

SAA 2022 Participant List – Leader, Devori Kimbro

**Seminar S 18, “Explorations of Cultural Trauma from the Early Modern Stage to Today”**

Confirmed:  
Robin Hizme  
Jeffrey Scott Squires

Abstracts:

Robin Hizme Abstract:

Cultural Trauma in Lodge’s *The Wounds of Civil War: Affecting English National Identity*  
*The Wounds of Civil War* by Thomas Lodge is one of the earliest historical-biographical dramas of the early modern stage and the first Roman play of the Elizabethan theatre. Based on the account in Appian’s *Civil Wars*, translated by W. Barker in 1578, the play chronicles the ten-year power struggle between Marius and Sulla from 88 to 78 B.C. First performed by the Lord Admiral’s Men sometime in 1586-1589, the play is replete with excessive rhetorical and staged violence (inspiring comparisons to Tamburlaine I and II), including a chariot drawn by moors, displays of chained prisoners, stabbings, beheadings, and several massacres.

This essay will explore the extreme violence of this martial play as a manifestation of English cultural trauma in the formative moment of nascent imperialism. The rupture of the Reformation was still being felt privately in the hearts and minds of families and communities, as well as demonstrated publicly in domestic and foreign threats to Elizabeth and the nation: Throckmorton and Babington plots, England’s part in the Dutch Revolt, and the ongoing Anglo-Spanish conflict. The Desmond rebellions, dangers related to the competitive colonial enterprise (including the mystery of the Roanoke colony), and the ever present specter of the plague also may have contributed to the play’s affective impact on English national identity.

Additionally, I will argue that the play contributes to the legacy of the early modern English stage through its depiction of Rome and representation of political, militaristic, and cultural thought.

Jeffrey Squires Abstract:

In this seminar paper, I explore how the spectacle of violence evokes the modes by which people were expected to experience, mitigate, and evaluate trauma. John Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi* (1613) exemplifies how violence, acting as a “sad spectacle,” evoked competing heuristics. How must one act in the face of impending violence, the “ten thousand” doors waiting to be opened? I explore how strangulation affects a ‘fashion’ in death, emblematic of the framework(s) necessary to process this infamously violent production that stages, dissects, and immortalizes trauma. Unlike its source material—Painter’s *Palace of Pleasure* (1567)—Webster’s drama accentuates the Duchess’ stoic agency in the face of death, symbolized when a defiant Duchess kneels before her murderer and effectively fulfills her earlier inquiry: “Do we affect fashion in the grave?”<sup>5</sup> Revolving around a diametric opposition of murder and sacrifice, Webster explores

the semiotics of violent acts, introducing and omitting key elements—including the Duchess' children—to bring into relief how traumatic acts—violence, murder, death—were meant to be experienced or processed.