

2019 Seminar Abstracts: First-Personal Shakespeare
Sara Coodin (University of Oklahoma)
Ambereen Dadabhoy (Harvey Mudd College)

Professor Tom Cartelli, Muhlenberg College

Uncanny Reprise: the Othello Complex Resurgent in Jordan Peele's *Get Out*

What makes *Get Out* more race-horror comedy than race-horror tragedy is that the sympathetic black protagonist gets away with ferociously killing three rich white people and one white grandmother dressed in the skin of a black maid before not quite finishing off Rose, his depraved white girlfriend. But in so doing, *Get Out*'s Chris paradoxically reproduces with extreme prejudice the decline into savagism characteristic of what I elsewhere describe as "the Othello complex." As schematized by Shakespeare—and elaborated by 400 years of racist stereotyping--this is the process by which an ostensibly "civilized" Moor responds to presumed marital betrayal by undertaking a ritualized revenge against the woman who has presumably stolen his "occupation" and manhood alike. In *Get Out*, of course, everything Shakespeare's Othello wrongly suspects about the treachery of women is transposed to embrace the proven treachery of an entire tribe of deeply entitled, predatory white men and women. Chris is thus licensed (in a way Othello never is) to wreak a "wide and sweeping revenge" against conspirers who seek to snatch his body and enslave his soul. But in casting aside the civility that attends this explosively updated version of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Chris himself goes well beyond what it takes to free himself from the aspiring body-snatchers in question. In so doing, Chris effectively confirms one of the working premises of yet another, earlier twist on *Othello*, Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, whose protagonist claims that the artistry of renowned black musicians is pure sublimation, and that Charlie Parker "would've played not a note of music if he just walked up to East Sixty-Seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw." Though Jordan Peele has constructed a film that arguably stages every African-American's worst nightmare—the photos of past black victims that line Rose's walls uncannily recall both the parade of young black men seduced by Lula in *Dutchman* and the faces of the victims of police violence of just the past few years—in staging what Baraka considers every African-American's most deeply held desire, he has also arguably evoked that other white American dreamscape in which exaggerated fears of black male violence matter far more than actual black lives. In the process, Peele himself seems to have been caught up in the machinery of the Othello complex, reproducing the same cultural fantasy as farce that Shakespeare produced as tragedy.

Dr. Sara Coodin, University of Oklahoma

"The skillful shepherd peeled me certain wands:"
Artificial Reproduction and *The Merchant of Venice*

I'll be contributing a paper to our seminar that begins with a speech from *The Merchant of Venice* (one that I've written about extensively before, in fact): Shylock's citation of the parable of the parti-colored lambs in 1.3. During the pivotal loan negotiation scene with Antonio, Shylock invokes the agency and skill of the biblical Jacob to voice a first-personal claim to Jacob's – and his own -- flourishing assets. For all its layered, complex theological significance, in its most literal aspect, Shylock's story first and foremost describes a set of technical practices associated with animal husbandry -- in this case, a series of improbably successful breeding

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interventions that allow him to, like Jacob, profit without stealing. With its designations of stock and colour, and the skillful manipulation and ‘sorting’ of populations, this episode outlines a series of technical practices associated with the artificial - i.e.: skillful and deliberate - manipulation of reproductive activity, a topic that was receiving renewed and sustained attention by late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century English writers in a variety of domains, from the printing press to the control and management of agriculture and farm animals. Looking at texts such as Gervase Markham’s *The Country Farm* (1616), I’ll be considering how the period’s writings about animal husbandry reflect what Wendy Wall has argued was a process of defining Englishness through the discourse of land, a process whose implications extended far beyond the mere refinement of agricultural techniques. By thinking through Shylock’s speech as a key instance of Shakespeare testing out a series of questions about artificial reproduction, I’ll be discussing how *The Merchant of Venice* wrestles with the growing cultural preoccupation with artful/artificial reproductive technologies in the early 17th century, with an especially keen attention to their implications for ethnographic and racial classification in the period.

Dr. Ambereen Dadabhoy, Harvey Mudd College

**“Give me Conquer’d Egypt”:
 Re-Orienting Egypt in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra***

At first, it might appear to be an anachronism of the greatest magnitude to read William Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* as engaged with the culture, politics, society, and mores of the greater middle east. After all, in Shakespeare’s day, such geographic designations did not exist; moreover, as its title demonstrates, *Antony and Cleopatra* is a Roman play that ostensibly depicts the events that give rise to Rome’s glorious empire, one to which the English make claims as both its colonized subjects and potential heirs. Where, then, does the middle east figure in such a calculus? One way, and the way that I will pursue in this paper is geography and culture. While the Egypt of the Roman conflict Shakespeare dramatizes is not Islamicate, at the time of Shakespeare’s writing, it has been for almost a millennia. I see the Egypt about which Shakespeare writes as being a loaded and overdetermined site of imperial fear and fantasy: Egypt, here, is a palimpsest of histories and cultures. The critical focus on the Roman narrative of Egypt or its possible English political and strategic corollaries obscures the Egypt of Shakespeare’s historical moment, and sidelines the histories of those other cultures that came after the Ptolemaic and Roman to the Ottoman. One critical question for me in my examination of Egypt is why critics have seen contemporary English events in Shakespeare’s play but have (deliberately) not seen Egypt? What are the cultural and ideological assumptions underwriting such forms of scholarship and knowledge production?

Professor Stephen Deng, Michigan State University

**Accountable to Whom?: The Second-Person Moral Standpoint and Accountability in
 Shakespeare’s *Hamlet***

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There's a tendency in recent political, economic, and social discourse to demand that people and institutions *be held accountable* for their actions and behavior, but the pronouncement tends not to specify *to whom* these parties should be held to account. In this paper, I employ philosopher Stephen Darwall's notion of the "second-person standpoint"—which he describes as “the perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on another's conduct and will”—as the position from which accountability may adhere for a system of morality. Moral obligation, according to Darwall, requires “equal accountability,” which must be seen as a set of “demands that are ‘in force’ from the moral point of view, that is, from the (first-person plural) perspective of the moral community.” As part of a larger project on *Hamlet* and accountability, I assess the actions and inactions of Hamlet according to a presumed first-person plural perspective of a moral community based on the assumption of a second-person standpoint. With Hamlet still commonly thought of as an early representation of modern consciousness, critics have tended to analyze the character from the perspective of a privileged “I” who stands apart from the lesser minds of his staged world. But despite some morally questionable actions, Hamlet frequently meditates on moral questions by assessing his situation in relation to the dictates of a moral community, even one that does not necessarily adhere to Christian principles. Much of Hamlet's “problem” stems from this desire to consider his actions from a second-person standpoint, to make sense of his obligations from the perspective of a moral community whose demands may be gleaned from his ruminations and positioning of himself in relation to others.

Professor Jim Kearney, University of California, Santa Barbara

In Decision: First-Person *Macbeth* and Affective Ethics

The consequential decision – especially deciding to act or not in response to some provocation – is something that Shakespeare returns to again and again, particularly in his tragedies. The plays seem interested in exploring what Brutus in *Julius Caesar* calls the “interim” between “the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion,” that is, the interim between contemplating some momentous act and its execution; for Brutus, that “interim is / Like a phantasm or a hideous dream.” To dramatize that interim is to stage a certain species of ethical *experience*, experience necessarily grounded in the first-person in consequential ways. In the larger project I touch on a variety of Shakespeare's plays as I chase the elusive event of decision and the ways Shakespeare might offer a phenomenology of decision. In this brief piece, I address first-person experience and the event of decision in *Macbeth*, especially, of course, the experience of the “phantasm” or “hideous dream” of that interim between murder and its first motion. My hope is to explore the play's staging of affect within a long moment of decision, with particular attention to the ways in which affect might engender experiential knowledge and color ethical calculation.

Dr. Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Representing Subjectivity in Shakespeare's Drama

What does a Shakespearean character say when she or he says "I"? Thinking of the different genres helps us examine the dramatization of the first person. In tragedy, the protagonist's

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subjectivity takes up centerstage: from Hamlet's self-explorations to Lear's eloquent outward speeches, tragic protagonists are singled out by their intense and absolutizing self-experience. In comedy, the focus lies on groups of characters and the first-person tends to be overshadowed by roles, disguises or doubles, as pairs of friends, siblings or twins defy sharp individual contours and uniqueness. Romances or tragicomedies feature a very interesting balance in the representation of individual subjectivity, since the figure of the grandiloquent protagonist exists but mostly in a subaltern condition in relation to Fortune's threats and whims. The long time lapses we see in romances help account for the idea that a process of elaboration is always required in the first-person construction of itself.

Living in a period when all sorts of determinisms -- of birth, class, humours and astrological configurations -- were competing with the belief in self-fashioning and the notion of Protean selves, what materials and discourses did Shakespeare have at his disposal for building such a variety of designs of subjectivity? The aim of my work is to discuss how these materials are engendered by early modern rhetorical culture, especially in three domains of discursive practices: the rhetorical education offered in Grammar Schools, responsible for training young men in the skills of speech and debate, engaging thus a theatrical perception of existence; a topography of the subject according to which the truth about individuals was to be found in their interiority, which Maus (1995) calls "the topos of inwardness"; and Stoicism and its precept that reason has the control over passions.

Observing the combined workings of these discursive practices enhances our perception both of what the first-person shows and hides of characters and of the linguistic machines that produce subjects on and off stages.

Dr. Sara Morrison, William Jewell College

“And when I lived, I was your other wife”: Second-Person Relational Autonomy in Much Ado About Nothing

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Claudio condemns Hero for what he considers promiscuous speech. Claudio's condemnation of Hero's "talking" with an unknown man results in her public humiliation and her "death." Hero is imagined dead and so is ontologically transformed by her accuser's speech. When Claudio, along with Don Pedro, publicly maligns Hero, falsely accusing her of infidelity, she is rhetorically metamorphosed into a radical Other to herself, her autonomous self destabilized, even if temporarily. Presumed dead, Hero is denied the various mechanisms of self-defense that might re-align her public persona with her personal identity. She must instead rely on the Friar's plan that her "death" might cause Claudio to remember her as she once was. Ultimately, in realizing Hero's innocence, Claudio, too, is restored, though such reintegration of self cannot occur without Hero's sight and speech. This essay considers Hero's circumstances that shape her as a "second person."¹ This formulation of personhood suggests that all individuals are socially shaped and their autonomy therefore can be understood relationally. This model of personhood still allows for autonomous choice, ethical agency, and freedom of expression, yet those performances of individuality may also rely on an atmosphere

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conducive to such liberties and may therefore be circumscribed by historical and social context. Given the centrality of speech in haling an individual into a culture's dominant ideologies and therefore also in the resisting of those same ideologies, a play like *Much Ado About Nothing* that turns on the fulcrum of misunderstandings, disguises, and mistaken identities taxes individual expressions of autonomy.

Mr. Esei Murakishi, Washington University, St. Louis

What Happens at the End of *The Winter's Tale*?

What happens at the close of *The Winter's Tale*—or, rather, what is done at its close? Shall we say “Hermione comes to life,” or shall we say, “Hermione is coming to life”? The purposes of this essay are three: (1) to extract from *The Winter's Tale* an account of personal identity; (2) to propose an *a priori* analysis of the relations obtaining among all its stagings, present, past, and future; and (3) to describe the modes of being a persona dramatis can suffer or enjoy. I hold, in short, that *The Winter's Tale* comprises all that is done at all stagings, past, present, and future; that a persona dramatis is a sequence of deeds; that the relations obtaining among stagings determine the aspect a deed takes, whether progressive (“what you are doing”) or indefinite (“what you do”); and, finally, that Hermione progressive, a queen who *is living*, differs essentially from Hermione indefinite, a queen who *lives*.

Ms. Amanda K. Ruud, University of Southern California

Mourning Lucrece's Loss

In Shakespeare's narrative poem *Lucrece*, the heroine seeks out a painting of the Fall of Troy as a site of mourning after she is raped by the king's son. Within the painting, she finds the silent figure of Hecuba and declares “I'll tune thy woes with my lamenting tongue.” Lucrece's apostrophe to Hecuba in the Troy painting overwrites an epic, ekphrastic scene with a prosopopoeia—the first-personal speech of a figure of poetry or art. Grieving before the Trojan image offers to construct Lucrece as another Aeneas, who wept over a similar image in Carthage before going on to found Rome. But Lucrece instead chooses to linger with and speak for the bereaved figure of Hecuba. In this paper, I will argue that Lucrece's speech draws attention to the failure of the epic, poetic tradition to attend to and represent personal experiences of loss or grief. Pausing the epic action of Shakespeare's own poem, Lucrece poses a critique of the nation-building ambitions of poetry, ambitions that threaten to overwrite her tragic personal narrative as part of a political narrative about a change of regime. Lucrece turns to prosopopoeia at the very moment that an epic ekphrasis might typically turn away from pity and toward imperial hope.

This paper will examine a few intertwined questions. What does Lucrece aim to accomplish by speaking for another historical but aestheticized female victim? What does her mourning suggest that poetry can offer to the suffering subjects it represents? And how can artistic representation ethically attend to personal loss?

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Using terms from W.J.T. Mitchell's "Ekphrasis and the Other" I will propose that Lucrece's choice to mourn by merging with the abject figure of Hecuba offers a revised ethical understanding of the ekphrastic tradition in poetry.

Mr. Gregory Sargent, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

The "Willing Freedom" of a "Lonely Dragon"?: First-personhood and *Coriolanus*

There is a connection between the construction of the first-personal space in Shakespeare and a kind of Shakespearean negativity, experienced by lovers and malcontents alike; Montaigne provides the bridge to link these two. He writes, "Our 'willing freedom' produces nothing more properly its own than affection and loving-friendship" (208). Tenets of the first-personal may be clearer than that of negativity, but surprisingly, negativity in Shakespeare depends upon freedom. For this paper, I will examine Caius Martius from *Coriolanus* and how he creates and destroys his world through first-personal interactions. I seek to question Shakespeare's engagement with authority and class in this play through Martius's very negative first-personal approach. I wish to begin a conversation philosophically convened around freedom and what that means when we read Shakespeare, what kinds of freedom give authority, and who can exercise "willing freedom" to create a first-personal relationship to the plays.

Martius represents Shakespearean negativity in some of his purest forms; he dislikes the common citizens, he has no need for political ceremony, he famously turns his back on Rome, and he ultimately would un-name himself as Cominius says plainly, "He was a kind of nothing, titleless" (5.1.13). These are all part of the first-personal space of Martius's interaction with the world of the play and they rely on a "willing freedom" to determine himself into negativity. If Martius is a contentious character, it is because we must confront his first-personhood as a way of knowing and measure it against our own "willing freedom" to engage with the text. *Coriolanus* unabashedly requires us to acknowledge otherness of class and gender and is thus a microcosmic template for a larger engagement with the determination of first-personhood opposite the other.

Ms. Deb Streusand, University of Austin

The Critical "We"

When literary critics use the term "we," whom are we talking about? In discussions of Shakespeare's works, the word "we" is often thrown about as a means of hand-waving audience response. By using "we," the critic asserts that a text's readers or audiences all respond in the same way. The response so characterized is, conveniently, generally exactly the way the critic needs the audience to respond for the purpose of their argument. Yet audience response is never so unified as such critics have a tendency to assume.

The diversity of response becomes even greater when speaking of a dramatic text "read" in performance, because in that case, the text's presentation has been filtered through the

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interpretations of directors, actors, designers, etc. It is unreasonable to claim that all readers respond in a unified way to a non-dramatic text, but it is even more so to imagine a single convenient audience for a dramatic text, to put oneself in an imaginary theater and magic up an audience response that is exactly what one needs for a given argument. Fortunately, this kind of critical approach is less pervasive than it was in the past, but it is still alarmingly common.

It is particularly important to consider what happens when a critic who holds privilege—white privilege, male privilege, etc.—uses the “we” to argue that everyone responds the way they do. In this way, critics silence marginalized voices by assuming that they speak for everyone. If we are to use the “we” responsibly—though I have my doubts that this is possible—privileged critics like myself must be mindful of the difference between the limited “me” (first person singular) and the diverse “we” (first person plural.)

Mr. Robert W. Tate, Duke University

The Communicability of Recognition in *Antony and Cleopatra*

At the height of one of Cleopatra’s most soaring imaginative flights, the spell of mystical abstraction breaks. Having recalled her dream of an “Emperor Antony” exalted to cosmic and divine proportions, she turns to the Roman soldier whom she has been rapturously speaking over, and asks a humble question: “Think you there was or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of?” Implied are further questions: “Who was this man I dreamt of, if not the Antony we witnessed? Could we recognize such a man, were he (or when he was) in our midst? How do such ‘dreams’ as these become communicable?” These questions are not rhetorical. Consequently, the soldier’s response, as tactful as it is candid—“Gentle madam, no”—crushes in its tenderness.

What we envision must earn its claim to veracity, as we earn our claims to authority. *Antony and Cleopatra* demonstrates the fragility of these claims by staging a competition of divergent theatres, divergent historiographies. Characters and audiences alike critically frame persons and events, shaping various figures for them (or daring not to, as Cleopatra’s harried Messenger). For each party, to elect one representation over another is to expose one’s cares and commitments—less generously, one’s prejudices—if not to implicate oneself in the fashioning.

Cleopatra’s modes of presentation are no more disinterested than Caesar’s. But whereas Caesar works to fix the significance of our pictures of the past, Cleopatra works to facilitate our attention to the ‘presentness’ of the past. Cleopatra yields images as gifts or events. In so doing, she acknowledges her powerlessness to *prove* their truth, illuminating the nature of our communal relation to truth telling—the nature of (our) authority. To paraphrase Stanley Cavell, Cleopatra thus expresses the kind of political relevance that philosophy and art aspire to have.

Ms. Jessica Tooker, Indiana University, Bloomington

Language Games and Naming Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Encountering Katherina for the first time, Petruccio strikingly and empathetically asks his future bride what she wants to be called, rather than simply reiterating what most of Padua calls her: “The Shrew” (a devil, etc.). In their opening exchange Petruccio authoritatively creates a rhetorical space where Katherina finally has license to re-cast her personal identity via a remarkable name game where she emerges with an identificatory “first-personal” status that is, cathartically, less Katherina, more Kate—and not at all an irksome, brawling scold, or “shrew.” That is, Petruccio confirms Katherina as a living person with genuine affective responses (sometimes of anger or sorrow as well as infamously quick and ironized come-backs) to her astonishing and condemning title, and relatedly to how she is perceived by others. Playing with, and eventually for each other in their highly performative courtship and later marriage, the dynamic couple interrogate what it means to name someone, to undo the pointed act of naming and, masterfully, to name yourself. This paper examines how the stimulating name game at the heart of *The Taming of the Shrew* generates a new and profound way for Katherina to revolutionarily speak of herself as she is—and not just intake gossipy rumors that others have published, naturally in the past.

Dr. Lehua Yim, Independent Scholar

“We end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to”: Affecting Death-desires and Non-Clusivity in Hamlet and Montaigne’s “A Custom of the Isle of Ceo”

This paper undertakes an exploration of the rhetorical, political, and ethical work done by the first-person plural in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Montaigne’s essays “A Custom of the Isle of Cea” (and “Of Cannibals”), specifically at the intersections of “we” and death. Each of these texts contemplates death as a kind of isolator (of individual experience) and a unifier of persons (as a marker of a human condition across all differentials of class, gender, location, and civilization), as well as a choice and a non-choice. While both the play and the essays are recognized as great works of first-person singular articulation, and contributing to the attendant epistemological shifts occurring in various “scientific” and artistic discourses of the time, there has been only some study of the use and functioning of the first-person plural in these works. Most importantly, as we have considered throughout critical theoretical work (feminist, postcolonial, deconstruction, critical indigenous or critical race theory), there is much to be learned about constructions of power relations and ethics in watching the slippery functions of firstperson plurals.

Working within this critical theoretical approach, this paper will begin with noting the fundamental lack of what linguists call clusivity, the grammatical distinction between the inclusive and exclusive first-person plural, in the English “we” and French “nous.” I will then explore moments where *Hamlet*, *Ophelia*, and Montaigne’s narrator(s) in these two essays deploy and manipulate that lack of clusivity, or the confusion about who exactly any given use of “we”/“nous” refers to, in conjunction with discussing death. Specifically, this paper will be carefully laying out the “worlding” implied by several uses of the first-person plural to hopefully tease out the death and death-wishes that are embedded in the political and ethical worlds implied by different instances of “we”/“nous” and the temptations and problems of assigning

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emotional affect to “others.” The paper will conclude with some consideration of whether reading against the grain of these texts, canonized as part of the historical rise of the “I” in early modern Europe, might reveal an antidote in them to the romance of death in Anglo-European imperial forms (to make space for the strategic survival of “others” who have far richer clusivity in their languages, art, and lives).