

SAA 2024 Seminar 34: Shakespeare and Scale

Caro Pirri

(University of Pittsburgh)

Jennifer Waldron

(University of Pittsburgh)

Seminar description:

When the Chorus of Shakespeare's *Henry V* describes actors as "ciphers" and "crooked figures" in the great "account" of history, he positions theaters as laboratories for the exploration of scale. We invite papers taking any critical approach to early modern "figures" of scale, from the theatrical and aesthetic to the epistemological and the technical. We also welcome those considering scale from methodological perspectives, such as distant/close reading or race and periodization.

Discussion Groups:

Group 1: Poetry and Scale

Rayna Kalas, "The Scale of Consent"

Jim Knapp, "Andrew Marvell and the Poetry of Scale"

Luke Wilson, "That Holy Integer: Scale and Number in Wroth's Crown of Sonnets"

Group 2: Global Scale

Jane Degenhardt, "Infinity, Kind, and the Production of Race in *The Tempest*"

Alexander Paulsson Lash, "Mushrooms, Cloves, and the Scales of Global Connection"

Anita Raychawdhuri, "Star-Crossed Lovers:" The Scales of Desire and Cosmic Racial Imagining in *Romeo and Juliet*

Group 3: Scalar Disturbances

Piers Brown, "Shakespearean Affect at Scale: Passionate Feeling, Meteorological Disturbance, Crowd Trouble"

Robert Darcy, "*Doctor Faustus*, *Hamlet*, and the Dread of Quantum Scale"

Adam Rzepka, "'The airy scale': Weightless perspective at the Dover Cliffs"

Group 4: Scale, Embodiment, and Performance

Allison Deutermann, "Pompey, played out"

Richard Preiss, "The Revolutions of *Tamburlaine*"

Maggie Vinter, "Human Scale in *Titus Andronicus*"

Abstracts:

Piers Brown
Kenyon College
brownjp@kenyon.edu

Shakespearean Affect at Scale: Passionate Feeling, Meteorological Disturbance, Crowd Trouble

How do feelings work at scale? Although usually thought of as intimate and interior, the early modern passions were also seen as deeply interlinked with the wider world. This connection is not merely metaphorical or an example of the pathetic fallacy, but a reflection of natural philosophy governed by Aristotelian theories of motion and Galenic humors in a ‘meteo-physiological’ circuit (to use Rebecca Totaro’s formulation). As such the passions offer a particularly useful case-study for central questions of scale theory: to what extent are phenomena at one scale incommensurate from those generated at another? What does it mean when similar forms appear replicated at different scales? One way to get at this problem is via a consideration of disturbances: the motions on the surface of individual bodies; of crowds or audiences; of the sea, forests, and clouds. In my essay I will focus on a series of terms that appear across Shakespeare’s plays—stir, ruffle, coil, trouble—and examine the sorts of scalar thinking they imply.

Robert F. Darcy
University of Nebraska, Omaha
rdarcy@unomaha.edu

Doctor Faustus, Hamlet, and the Dread of Quantum Scale

This paper interrogates the early modern usage of the word “quantum” as an indeterminate numerical and spatial amount. The communion bread of Christ was written in the period as having a “quantum” of Christ’s body, for example. But the concept of the “quantum” would get reimagined through modern physics in attempting to explain what happens at extremely small physical scales. Did the early moderns think about an inconceivably small scale of existence? Does Hamlet’s infinite space in a nutshell convey some consciousness about scale as an answer to some of the more difficult philosophical and indeed physical problems of the universe, rapidly unfolding to Renaissance science? And what is the architecture of the bridge connecting an early modern use of a word and its modern usage, through inheritance or cooptation? How does “quantum” come to express a departure in physics from conventional understanding?

Jane Hwang Degenhardt
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
janed@english.umass.edu

Infinity, Kind, and the Production of Race in *The Tempest*

In tandem with new astronomical developments led by Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and others, Neoplatonic philosophers such as Agrippa, Ficino, and Bruno gave rise to the possibility of an infinite universe and a plurality of worlds. My paper seeks to consider how the concept of infinity – a concept whose unfathomable scale exceeds the ontological capacities of space and time –

translates into a new cosmological understanding of natural abundance and diversity. I am particularly interested in exploring how the idea of an infinitely diverse cosmos might compel a rethinking of understandings of singularity, novelty, and kinds. In his essay “Of A Monstrous Child,” Montaigne explains how the perception of monstrosity results from a failure to recognize the infinite diversity of nature. Whereas nature’s full potential for diversity is afforded by God’s infinite vision, it exceeds the scope of human perception. It follows from Montaigne’s reasoning that in an infinite universe, there can be no singularity or alterity; rather, there can only be kinds. As he argues, our human perception of singularity results from our limited ability to perceive the larger “arrangement” and “relationship” that is inherent to the cosmos. Turning to Shakespeare, I aim to examine how plays such as *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Tempest* helped to apprehend a new awareness of an infinite cosmos by cultivating new understandings of kind, kinship, and race.

Allison K. Deutermann
Baruch College, CUNY
allison.deutermann@gmail.com
Pompey, Played Out

In 1592, Thomas Nashe celebrated the theater’s capacity to bring long-dead heroes back to life. Such resurrections happened not just once, but repeatedly--or, as Nashe writes, “at several times”--in each performance of the play (or plays) in which that character appears. What effects might such repetition have on the stage’s most popularly (re)represented figures? When does a resurrection become a running joke? My paper begins with the deceptively simple observation that the figures who best embody classical notions of glory--the kind of eternal, monumental renown usually understood in opposition to the more fleeting kinds of fame or popularity associated with celebrity--are some of the most repeatedly represented characters on the early modern stage. As embodiments of eternal fame and as frequently staged early modern dramatic characters, classical figures become useful for theorizing the attenuation that is caused through repetition. I focus on Pompey, who is routinely reduced in the work of Shakespeare and others from Pompey “the great” to Pompey “the big.” This reduction through repetition, of being made the (often literal) butt of a joke, draws attention to the processes of mediation through which such reduction takes place and to the forms of popular publicity they helped to make possible.

Rayna Kalas
Cornell University
rayna.kalas@cornell.edu
The Scale of Consent

Shakespeare uses the verb “scale” twice in the space of 50 lines for Tarquin’s assault of Lucrece: “On her bare breast ... his hand did scale” and “I come to scale/Thy never-conquered fort.” In doing so, he borrows from but also comments on Marlowe’s description of Leander with Hero in her bedchamber: “the ivory mount he scaled.” Hero’s own escalating desire is the sign of her consent (though her desire is also described as a treason against her chastity), whereas Lucrece’s “blue veins” run pale as Tarquin escalates his assault. The paradoxes of chastity, which Marlowe renders as comedy, are “scaled” to tragedy in Shakespeare’s poem. Tyranny is repeatedly expressed in *The Rape of Lucrece* through the rhetoric of scale (escalation, gradation, quantity, the relation of the microcosm to the macrocosm). Yet the poem also articulates alternative scales (interval, variation,

transposition, scattering) through which Lucrece, rather than Brutus, amplifies the apparently private violation of “her” rape into a public outrage and the occasion for a constitutional revolution of consent against tyranny. Joining her voice to Philomel’s, Lucrece imagines that, through her self-sacrifice, she can “hum on Tarquin still...as frets upon an instrument.” Brutus may take up the oath to revenge, but it is Lucrece the “(poor citizen)” who “pleads in a wilderness where are no laws” who wagers constitutional change by “publish[ing]” Tarquin’s treason with her “bleeding body.”

James A. Knapp
Loyola University Chicago
jknapp3@luc.edu

Andrew Marvell and the Poetry of Scale

In “On a Drop of Dew,” Andrew Marvell transports the reader from a world contained within the “little globe” of a dewdrop to the “clear region” of the “skies” from which it came. As the poet imagines a world contained within the dewdrop, the movement from the vast expanse of the sky and cosmos to the tiny drop poised on the petal of a rose produces a vertiginous effect. Soon to be annihilated by the sun’s light and its inevitable evaporation, the drop temporarily “encloses” the “region” from whence it came to stave off corruption from its earthly fall. In the second half of the poem, Marvell extends the drop’s experience to that of the embodied soul, eventually destined to be free and return to “the glories of the almighty sun.” Marvell’s movement from the tiny world of the drop to the expansive sense of God’s created and eternal domain exemplifies the period’s attention to scale as a key enigma shaping human experience. To represent the salvific potential of the soul’s hoped-for departure from the created world, Marvell relies on a complex scalar operation. In this paper I draw on Joshua DiCaglio’s *Scale Theory*, and particularly his concept of the “ego-structural problem,” the fact that situated human perception is always in tension with scalar phenomena that exceed the perceptual affordances of that scale. Taking Marvell’s poem as a case study, I argue that Marvell approaches the incomprehensibly vast nature of the divine through the image of the drop, which is both contained by the world in which it lies and container of that world, if only for the brief moment during which it exists prior to evaporation—a metaphor for bodily dissolution and reconstitution with the larger theological frame.

Alexander Paulsson Lash
National Taiwan University and Stockholm University
alexander.paulsson.lash@gmail.com

Mushrooms, Cloves, and the Scales of Global Connection

This paper puts the arguments about the scalability of global capitalism in the work of the anthropologist Anna Tsing into conversation with John Fletcher’s experiments with staging the scales of global connection in *The Island Princess*. Against the repeatable, efficient, and homogenizing forms of scalability that Tsing sees as having arisen in the early modern slave plantation, her *The Mushroom at the End of the World* traces the global movements of the matsutake mushroom, which thrives in the ruins or aftermath of attempts to treat forests as scaled-up industrial resources. The growth of matsutake cannot be manipulated or scaled up by human intervention, even as what seems like human destruction of the forest ecosystem is what has created the conditions for its thriving in certain places. I read the Ternate and Tidore of Fletcher’s play as a

site that stands at the opposite end of the four-century long history of scalable global capitalism, with Tsing's forest and Fletcher's island as bookends. In both places, a variety of ways of imagining global connections jostle up against each other, revealing the fragility, as well as the potential for violence, inequality, and hatred, of global scale-making projects.

Richard Preiss
University of Utah
richard.preiss@utah.edu

The Revolutions of *Tamburlaine*

Two facts define the reception history of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587). Together with *The Spanish Tragedy*, it was the first commercial blockbuster of the English stage, spawning dozens of imitations (including its own sequel) and legions of devoted fans, who flocked to its endless revivals and continued to cite, quote from, and fantasize about it for decades. Centuries later, meanwhile, modern critics still struggle to pinpoint the cause of this runaway success – to explain why exactly it seized the imaginations of playgoers, and what in the nature of early modern theater it seized upon to do so. For some, its power inheres in the sheer charisma of its protagonist, whose boundless ambition and indomitable will made him an object of fascination and dread for audiences variously invested in or disaffected with the strictures of the Elizabethan class system. For others, the play's innovations are technical ones, its rhetorical complexity, thunderous histrionics, and the grandeur of Marlowe's blank verse allowing it massively to amplify the sublimity of its themes. For still others, finally, its most profound experiments are semiotic, marshalling the full resources of theater to form totalizing spectacles that seem to transcend representation, while at the same time forcing its viewers into ambivalent affects it refuses to decide for them. The distinctions of *Tamburlaine* thus occupy multiple scales, from the microscopic to the cosmic, from the line to the speech to the scene to the geography of the play (and the world) as a whole. Rather than choose one, this paper embraces them all, so as to add a further, overarching level that collapses the orders of magnitude between them. To account for the sensation of *Tamburlaine*, I suggest, we must consider the sensation of *Tamburlaine* – the actual experience of seeing it as early modern playgoers would have seen it, in repertory, which meant seeing it over and over. The play abounds with internal units that tirelessly recycle themselves: phrases, tropes, numerical fetishes, syntactic structures, visual tableaux, an episodic, unvarying, thrice-reiterated plot. Repertory activates these elements and reveals their purpose. Redoubling and compounding the rhythms of their own internal repetition, reperformance blurs them together to create something like the cyclonic, dizzying effect to which contemporaneous descriptions of the play's audiences attest, and which the play itself dramatizes: ravishment, transport, the self-loss of unmooring from linear time and space, leaving one “gaping” and “dead-stroke.”

Anita Raychawdhuri
University of Houston, Downtown
anita.raychawdhuri@gmail.com

“Star-Crossed Lovers:”

The Scales of Desire and Cosmic Racial Imagining in *Romeo and Juliet*

A scalar concept of much interest to me is the “cosmos.” Early moderns were grappling with the “loss” of the Aristotelian cosmos, while new technologies expanded the sense of what the heavens

might mean. Thinking with the heavens also can open up considerations of multiple worlds or the world beyond our “world” if we are willing to think with multiple scales. This multiversal perspective can work to both uphold and challenge early modern formations of national identity (which was profoundly racialized). Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* references the heavens at a number of moments, such as Romeo and Juliet being “star-crossed lovers,” Romeo’s call to “Turn back, dull earth and find thy center out” (2.1.2) or Juliet’s plea to Romeo of “Oh, swear not by the moon, th’inconstant moon / that monthly changes in her circled orb” (2.1.151-2). The lovers also both use astrological imagery to describe each other’s beauty. This paper asks why does the play repeat such a scaling up of love and earthly actions towards the heavens? Furthermore, the play’s use of the heaven’s often invokes contrast, usually of the bright stars versus the dark sky. The tension between light and dark is also apparent in Romeo’s description of Juliet in relation to the “jewel in the Aethiop’s ear” or “a dove” to a “raven,” or the lovers’ conscious differentiation between night and day. I want to suggest that there is an organizing racializing logic to the hierarchy of the universe in *Romeo and Juliet* as well as how early modern England imagined scaling up towards the heavens. Yet, in turn, the world-making possibilities of thinking with the stars can also upset normative framings of the family, community, country, and world.

Adam Rzepka
Montclair State University
rzepkaa@montclair.edu

“The airy scale”: Weightless perspective at the Dover Cliffs

My title quote comes from “A Lover’s Complaint” (where a “phraseless hand...weighs down the airy scale of praise”), but my paper takes up the issue of scale in the “Dover Cliffs” scene in *King Lear*. In that scene, Shakespeare orchestrates a dazzling set-piece in which a blind and suicidal Gloucester is led by the disguised Edgar to the edge of a vast cliff that is not there. From this imagined vantage, Edgar conjures for his father a vertiginous perspective that relies on metonymic recursions and paradoxes of scale: boats and birds look like parts of themselves; the silence of the absent waves on the absent pebbles becomes evidence of how distant they are.

And then Gloucester throws himself off, onto the same stage on which he is already kneeling. When Edgar awakens him, he magnifies Gloucester’s redemption by describing his supposed fall as a miraculously weightless drift and a return to the vital weight of embodiment: “Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air, / So many fathom down precipitating, / Thou’dst shiver’d like an egg: but thou dost breathe; / Hast heavy substance....Thy life’s a miracle.”

I am interested in two things, here: first, the interplay between “scale” in the seminar’s sense and “scale” as an instrument measuring weight; and second, in the ways in which direct early modern corollaries like Dürer’s *Melancholia I* and Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* prefigure that interplay. Ultimately, I would like to say something about the nature of the (dis)knowledge that inheres in this particular kind of vision.

Maggie Vinter
Case Western Reserve University
mlv28@case.edu
Human Scale in Titus Andronicus

This paper places *Titus Andronicus* in dialogue with contemporary scale theory. Recent work by thinkers like Joshua DiCaglio, Zachary Horton and Derek Woods has noted the ethical and epistemological problems inherent in frameworks of measurement that center the human, and have emphasized rupture, discontinuity and incommensurability in a bid to resist anthropocentrism. In some respects, *Titus Andronicus* anticipates these critiques. From the sacrifice of Albarus that instigates the revenge plot to the cannibalism that concludes it, characters deploy the bodies of themselves, their family members and their enemies in order to understand and influence larger systems such as the Roman empire, the natural world and a putative cosmic system of justice. The play tests the limits of the human body's ability to represent, affect or compensate for forces and entities existing at grander orders of magnitude. In many respects, the play appears to confirm the limitations of the human as a yardstick for measuring larger systems in which individuals are embedded. Rather than stabilize a political or natural order, the progressively more mutilated, alienated and atomized bodies of the play demonstrate how different humanity looks at different scales of existence, and register the costs of attempting scalar alignment on a somatic level. Yet I want to attend to what the play's bodies reveal, rather than on what they fail to convey. The play encourages us to see anthropocentric conceptions of scale less as an ignorance or disregard of inhuman perspectives than as an indication of how the human and the inhuman can become violently and painfully interrelated. Moreover, the measuring bodies within *Titus Andronicus* suggest we should look for ways to historicize the human in humanism and complicate our notions of what anthropocentrism means before we simply reject it.

Luke Wilson
Ohio State University
wilson.501@osu.edu

That Holy Integer: Scale and Number in Wroth's Crown of Sonnets

Wroth's crown of sonnets, conventionally regarded as part of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, seems to have been unique (in English) in being composed of 14 sonnets, suggesting a scalar relationship between the number of sonnets in the crown and the number of lines in each of the sonnets. This essay considers some of the implications of this scalar analogy, including the tension between the circularity required by the crown form (where each sonnet must begin with the last line of the preceding sonnet, and the last sonnet must end with the first line of the first sonnet) and the expectation of forward movement implied in the loosely syllogistic structure of the individual sonnets. To the extent that the crown is one big "sonnet" consisting of fourteen 14-line parts, we should find – and we do – a volta in the ninth sonnet, and a volta of the volta in the ninth line of that ninth sonnet. The essay ends by considering how Wroth's rhyme words, and particularly her strikingly frequent use of a rhyme cluster including "move" and "prove" mobilizes similar tensions at the level of the individual line.