

Group 1

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Act II, scene iv of *Cymbeline* shows a moment of council between a man who believes himself to be cuckolded, and his two friends. Philario, Jochimo, and Posthumous share notes about the latter's supposedly treacherous wife, Imogen, and between lines 106 and 152, Jochimo reports (falsely) that she had succumbed to his pretended seduction. Philario, meanwhile, exhorts his friend three times to be patient and wait for more evidence. In this paper, I suggest that Shakespeare's discussion of patience in *Cymbeline* reveals an important connection between the advent of skepticism and the growing importance of evidence-based claims in early modern thought – in particular, reflecting the seismic shift from Aristotelian to Baconian epistemological models. In the *Novum Organum*, Francis Bacon decries the Aristotelian method, where the mind apprehends species through intuitive generalizations, that is, directly and passively. In Bacon's representationalist theory, the mind perceives actively but also needs help from his "new" or "reconstructive method" (borrowed from Galileo) – that which "constructs its axioms from the senses and particulars, by ascending continually and gradually." The role of patience in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* anticipates Baconian epistemology and notably gestures toward the development of the scientific method.

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"On Psychological Overrepresentation: *Othello* Between Plato and Wynter"

Sylvia Wynter, in an well-known article, identifies the Renaissance as having given birth to an "overrepresentative" concept of Man which identified the European male as the human subject in general. *Othello* does not endorse so much as it plays with these patterns of psychological overrepresentation and ultimately explodes them, showing the vulnerability of the overrepresentative Platonism of Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio, to the racist pseudo-Platonism of Iago. With the help of Wynter and Frantz Fanon, one can read *Othello* as an important and prescient marker in a history of race and the soul with long-term ramifications for literary, social, and psychological representation.

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"Spinoza and Literature"

In this paper, I discuss how Spinoza's philosophy relates to his friends' and interlocutors' theses on poetics and literature at large, looking at classicist poetics in particular, between England and the Netherlands, as well as literary approaches to verisimilitude and intention. Spinoza developed his philosophy directly in conversation with advocates of "classicism" - and the members of Nil Volentibus Arduum in particular - and so he pays close attention to the connections between affects and actions in relation to imaginations. His is not, however, a dismissal of imagination. On the contrary, Spinoza learns about the power and utility of imagination from his interlocutors. And this is why, I suggest, he is already looking forward to dynamic theses on ideology in the twentieth and twenty-first century, which expand (rather than dismiss) the powers of "ideology" and "critique."

Group 2

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“Shaping Fantasies’: Consolation and Fabrication in A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

“What cause of discord breaks the ties which ought to bind this union of things?”
--Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V Metrum 3

A *Midsummer Night’s Dream* imaginatively plays with Boethian providence and discord, much as it plays with its “source”, Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*. A continuity between the ancient and early modern world, Boethius’s *Consolation* finds in God’s eternal present a providence that manages and harmonizes the discord of the world; Shakespeare’s embrace of chaotic and discordant possibilities in the *Dream* suggests a reevaluation of Boethian providence. In this paper, I will examine how the *Dream* explores the limits of Boethian consolation through a modern thinker interested in the ancient tradition’s conception of human experience: Hannah Arendt. Reading the *Dream* through Arendt allows us to see Shakespeare’s comic transformation of Boethian (and Chaucerian) philosophical consolation in the roles of Bottom and Theseus, who each provide a reading of the chaotic events in the forest. Theseus’s commentary on the lovers’ story poetically imagines “the lunatic, the lover, and the poet” as fabricators who shape the world to suit their image. Shakespeare’s Theseus thus promotes and fosters the world of Arendt’s *homo faber*. Yet, Shakespeare goes beyond the image of the sovereign as providential *homo faber* through Bottom, whose acting (and poetic creation in “Bottom’s Dream”) exceed Theseus’s (and Oberon’s) impositions of order. Managing his experience through sense, memory, and action, Bottom’s goes beyond sovereign forms of order to participatory and phenomenological ways of living through the “causes of discord”.

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“Between Affect Theory and Stoicism: Phantasmic Politics in *Julius Caesar*”

This paper focuses on Brutus’s soliloquy in Act 2 of *Julius Caesar* to explore how Shakespeare reworks Stoic ethical concepts of feeling and agency in ways that speak to the affective turn in literary studies. Affect theorists have found a productive field of study in the fluid, leaky, volatile life of the embodied early modern humoral subject. We have grown more comfortable thinking of early modern subjects less as “true-fixed” and constant identities and more as affectively in motion, becoming, between, as Brutus ruminates: “Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.” What Brutus discusses in these lines is the much-debated topic in ancient philosophy concerning what’s “between” intention and action, how someone is or isn’t *moved* to action. A great deal of the play concerns this problem, not only in terms of Brutus’s decision making but also in terms of attempting to “move” the “constant” Caesar, to the dueling funeral orations that attempt to “move” the people, to Brutus and Cassius’s attempts to persuade one another about military strategy in the last acts of the play. Brutus’s description of “motion” in the soliloquy not only conflates rational volition with the experience of being affected from without; it also decenters the self from an embodied positionality to a fluid process, “between” and amidst rather than precisely *in* material bodies. Gail Kern Paster has noted how Brutus’s soliloquy demonstrates “the impossibility of separating reason and emotion, cognition and affect, action and passion in early modern affect theory.”

The thinking, desiring, feeling self here occurs in and as what Brian Massumi has called a “Real, material, but incorporeal ... dimension *of the body*”—a dimension of affective intensities.

The language Brutus uses to articulate this fluid and mobile subjectivity is taken not from Deleuzian-inspired affect theory but from the philosophy that so inspired Deleuze: Stoicism. It’s a school of thought that, on its surface, seems radically opposed to affect’s decentering of reason and volition. Yet the Stoics did have a term for the pre-rational sensation of feeling, *propathēiai*, often translated as “first movements”—Brutus’s “first motion.” We might think of the Stoic “first motions” as passions—think of a moment when you’ve become blindly angry or inescapably aroused. These motions, for the Stoics, are expressly *not* what we term “emotions,” which for the Stoics are the result of deliberative judgments originating from the rational faculties of the soul: for the Stoics, we get angry not because of something we see or feel, but as the result of a cognitive decision and evaluation of an object or action. This paper seeks to extend Shakespeare’s close examination of Brutus’s psychology outward, wondering whether similarly “insurrectionist” modes of feeling, action, and temporality are at work in the “people” who are indeed “moved” by Antony’s oration, as Cassius fears. *Julius Caesar* opens in a relational, in-between, pushing and pulling affective space: “Hence!” yells the tribune Flavius, “home, you idle creatures, get you home! / Is this a holiday?” If affect exists in the very chaos of incipient motion, “insurrection” (as in Brutus’s soliloquy) only happens once affective intensities are channeled and fixed by emotional narratives—powerful stories composed of what Brutus seems to liken to a “phantasma or a hideous dream.” *Phantasma*—“figments” of imagination in Stoic philosophy that bear no certain resemblance to an external referent—may occupy that in-between trajectory of political motivation, like a “dream” that’s “hideous” to the extent that it veers toward self-interest and away from more transversal ethical commitments.

Group 3

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This paper will test the validity of two ethical theories, Aristotelian virtue ethics and Machiavellianism, by estimating their explanatory power for understanding Richard II and Bolingbroke in *Richard II*. My assumption is that one of the standards for judging an ethical theory is its power to explain people’s behavior including speech. My preliminary conclusion is that different ethical theories shed different light on character, which is an argument for ethical eclecticism.

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On being (a) submissive in Shakespeare

How can the physics and metaphysics of Aristotle and his commentators illuminate the role of force, action, receptivity, and passivity in queer and kinky sexualities, from Shakespeare to the present day? My paper traces the ontology of the sexual submissive by reading phrases like Albertus Magnus’s “Necesse est quod agens repatiatur a passo” (“it is necessary for the agent to submit in turn to the patient”) alongside lines like Rosalind’s “To you I give myself, for I am yours.” Such declarations—from Aristotle and Magnus to Shakespeare’s Rosalind and modern-day writers like Anne Carson and Katherine Angel—affirm the potential of erotic submission to make a self.

I turn to natural philosophy to expand the way we understand erotic submission beyond a role confined to sexual play. While this is true for some submissives, others claim this as a marker of identity that extends through various love relationships. For them, submission is a mode of being in the world by actively yielding to its force.

In focusing on Rosalind in *As You Like It* (arguably Shakespeare's most BDSM title), my paper asks: What might it mean to construct an identity by slipping into someone else's fantasy of you—to essentially become "as you like it?" Magnus's *repatiat*, "to submit in turn," is a verb that sexual submissives know intimately well, from the receptivity and mutuality of *re-* to the "suffering" in *patior* and the passivity of *-atur*. According to classical and premodern natural philosophy, such active passivity (or is it passive activity?) *necesse est*—it is an essential way of being-in-the-world. At the least, I hope to frame it an essential way of being-in-a-Shakespeare-play.

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"Speak What We Feel": Some Episodes from Alternative Histories of the Sublime

The surviving manuscript of *Peri Hypsous* breaks off just after considering the connection between the sublime and freedom, asking whether bold strikes of eloquence, and bold eloquent speakers, can flourish without the social and political institutions of democratic liberty. How can there be sublime eloquence when the institutions of law and politics function merely as empty theater for a tyrannical state? Such attempts to frame sublime genius as a product of a free state are complicated by the ways that sublimity itself is a violent force. Indeed, the experience of the sublime involves the feeling that one's will is being seized and put under the control of an outside force. The metaphors for the sublime frequently involve violent seizures and rapes of the speaker and audience, and those poets and speakers possessed by sublime genius often appear to be in the grips of madness. The sublime simultaneously negates and asserts freedom, its eloquence responding to tyranny while being itself a kind of tyrannical power. In the ancient models for sublime eloquence like those in Ovid, that seizure takes place at the uncertain pivot point between action and passion, that place between reason and passion where the will may find, or lose, its freedom.

During the seventeenth century as *Peri hypsous* began to take a central role in rhetoric and poetics, this connection to republican liberty became well established even among critics writing under the conditions of absolute monarchy. Over the course of the next century, the sublime would model a new science, the aesthetic, where judgment is exercised in matters outside the institutions of law and politics and concerned only with representations of reality and their appeals to the senses and emotions. To experience the sublime in art or nature is to experience the limits of reason from a distance, which enables this subjective experience to be considered objectively. The paradoxes of sublime experience would provide Kant with a way to escape the trap set by Hume, where reason is in bondage to the passions. For Kant, the fear and awe produced by the sublime allow one to use reason to meditate upon its limits and thereby paradoxically recognize the extent of its power. That feeling of awe for the glory of reason, however, becomes in postmodern thought the feeling that reason fails to provide complete access to the truth, the sense that there must be more to say but no words with which to express it.

For the most part, however, modern and postmodern accounts of the sublime take little notice of the premodern sublime. This omission can undoubtedly be attributed to the belief that the sublime was completely lost with the manuscript (mis)attributed to Longinus and that the sublime was then a peculiarly modern creation developed to meet the modern condition. Recent studies, however, have shown the existence of sublime eloquence throughout the premodern period even without that name,

with models found in Ovid, Lucan, Cicero, and others in the Christian and classical traditions.¹ This paper will propose some ways that premodern explorations of the paradoxical freedom and bondage of the sublime can inform postmodern understandings of the sublime, and vice versa. I am particularly interested in moments where the speaker is possessed by the urge to speak against what is felt to be an injustice even if it is in some way unspeakable in the language of its political and moral world (examples of what Lyotard calls the differend). In the sublime, the irrational speaks in order to critique the rational, and audiences can see the limits of reason and its master-narratives.

¹ For example, Jenny C. Mann, *The Trials of Orpheus: Poetry, Science, and the Early Modern Sublime* (Princeton UP, 2021); Patrick Cheney, *English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime: Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson* (Cambridge UP, 2018),