

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare's Language: Changing Methods
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With socio-historical linguistics sketching out micro-histories of language change, with ambitious digital projects re-imagining the scale of rhetorical and stylistic analysis, with renewed interest in linguistic form deriving both from cognitive science and early modern "grammatical culture," new avenues are opening for the study of literary and dramatic language. This seminar invites papers about the language of Shakespeare and his contemporaries that engage with evolving methodologies.

Dr. Ross M. Knecht (Emory University), ross.knecht@emory.edu

Humanist Grammatical Theory and Montaigne's Relativism

This paper argues that humanist ideas about language and pedagogy had a significant influence on Montaigne's belief that it is custom rather than nature or law that governs human life and action. The humanists elevated the practice of language over the abstract principles of grammar, arguing that correct speech was governed only by the contingencies of convention and use. Montaigne adopted and expanded this conventionalist perspective, arguing that human action, like language, is unconstrained by prior precept. Those moral values and natural laws that we take for absolute ideals are merely customs, practices that have sedimented into rules over time: "we have no other criterion of truth or right reason," writes Montaigne, "than the example and form of the opinions and customs of our own country." This movement from grammatical conventionalism to cultural relativism suggests the radical openness of at least one thread of early modern thought.

Dr. Julian Lamb (Chinese University of Hong Kong), julianlamb@cuhk.edu.hk

Performing the Storm in *King Lear*

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!

Is the storm already happening when Lear says these famous lines? If it is not then we might regard these lines as the performative invocation of a storm about to happen; but if it is, which is customary in performance, their performative status and function is more difficult to determine. They are not a plain description of what is already taking place, but nor can their performativity be characterized either as an invocation (for what they invoke already exists), or a command (for what they command is being done anyway). This paper comprises an attempt to ascertain just what sort of performative they are. In so doing, it will utilize J.L. Austin's seminal account of speech acts in *How to do Things with Words*, especially its problematic attempts to determine the ways in which a performative can fail to fulfil any one of a seemingly endless number of felicity conditions. This enterprise, which Austin eventually abandons, courts a philosophical drive to define a concept with a level of precision and certainty that cannot be sustained when we consider language as it is actually used. Ultimately, then, I want to ask just how transferrable the concept of the performative

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is – not just from philosophy to literature, but from philosophy to ordinary language. As I hope my analysis of Lear's unusual performatives will show, we are closest to the truth when our pure and flawless concepts allow themselves to be sullied by the uses to which we put them.

Dr. Russell McConnell (Southern Methodist University), rhmconnell@smu.edu

The Art of Being Romeo: Speech Act Theory in Verona

At various points in *Romeo and Juliet*, most significantly in the famous Balcony Scene," Shakespeare's characters become philosophers of language, theorizing about the nature of names and words, and about how one may deploy language in order to take effective action in the world. Many of the concerns that they address bear a striking resemblance to the 20th-century philosophical movement known as speech act theory. In this paper I take a New Formalist approach in exploring how the characters of *Romeo and Juliet* anticipate and grapple with the nature of speech acts, as well as exploring how and why all this elaborate theorizing generally fails to achieve the characters' aim of gaining control over their tragic situation. This argument advances our understanding of Shakespeare's attitude towards both the power of language and the value of philosophy.

Dr. Nick Moschovakis (Bethesda, MD), moschovakis@gmail.com

Shakespeare's conditional forms

I'm interested in Shakespeare's language of reasoned argument, and especially (for this seminar) his conditional constructions. Unlike older studies of "if" as a thematic word in Shakespeare, my paper will use search tools to scan uses of various early modern English conditional forms across the corpus. With the resulting data in view, I'll look for patterns in the functions of these conditional forms. For example, given the modal force of many conditionals, where do they skew toward the optative and imperative? And by contrast, where do they skew toward the subjunctive—and when do subjunctive conditionals suggest, at least latently, a process of deliberation or dialectical reasoning (as opposed to, say, a performative speech act of commitment, or an expression of mourning over a lost possibility)? How might Latin study have informed Shakespeare's English conditionals? Finally, what to make of subjunctives that may imply missing conditions?

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Tender Resentments

What follows is part of an experiment in applying quantitative methods to philology, using the resulting evidence as part of an expanded practice of cultural history. Recent accounts of the early

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modern passions are based on what seem to me to be narrow evidence and excessively theoretical models: a concept of passion is derived from some more or less technical source—humoral discourse, philosophical ethics—and is then used to interpret the dynamics of affectivity in drama and other forms of cultural expression. The result is sometimes called a historical phenomenology: an archeology of the dynamics of early modern affective experience itself. In my view a real phenomenology of the early modern passions would need to come much closer to the way passion was written about across a much broader set of discursive contexts, attending to what is said about passion when passion itself was not the explicit topic of discussion.

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Combinatorial Shakespeare

Popular treatments of Shakespeare often laud him for having “all the best words” – the biggest vocabulary or the most coinages in the English language. Scholars have tended to debunk these superlatives by revealing their basis in mistaken assumptions about history and historical dictionaries (Crystal) or flawed statistical methodologies (Craig; Elliot and Valenza). This paper will explore the prospects for thinking about Shakespeare's linguistic creativity in combinatorial rather than strictly lexical terms. Drawing from Construction Grammar and taking advantage of tagged linguistic corpora, it seeks to develop a rigorous account of combinatorial creativity that extracts the concept from the ideological matrix of bourgeois individualism and Cartesian humanism. Developing such an account, I argue, will require altering longstanding theories of the linguistic sign and thus of the conventional, prefabricated units of combination.

Dr. Kyle Sebastian Vitale (Yale University), ks.vitale@gmail.com

***King Lear* and the Shape of Shakespeare's Questions**

This paper asks how Shakespeare uses questions to explore spiritual and linguistic issues throughout *King Lear*. It positions questions in early modernity's debate over Aristotelian (or differential) and Platonic (or intrinsic) origins of meaning in language. Cordelia's crisis in Act 1 is a crisis of Platonism: she is asked to make her love meaningful only in relation to her sisters' linguistic play, while she prefers to speak only as her love encourages. This crisis – the inability to perform Platonic language – becomes the plays' Genesis fall, rending language itself. This rend becomes obvious through use of questions in the play, and addresses not only character development, but our own assumptions about the use of questions and the things we seek as scholars, citizens, and spiritual beings in our work.

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Professor Jennifer Waldron (University of Pittsburgh), jwaldron@pitt.edu

Movement, Metaphor and Scale in Shakespeare

This paper examines metaphor in Shakespeare in relation to disjunctions of scale rather than oppositions between the literal and the figurative. In this, I emphasize the double-jointed quality of metaphor—its power to produce sensations, actions, and orientations in the world rather than merely describing them. On the positive side, scalar metaphors like the “cipher” of *Henry V* can offer access to phenomena that operate at much larger or smaller scales than are humanly perceptible. But these artificial devices also have the capacity to enter the human-scaled world as programs for action, whether virulent or beneficial. As test cases, I briefly examine a series of female characters whose bodies become subject (sometimes violently) to text-based metaphors, including Lavinia, Hero, and the noblewomen of *Love's Labors Lost*.