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Seminar 44
Shakespeare's Sentences
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Paper Abstracts

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Lara Dodds
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"Wroth's Forms: From the Sentence Up"

Wroth was an accomplished writer of many literary forms, including the sonnet, the sonnet sequence, romance, and drama. My paper for this SAA seminar will eventually become part of a chapter that provides an overview of Wroth's forms, with a particular focus on the intersection of lyric and narrative in *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* and *Urania*. Like other women writers, Wroth's early critical reception was shaped by detraction—the identification of her works as "bad," "boring," or "difficult." This framing obscures Wroth's distinctive formal innovations in the sonnet, sonnet sequence, and romance; I revisit this critical reception in order to provide an alternative account of Wroth's forms that celebrates her distinctive contributions to literary history through attention to the stylistic qualities of Wroth's writing. My overarching aim is to provide readers with critical tools for appreciating and analyzing Wroth's use of form at several different scales, from the larger structuring frameworks of Wroth's chosen genres to the more local elements such as rhyme, versification, prose style, and figures of speech. For this seminar, I will be building these critical tools with the sentence as my starting point. Or, in other words, I will define Wroth's forms "from the sentence up." What are the characteristics of Wroth's sentences? What are the syntactical elements shared across the romance and the sonnet, and which elements are distinctive to each? Ideally, my research for this seminar will result in pedagogically and critically useful guidelines for comprehending and appreciating the excellence of Wroth's sentences.

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Darlene Farabee
University of South Dakota
"The Paradoxes of Shakespeare's Sentences in *All's Well That Ends Well*"

The negation and loss that permeates *All's Well That Ends Well* originates in the sentence structures of the play and undermines forward movement of the play. In many ways, the

undermining of the comedic genre on display depends on the pull of the characters' past and the negations of the play's present. Expressions of opinion, ideas, punishments and sentences of words strung together are undermined and negated in a multiplicity of ways. The word "no" appears in *All's Well* more often than in any of the other comedies; similarly the only comedy with a higher frequency use of "but" than *All's Well* is *Measure for Measure. All's Well* also has the highest frequency of the word "cannot" of all the comedies. In this paper, I suggest that the undermining of generic expectations in the play are rotted in the negations at the sentence level; this reading may allow us to read differently the ending of the play.

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Lynne Magnusson
University of Toronto
"Poetic Sentence Architecture in Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus: Prologomena* and Examples"

This paper focuses on poetic sentence architecture in Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. It aims to show what a significant role grammatical and syntactic experimentation plays in her poetic art, whether forms are being used to create virtuoso poetic effects, to frame distinctive mental landscapes, to rehearse passion inflected by gendered power relations, or to influence a specific addressee or wider audience. Virginia Woolf gave primacy to this largely neglected critical issue when she advanced the study of women writers in English: "before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty. . . ." And, indeed, "difficulty" has been a main theme when Wroth's poetic syntax is considered. With the recent emergence in early modern studies of feminist formalism, the time is ripe to consider gendered sentence-making as an important element of Wroth's technical craft. This paper lays out some groundwork, introducing and adapting both historical vocabulary and methods of modern-day linguistic analysis to the task of characterizing Wroth's sentences. The paper concludes with an example of intertextual conversation between Wroth Philip Sidney focused on their uses of "correlative verse" and illustrating how poetic and sentence forms interact.

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Nick Moschovakis
"Conditional sentences in Kyd, Lyly, Marlowe, and Shakespeare"

I define a conditional expression as any utterance – whether or not a modern editor would punctuate it as a syntactically complete and correct English sentence – that presents the referent of an apodosis (consequence) as following logically or causally from that of a protasis (condition). Such expressions take many verbal and grammatical forms besides their prototypical form, the if-construction. (To give just one example: "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," Genesis 2:17 [KJV].) Most, though not all, expressions of this kind can in fact be punctuated as complete modern sentences. Accordingly, I will call them "conditional expressions," and I will hope that the Venn intersection with "sentences" as such (whatever these may be) looks significant enough, to most seminar participants, to warrant the discussion of such

expressions as an interesting class of early modern English "sentence." In ongoing work I'm exploring how Shakespeare uses conditional expressions as tools for narration and emplotment: for example, to attribute motives to characters, to proleptically narrate possible futures, and to articulate causal relations in a play-world (relations that may or may not seem actually to obtain). My question this time will be: was Shakespeare innovative in using them thus?

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Stephanie Pietros
University of Mount Saint Vincent
"Syntactic Resistance in the Early Modern/Modern Sonnet"

"You have to master the rules in order to break them"—that is the truism sometimes evoked to explain the more traditional, frequently earlier works of *avant garde* artists. But at least in the case of modern and contemporary sonnets in English, such an explanation misses that the form itself, through its heightened intertextuality and self-referentiality, is always, to some extent, about resistance. Put another way, sonnets are almost always breaking, or at the very least putting pressure on, their own rules. While modernist poetry tended to reject traditional poetic forms and poetics in favor of experimentation, traditional fixed forms of course persisted, perhaps especially the sonnet, which had achieved its standard English language form in the early modern period. Although they are in many ways different, e.e. cummings, Claude McKay, and Edna St. Vincent Millay all wrote sonnets, and I will consider through 3 representative examples, all mined the inherent tension in the form, particularly that between the sentence and the poetic line, to resist and interrogate heteronormative white patriarchy. While tempting, it would be a mistake to attribute this resistance and these poets' innovations on the sonnet form entirely to their time period or to aspects of their identities. It is my contention that these modern sonnets deepen into meaning when we read them through early modern sonnets, particularly Shakespeare's sonnets to the so-called dark lady. While sonnets, early modern and modern, need to be read in their unique historical contexts, the pervasiveness of the form necessitates scholars think across periods as well.

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Tracey Sedinger
University of Northern Colorado
"There's something about Macbeth"

My essay will focus on the following lines from *Macbeth* 1.7:

> If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly: if the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success; that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come.

What intrigues me here is the use of the irrealis mood (conditionals, the subjunctive, etc.) to

imagine alternative courses of action. For Macbeth, the conditional and the subjunctive operate as a way to think about the perennially problematic relationship between action and consequence. Paradoxically, Macbeth's initial desire for a successful violent action that accomplishes all his desires leads him to imagine a future without futurity. He thus rejects the plan to murder Duncan, raising the possibility that for us, he could be something other than what he will become.

Shakespeare, I will argue, uses forms of grammatical mood to free historical figures from the determinism of his source materials. I am interested in using possible worlds theory to articulate how audience members and readers might think about a Macbeth who does not kill Duncan while still remaining (recognizably) Macbeth. That there is at least one possible world in which Macbeth does not kill Duncan is necessary, I will argue, for a tragic experience that generates pity (if not fear). For if Macbeth were merely a figure whose actions were subordinated to a historical plot whose end is always already known, he would cease to be the kind of character with whom audience members and readers can identify and for whom they/we can feel. And without our investment, our identification and affect, tragedy could not perform its political and ideological labor.

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David Vaughan
Northwestern Oklahoma State University
"As You Like If: The Conditions of Virtue and Truth in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*"

When he tells Jaques that there is "much virtue in 'if'" (5.4.94), Touchstone draws attention to the way in which *if* creates the conditions for virtue to emerge. In this sense, virtue may mean power and/or moral matters. But to what end does Shakespeare employ this virtue in a play full of "ifs"? This project has two objectives. First, following a question in the seminar prompt, I would like to explore *how* and *why* Shakespeare uses the "different impulses of poetry and the sentence to create meaning and aesthetic pleasure." By examining conditions contrary to fact at key moments in the play, this project will consider how Shakespearean virtue resides in sentences that obscure and clarify, that destabilize truth and grant aesthetic pleasure. Second, as a Miltonist coming to Shakespeare, I suspect the idea at the center of this project may have already received critical attention, but through the collaborative discussion emphasized by Travis and Shankar as a central part of this seminar, I would like to learn how this project might develop into a useful contribution to extant scholarship on the play.