

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Minor Affects and Feelings in Early Modern Environments
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**The End/s of War:
 Contempt, Sovereignty, and Total War in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine***

This essay examines the cross-section of affect, vocal expression, and political violence in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. As frequently as he uses swords and spears, Marlowe's titular war lord and anti-hero deploys his voice as a weapon against those he would supplant, depose, and murder; as a weapon, however, Tamburlaine's voice seems to draw its strength from what this seminar would consider minor affects. Not with rage or wrath does Tamburlaine speak, but with painfully ironic contempt and disdain. What does the leveraging of these minor affects afford Tamburlaine, and what might their use tell us about the relationship between care and carelessness in political sovereignty? Though this paper certainly does not champion Tamburlaine's violence, it does work to explore how these minor affects are deployed in and through the voice as weapons of control. Moreover, it considers Marlowe's characteristic irony as a potential tool of political critique, for the play suggests that Tamburlaine's cruel, minor affects have been honed by his own subjection, marginalization, and powerlessness. Using his voice as a kind of barometer of power, Tamburlaine adapts his machinations by willingly considering emotions where others will not. Ultimately, I argue that what Marlowe offers in affording Tamburlaine this skill is an account of state power that neglects the felt experiences of its subjects, a failure which ultimately transforms into a threat to the state made with the state's own violence. Looking to Jean-Luc Nancy's theorization of war as the ultimate proof of sovereignty and his desire to think beyond sovereignty as the organizational structure of either the self or community, I read Tamburlaine's contempt as containing a critique of the extreme violence of the play, a critique that begins with the voice.

Paul Budra, Simon Fraser University

Logic Chopping and Smug Servants

In the second scene of *Doctor Faustus*, a scholar asks Faustus' servant Wagner "where's thy master?" Wagner replies, "God in heaven knows." When the second scholar responds, "Why, dost not thou know?" Wagner replies, "Yes, I know, but that follows not." This is logic chopping: when a simple query receives a needlessly complicated and intentionally obtuse answer. While such scenes are amusing and can involve displays of virtuoso wordplay, in Shakespeare and other early modern dramatists such scenes are also sites of class conflict: it is almost inevitably servants or the lower classes who employ logic chopping when responding to the inquiries of their social betters. Logic chopping, then, is a petty act of class resistance, a small act of conscious non-compliance that results in minute emotional victories by creating confusion, unease, or simple

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irritation in its targets. But how does it feel to the logic chopper? Once Wagner has frustrated the scholars, he says, “Thus, having triumphed over you, I will set my countenance like a precisian and begin to speak.” Wagner is buoyed by a sense of self-worth generated by his small victory — a positive emotion. But his *affect* is one of smugness, a display of complacent self-congratulation that borders on the insufferable. In this paper I will attempt to trace the registers of smugness (and the curious bifurcation of its subjective and objective experiences) as they are displayed in Shakespeare’s socially fraught logic-chopping exchanges.

Sheila Coursey, University of Michigan

**“Slouching Towards Bethlehem:
 Joseph and Exhaustion on the Early Modern Stage”**

In the York *Corpus Christi* play “Joseph’s Troubles About Mary,” Joseph’s initial interaction with the angel Gabriel is fairly anticlimactic. When confronted with the Heavenly messenger, he snaps “a, i am ful werie, lefe, late me slepe” (248). This paper examines the theatrical legacy of Joseph in late medieval biblical drama as a kind of New Testament Eeyore, an irritated and exhausted grump who refuses to share in the transcendent joy and serenity that drives the scenes leading to the Nativity. Instead, Joseph draws attention to the precarity of his own aged body as conscripted into the Holy Family, and in doing so slows the pace of the plays leading up to the Nativity. While work on Joseph in medieval drama tends to focus on his misogyny or similarity to *fabliaux* tropes, this paper instead places Joseph with a collection of servants and domestic dependants on the early modern stage, characters like Susan in *Arden of Feversham* (c.1593) and Rachel Merry in *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (c.1601) who also find themselves doing (criminal) work that they would prefer not to. Susan and Rachel are both characterized as passive accomplices in the crimes of their masters, relegated within their respective plays to cleaning crime scenes and moving corpses. This paper explores their shared exhaustion and slowness as a mode of affective resistance activated in performance, a way for minor characters to carve out time for themselves and draw attention to their own precarity.

Jennifer Feather, University of North Carolina Greensboro

**Contentment and Gloom:
 Minor Affects in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine***

Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* is, perhaps, the last place one would most readily look for “minor affect.” After all, its prologue promises that we will hear “the Scythian Tamburlaine / Threatening the world with high astounding terms.” This threat is part and parcel of Tamburlaine’s strategy. The high astounding terms produce an ambient sense of threat that pervades the plays. But they also produce a sense of wonder and admiration. Neither the threat nor the wonder that Tamburlaine produces fall into the category of “minor affects,” but they do leave affective traces. This essay examines these

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traces, attending to how threat and wonder are registered as daily, ordinary, minor affects. Specifically, I examine Zenocrate's developing response to Tamburlaine from being "pleas'd perforce" to becoming a seemingly willing lover and accomplice in Tamburlaine's conquest through affect.

By analyzing persistent but lowgrade affects, I think beyond narratives that would cast Zenocrate as either performing her love for Tamburlaine as a means of survival or as being unable to assimilate her emotions about his forced acquisition of her affections. I argue that minor, daily affects register complicity and resistance simultaneously and complicate our understanding of the forms of will involved in forced affection. How does Tamburlaine exert his will? How does Zenocrate comply or assert her own will? I argue that reading Zenocrate's will can help unravel modern formulations of sexual harassment and assault that too often rely on expressions of emotion as evidence of consent or resistance. By focusing on states of vehemence, we fail to see their affective traces that trouble simple assertions of will. Seeing minor affective states as durable and persistent, I locate in them complicated negotiations with circumstances of constraint.

Robin Hizme, Queen College, CUNY

Conversion as Affective Technology in Henry Shirley's *The Martyred Soldier*

This essay investigates the trope of conversion in Henry Shirley's *The Martyr'd Soldier* to explore the appeal of a hagiographic drama (modeled on pre-Reformation miracle and saint's plays) for the audiences and readers in Stuart Britain. Pity, or empathy, is the dominant emotional regime of the Christian community in the play. Characters who, through their emotives, demonstrate their ability to empathize are able to join the community through conversion and are witness to miraculous sights and sounds. These figures, both male and female, construct themselves as Christian soldiers with the simultaneous qualities of penetrability and softening. This affective model is juxtaposed with the characters in the play who exhibit the inverse of pity – not a lack of pity - but *schadenfreude*, pleasure in the pain of others. Regardless of where any individual audience member positioned him- or herself along the spectrum of Christian faith in 1618, the London audience would have been brought into attunement by the main Christian tenet posited by the martyrs: faith in the immortality of the soul. As spectators at a performance which includes scenes of torture, any seemingly perverse pleasure we experience at the spectacle of violence could be projected onto the figures of Genseric and Henricke, the obdurate pagans. Understanding sight and sound as penetrative and powerful affective technologies, we are interpolated as fellows in the Christian community through our witnessing of angelic visitations and experiencing divine, sweet music. Unlike the onstage tyrants who deny their sensory experience, the paradoxical affective potency of the theater invites the spectators to feel pity for the suffering of the martyrs and join the emotional community. Thus, I argue that conversion in this play figures as a collective fantasy for national unity; regardless of where each individual's private faith positions her, the play structures collective unity as a cohesive and hopeful political futurity. In 1618, the year of the first recorded performance, this may be read as

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a response to the perceived abandonment of Protestants at the start of the Thirty Years War. By the time of the play's publication in 1638, this may have spoken to the anxieties surrounding the growing dissent towards Charles II and his Catholic wife.

Allison Kellar, Wingate University

**“A brittle glory shineth in this face”:
Expressions of Anger and Grief on the Early Modern Stage**

This paper analyzes the collective performance of Shakespearean actors' parts in relation to early modern theater practices, early modern physiology and physiognomy, and cognitive science theory to examine how early modern actors performed and responded to facial descriptions such as Richard II's confession that a “brittle glory shineth in this face” (TLN 2210). Shakespeare's descriptive language often imparts the emotion that a character's face should be expressing, but why? Audiences might not have always been able to see the actors' faces, so scholars have been right to assume that the descriptions help the audience identify the characters and understand what is taking place. But language that describes a character's expressions and emotions has an equal, if not a greater, effect on actors who are hearing lines that they barely know or have never heard before. Shakespeare's descriptive language regarding facial expressions reveals a character's social stature and affiliations as well as his or her emotions and physical features. These descriptive phrases serve as expressive prompts in performance, which are different from the actor's one to three-word cues because expressive prompts occur not only in the short verbal cues but also within characters' speeches. Facial expression phrases in Shakespeare's *Richard II* suggest that playwrights may have written expressive prompts into plays to help actors perform various emotions, understand the emotional connections in major scenes, and shift character allegiances as the plot progressed, thereby creating a network of expressive and affective references for the actors so that they would successfully connect with the other actors whose lines and parts they did not have free access to consult. As the characters' allegiances transfer from one king to the next, the actors' prompts for facial expressions also alter, symbolizing the transformation of the body politic.

Ineke Murakami, University at Albany, S.U.N.Y

***Esprit de Corps*:
Affective Constitution and “the Lusty Lasses of the Levelling Party”**

Affect studies are rightly extolled for bringing embodiment to bear on thinking about emotion. Yet, relatively few such studies concern themselves with collective bodies or posit the way their assembly relies on affective social performances. This paper extends Sara Ahmed's assertion that groups fashion a kind of collective “skin,” or boundary, through shared emotions roused in plural performance to explore how *esprit de corps*, an affective sense of belonging to a collective body, establishes a body politic of Leveller women petitioners. Drawing on news books, satirical pamphlets, and petitions by and

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about Leveller women and their associates, this study examines petitioning marches of Leveller women on parliament between 1648 and 1649 that tend to lose distinction in accounts of the general public unrest of England during the civil wars. I argue that the story of these performances offers insight into the mutually constitutive work of *esprit de corps* and bodies politic, one that has broader implications for the constitution of collectives and their reception in the wider political community of which they and their members remain a part.

Caro Pirri, Rutgers University

Borderline Feelings in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*

My larger project identifies a period of English history between 1570 and 1620—bracketed by the search for the Northwest Passage and Jamestown's Starving Time—when the New World became a shorthand for catastrophe and failure. Critics have deemphasized these early years, subordinating them to a narrative of imperial ascent. But travel narratives such as Richard Hakluyt's *Principle Navigations* (1598), John Brereton's *A Brief and True Relation* (1602) and William Strachey's *True Repertory* (1612) exhaustively documented settlement's failures, drawing together conditions of political, financial, and ecological crisis to present a skeptical outlook on England's colonial project. Popular drama takes up this history. Onstage, settlement becomes synonymous with representations of crisis and catastrophe. These plays continued to shape perspectives on the New World into the seventeenth-century and beyond.

Jillian Marie Snyder, University of Notre Dame

**“These Profound Heaves:”
 The Sigh in the Repertoire of Revenge**

Throughout revenge tragedies, characters express their sense of injustice through blunted prayers. Titus Andronicus threatens “to breathe the welkin dim” should his and Lavinia's pleas for justice go unanswered (3.1.212). In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo laments his “broken sighs” that “beat at the windows of the brightest heavens, / Soliciting for justice and revenge” (3.7.13-4). Both of these characters, however, find little in the way of heavenly aid. Hieronimo describes heaven as “countermured with walls of diamond” that “give [his] words no way” (3.7.16, 18). Titus takes a more literal tack, attempting to pierce the heavens with arrows. Such failed petitions, evinced by the frustrated breath, leave these avengers to take justice into their own hands.

This essay examines how the efficacy of sighs become a minor affect that shapes the repertoire of revenge. It first takes up the breath within changing conventions of English Protestant prayer. Protestant ministers and writers redirected the devotional economy from the saints to God, arguing that efficacious prayer resulted not from the intercession of others but from the work of the Spirit in the life of the elect. Taking their cues from Romans 8, they linked spirit with breath, claiming sighs as evidence of otherwise

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invisible spiritual work occurring in the practice of prayer—even when those prayers went unanswered. Protestants nevertheless struggled with the potential of sighs to unveil spiritual desire that was both sincere and spontaneous. This concern appears in the increasing complaints of ministers, who warned that congregants’ sighs were being falsely performed.

The essay then briefly ventures into *Titus Andronicus* to demonstrate how sighs constitute a plea for action, especially when characters lack the capacity to act. The sincerity underlying these prayers makes them subject to misinterpretation and manipulation. It finally turns to *Hamlet* to illustrate how the sigh becomes enmeshed in questions of devotion. More specifically, it will focus on Claudius who manipulates the questions around the sigh’s efficacy and filial piety sigh to entice Laertes into pursuing vengeance on his behalf.

Matthew Wagner, University of Surrey

“Performing the Prophetic”

What affect(s) are generated by an uncertainty of the future? In performance, are those affects different for/between characters and for/between the performers and the audience? And how might answers to these questions be charted in terms of temporality, change, and ‘becoming’?

Laura Cull has defined affect, specifically within a Deleuzian framework, as a state of “‘becoming,’ change or variation caused by an encounter between bodies” (2012, 189). This paper will pursue the questions above by aligning Cull’s central notions of becoming and change with a series of ‘prophetic moments’ in Shakespearean performance, and tracing the affective impact that these moments may have upon both characters and audiences. Working with *Richard III*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*, I will examine different types of prophecy, ranging from what we might think of as a literal or narrow definition of the word in *Richard III*, to a satirical rendition of prophecy by Lear’s Fool, to Hamlet’s defiance of ‘augury’.

Each case involves the creation of a vague, *dismissable* foreboding – a ‘minor affect,’ if you will -- and it is this generative phenomenon that interests me here. Cull suggests that “the work of the performer is not to represent emotion or to represent other bodies in the world, but to devise a procedure to extract the affects of bodies, to somehow reconstruct in performance the power of another body to pierce us like an arrow” (2013, 142). I suggest here that the use of the prophetic in performance – which is a concerted means of crystalizing our experience of temporality – is precisely such a procedure. It is, moreover, in the Shakespearean instances I will examine here, a procedure that is dependent upon a specific triangulation of bodies: performer to performer to audience. Finally, I argue that the (minor) affects afforded by performing the prophetic are ultimately, perhaps, not so minor, particularly because they appear as multi-temporal. By this, I mean that the performed prophetic moment in fact encompasses many scattered

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moments, and the temporal affect it induces is not simply one of looking forward to a predicted if uncertain future, but – within the time frame of the staged play – when that future arrives, we are also looking backward to the initial utterance of the prophecy itself.