeline*. The riddle ties together the identities of Posthumous, Innogen, and her brothers, Arviragus and Guiderius with the latter two likened to cedar branches separated from the trunk. For the seminar, I plan to examine what it means to identify these princes as branches of a tree—not the entire tree itself which is usually symbolic of monarchy or the monarch. The “natural” identities of these characters is worth situating within their presence in the Welsh wildlands

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(I have explored the significance of their cave dwelling in other SAA work that I may integrate here). It is also striking that Jupiter's prophecy dehumanizes and reconfigures the identities of each character alluded to in the tablet. Posthumous is a "lion's whelp," Innogen is the immaterial "piece of air," and the princes are parts of trees. Each attains a fuller sense of their identity by being reconstructed as a part of a natural world independent from human systems. In addition, each of these identities does not cast them as distinct individuals but, rather, as interconnected and interdependent entities (a lion family, air that embraces a material object, and branches reconnected to a tree). Thinking of persons as natural objects, then, creates a paradoxical dynamic in which human identity comes through the defamiliarizing process of dehumanizing each character.

Bio: I am a professor at Salem State University in Massachusetts. My early research focused on representations of the forest in Shakespeare to Milton—culminating in *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral Nation* (Duchesne UP, 2009). My current book project is an ecocritical examination of home and dwelling in early modern writing with a strong focus on Shakespeare's plays *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. In this project I examine changes in architectural and building practices during the period and expand the conventional focus beyond architectural style and interior domestic relationships to how the household is situated within a broader set of environmental and social relationships.