

1. Hailey Bachrach-University of Roehampton

**Title:** *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Redemptive Rape, Then and Now

**Abstract:** When is rape framed as being for a character's own good? This paper will read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through the lens of the 'Cupidian tragedy' as described by Jane Kingsley-Smith in order to explore how Titania's sexual manipulation by Oberon fits into an early modern theatrical vocabulary that does not see her treatment as a violation. I will then look at how recent stage and screen productions of the play at the Bridge Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, and for the BBC have used casting to replicate this moral dynamic, in particular playing with characters' gender and sexuality in casting in order to suggest that the magical overriding of Titania and Demetrius's ability to consent is not only good, but necessary for their growth as characters and perhaps even the betterment of society. Ultimately, these productions suggest that the early modern and present day views of the potential redemptive power of rape are not as sharply divided as we might hope.

2. Emily D. Bryan-Sacred Heart University

**Title:** What's Love Got to Do with It? Taking Up Boy Actors and Powhatan Children

**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the role of consent and authority in early modern letters patent that allowed choirmasters and theatre managers in England to take up children to perform in royal choirs and all-boy theatre companies. Even though the official mechanism for taking up children is silent on the consent of parents and children, this paper traces resistance to this mode of incorporating boys into theatre companies through court cases, account books, and first-hand reports. As the process of impressing boys into the theatre became more fraught, highlighted especially in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, this model of taking up children was revived by the Virginia Company in one of its fundraising schemes to promote the charitable aspects of the Virginia colony. This paper sketches out the way that the all-boy company warrants provided a model for the orders to "take up Indian children" and train them to be English. The early plans for Henrico College anticipated the United States' policies of residential schools and assimilation that would dominate interactions with the indigenous people of America throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

3. Rob Carson- Hobart and William Smith Colleges

**Title:** "The Sociability of Early Modern Consent"

**Abstract:** In one of his sermons, John Donne describes the prefix *con-* as "the sociable syllable," writing: "How much and how often Saint Paul delights in that sociable syllable.... As much also does God delight in it from us when we express it in a *conformity*, and *compunction*, and *compassion*, and *condolence*, and... *in weeping with them that weep*." Taking my cue from Donne, for this seminar I would like to consider the sociability of early modern consent, hypothesizing that the concept might have resonated at the time in a way that was closer to its etymological roots in the Latin verb *cōsentire*: "to feel together, to be in harmony, ... to correspond, to act together." Or to put this another way, I am interested in exploring the tension that we can find in the early modern period between the idea that consent is determined by an individual having a particular thought (*I consent*) or making a particular utterance ("I consent") and the idea that consent emerges from the shared practices of multiple

people within a community, from people feeling together and acting in harmony with one another. I'll use this framework as an opportunity to briefly explore some of the ways that consent is interrogated in Shakespeare's plays.

#### 4. E. Rose Grant- University of Toronto

**Title:** "It is not words that shake me thus" but the "handkerchief!—O devil": Exchanging Words Versus Exchanging Tokens as Expressions of Sexual Consent in William Shakespeare's *Othello*

**Abstract:** In William Shakespeare's *Othello*, the titular character accuses his wife of having an affair with his subordinate, Cassio, and of gifting him Othello's handkerchief: "she did gratify his amorous works / With that recognizance and pledge of love / Which I first gave her" (5.2.211-3). Othello's statement suggests that the handkerchief not only is a "pledge of love" but replaces any need to verbally articulate that pledge. Yet, within the world of the play, the handkerchief is an object that is both freely given and forcibly taken. It is viewed as a love token and as a magical amulet capable of enforcing romantic attachment. The handkerchief's unstable symbolism and means of circulation in turn shape the meaning of the relationships that it is invoked to define. This paper explores the exchange of the handkerchief between Cassio and Bianca, an extramarital, interclass, and, possibly, interracial relationship. At first glance, the exchanging of this "love token" by the couple might be viewed as symbolic of them being equally empowered and unconstrained in their capacities to articulate sexual consent. Further, it might be interpreted as symbolic of them sharing reciprocal feelings. However, since the handkerchief is in fact an ambiguous symbol that has multiple meanings, I suggest that it actually hinders articulations of consent and serves to reinforce class, racial, and gender hierarchies. By replacing words with love tokens, Bianca, like the handkerchief, risks being misinterpreted, objectified, and exploited.

#### 5. Benjamin Hilb- Francis Marion University

**Title:** Listening to Ophelia

**Abstract:** This paper will examine the case of a preeminent white male Shakespearean character whose evident sexual assault of a woman has long been overlooked. In my research to date, only Amanda Bailey has marked the sexually predatory implications of Ophelia's fairly explicit account of Hamlet's incursion into her sewing closet. Ophelia says that he entered ambiguously undressed, grabbed her hand and shook it unto what seems his orgasm, commonly known in the early modern period as *la petite mort*, figuratively signaled in Ophelia's report by Hamlet's sigh so "profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk / And end his being" (2.1.106-108). My paper will consider the scene with respect to early modern English clothing, class, and cases of sexual assault. Then, seeing Hamlet's abuse of Ophelia as a forced hand-to-genital assault shockingly similar to sex crimes recounted by victims of Harvey Weinstein in latter-day Hollywood, the paper will link the lack of attention to Hamlet's sexual molestation of Ophelia to the unjust protection of white males, even criminals, under western patriarchal capitalism.

#### 6. Hyosik Hwang- Chungbuk National University

**Title:** Limited Sovereign Power and Popular Consent: Re-reading *Coriolanus* in the Commonwealth Discourse

**Abstract:** Nahum Tate's 1681 adaptation of *Coriolanus* emphasized obedience to royal power, shaping interpretations of the play towards anti-populism. However, contemporary analyses, notably Annabel Patterson's *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, offer progressive readings challenging this view. This paper explores Shakespeare's political thought by re-reading *Coriolanus* within the context of commonwealth discourse, focusing on limited sovereign power and popular consent. Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* (1583) is considered a pivotal text in understanding this discourse. The play opens with citizens protesting against food scarcity, highlighting their rationality in negotiation. Against Menenius' use of the body politic metaphor to downplay their concerns, echoing the authoritarian views of James I, the First Citizen reclaims the metaphor, advocating for the harmony of each part in the whole body representing the commonwealth. Coriolanus rejects people's participation in the polity, challenging the consensus of mixed monarchy outlined by Smith. He favors absolute power, aligning with James I's absolutist idea, but faces opposition from both the characters in the play and the contemporary audience. The tribunes, though instrumental in curbing Coriolanus's potential tyranny, are depicted as self-serving and manipulative, challenging facile interpretation. The play underscores the complexities of representative politics, encouraging citizens to engage virtuously in civil society to uphold the common good. In doing so, it highlights the importance of limited sovereign power and popular consent in governance as advocated in contemporary commonwealth discourse.

## 7. James J. Marino- Cleveland State University

**Title:** "What Said the Wench?" or, *The Annulment of the Shrew*

**Abstract:** Weddings and betrothals are formal requisites for the ends of comedies, and correspondingly perilous to undertake in the middle acts. The much-debated marriage of Katherine and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, consecrated offstage mid-play, is most vexed at all. It may not be a legal, or legally binding marriage. The text is, at best, stubbornly ambiguous about whether Katherine and Petruchio are in fact married, and scrupulously avoids any sign that Katherine has given her consent.

Most importantly, the play suggests that Katherine has not said her wedding vows. Petruchio, rather than saying "I do" when prompted, has said "Ay," but also cursed and knocked the officiant to the floor. When the onstage witness is asked "What said the wench then?" the answer is "Nothing, but trembled and looked pale." This moment of terrified silence comes exactly when the bride should be asked to make her vows, vows that seem not to have been made. Katherine's silence is taken for consent, even when the law demands her affirmation.

Nor should her father have given her to Petruchio without her consent, over her vocal objections, but Baptista substitutes Petruchio's false gloss for his daughter's plain speech. Even Katherine's dissent is taken for consent. And the play also implies that the wedding is not consummated, with the groom giving the bride a "lecture upon continence" rather than her marital due. (He's kept the bride awake all night, but left her a virgin while doing it.) The strong implication is that this is a marriage without contract, consummation, or consent, which is to say not a marriage at all.

## 8. Emily L. Sharrett- Loyola University Chicago

**Title:** Consent and the Art of Dying Well in Shakespeare's *Antony & Cleopatra*

**Abstract:** This essay is an excerpt of a longer chapter that details the ways in which classically-derived environmental thought intervenes in early modern English death and mourning rituals. I

argue that nature and its perceived affordances inform the framing of death, both by Shakespeare and his Roman characters who use nature to craft the way their deaths are to be remembered. My study of early modern revisions of classical stories that involve death reveals that characters structure their rhetorical appeals in light of the physical world which contains their human affairs and institutions.

Dying is framed in *Antony and Cleopatra* as an unavoidable event that spurs narrative creation, for characters consent to treat death as an opportunity to craft stories for public consumption. Here, I use *consent* in the intransitive form that the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines as “To be in agreement with, or agree to conform to, a statement, doctrine, practice, etc.; to assent.” In my paper, I expand on the insights of Katherine Eisaman Maus and Emily Vasiliauskas among others who have outlined how Shakespeare’s characters engage in “choice-making” processes that are constrained by political and legal concerns and practices in Rome (Eisaman Maus 256; cf. Barksdale-Shaw, Gray, Hadfield, Miola). Yet, I contend that such concerns of politics and law are considered by characters to have both pre- and post-mortem variants. Characters—as they envision how their death story might work to sustain or restructure the physical, political, and legal realms within which the characters move—choose whether to consent to certain collective preferences for the cultural uses of nature in death and mourning practices. My paper explores how and to what end Cleopatra consents to accept or challenge those approved ways of being in and thinking about nature when death is considered imminent. Cleopatra’s death work serves as a case study of the role of consent in death practices that are appraised by individuals and collectives, detailing how collective consent to cultivation practices marks the art of dying well as a socially contestable act.

## 9. Bailey Sincox-Princeton University

**Title:** “What men daily do”: Claudio’s Consent in *Much Ado About Nothing*

**Abstract:** At the altar, poised to marry Hero, Claudio instead accuses her of infidelity, returning her to her father with the words “Give not this rotten orange to your friend!” (4.1.32). Though Hero declares “I talked with no man at that hour, my lord” (4.1.86), Claudio discredits her testimony by reading her body as refutative evidence: “She’s but the sign and semblance of her honour” (4.1.33). In recent decades, scholars interested in *Much Ado*’s “traffic in women” have analyzed the Hero plot in psychoanalytic terms (as bespeaking “castration anxiety” and patriarchal control of language) as well as material ones (as reflecting antitheatrical discourse and reifying aristocratic male prerogative over illusion). In this essay, I will build upon this work by reframing the Hero plot in terms of consent.

I begin with a simple observation: Hero does not consent to marry Claudio. Rather, she tacitly submits to her father’s wish that she accept Don Pedro’s suit (2.1.49-66). When Don Pedro reveals that he has wooed on Claudio’s behalf, Hero accepts the Count for the Prince with equal silence (2.1.295-314). Turning to the gap between 3.2 and 3.3 in which Claudio concludes that Hero is “Leonato’s Hero, [his] Hero, every man’s Hero” (3.2.100-1), I suggest that the interchangeability of Claudio and Don Pedro in Hero’s assumed “goodwill” (2.1.192) is refracted in Hero’s alleged exchange of Claudio for Borachio. In the final section, noting that Claudio’s consent to the Prince’s proxy catalyzes his crisis of belief (1.2.252-84), I argue that *Much Ado* dramatizes female consent as an unstable fiction collectively authored by men. In this light, I suggest that Claudio’s lament “O, what men dare do! What men may do! What men daily do, not knowing what they do!” may be read productively as expressing the limits of coercion.

## 10. Megan Vinson-Indiana University

**Title:** Phillis

**Abstract:** Phillis Wheatley was living at the end of the 18th century. As a child, she was taken from somewhere in West Africa and sold in a Boston slave market to the family of a wealthy merchant. Phillis was taught to read and write by the family, and was given a traditional, Christian humanist education. Phillis went on to become an internationally known poet, publishing in both America and England. Phillis was living in a transition period between the “early modern” and the “modern.” Yet, her poetry feels like Phillis was living a 100 years before her time. She very much models herself as a quintessential, humanist poet. In her poetry, Phillis reaches back to classical figures and places an emphasis on virtue. However, reading Phillis’ poetry becomes complicated for a modern reader because of the ways in which her life was structured by slavery. In this essay, I reflect on how Phillis writes about her own social position, as well as her relationship to time and an aesthetic past. Scholars such as Kim F. Hall and Saidiya Hartman have written about the pain and sadness that comes with encountering unknowability in past literature. Using Phillis’ poetry, I try to think about what it means to accept an unchosen present while still looking back to the past for comfort.

## 11. Robert O. Yates-Graduate Center, CUNY

**Title:** "Keeping the King's Peace: William Lambard's "The Duties of Constables" and the Comedy of Policing in *Much Ado About Nothing*"

**Abstract:** Shakespeare’s constables are often funny. Dogberry (*Much Ado About Nothing*) lightens the plot with his laissez-faire approach to policing the streets of Messina – the exact opposite attitude one tasked with “keeping the king’s peace” should exude. Is he unaware of his duties? If not, how exactly would he learn the duties of the constable?

Printed throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, William Lambard's "The Duties of Constables" conduct manuals detailing the duties of constables and other “such inferior ministers of the peace” offers some possible answers. These materials maintained a vibrant life in print thanks to legal writers, law students in the Inns of Court, and clerks.

I explore materials of the English constabulary in relation to comic constables to argue that Shakespeare’s audiences might laugh at the constable to giggle at the crown indirectly. Still, Dogberry and these manuals invite us to question whether laughter dampens the crown’s authority vis-à-vis the constable or extends it through theatrical production. I propose questions about identifying and responding to power and authority in an early modern English figure, which persists in the “literary” and the “real” today: the figure of the police.

## 12. Matthew Zarnowiecki- Touro University

**Title:** Fairest creatures we desire: Shakespeare’s sonnets and consensual beauty

**Abstract:** This essay seeks an extended critique of consensual and non-consensual beauty. I begin with two of Shakespeare’s canonical statements on beauty in sonnets 1 and 127, especially “From fairest creatures we desire increase” (1.1). To examine this eugenic fairness, I begin with Kim F.

Hall's examination of beauty and fairness and their increasingly fraught opposition to blackness in early modern poetics and then move to Elaine Scarry's connection of fairness in aesthetics to fairness in ethics. Finding in these two explorations of fairness some major contradictions, I then seek some resolution or development in contemporary responses to exclusionary, oppressive, and non-consensual beauty standards and practices, particularly from black feminist and disability studies, encapsulated by a (2018) special issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly* on the subject of "Beauty." These responses are perhaps a way to connect Shakespeare's construction of a nonconsensual lyric "we" to practices and standards that instead accent consensus, collectivity, and consent in the realms of lyric expression and beauty as well as in the realms of justice and fairness.