Reading Faces and Bodies on the Early Modern Stage
Seminar Leaders: Sibylle Baumbach and Michael Neill

ABSTRACTS

Joshua Brazee (University of Wisconsin-Madison): " 'And his ingle at home': Boys and the Representation of Gender in Jonson's Epicene"

Through an investigation of Ben Jonson's *Epicene*, I propose to interrogate Stephen Orgel's contention that boys and women were understood in the Renaissance not as "antithetical" to each other but to men; that in the Renaissance, boys and women could be substituted for one another. If we consider both the original performance of the play—by the Blackfriars Children in 1609—and the many jokes and puns on gender instability, we can see both how the play undermines Orgel's theory of gender, and opens up other possibilities for understanding gender in the Renaissance.

Early on in the play, Clerimont's sexual banter with his boy strongly suggests that Clerimont sees him as a potential rival. Although the boy is allowed to be with the ladies in ways the men are not, it is understood that his sexual maturity poses a potential problem for the men. This recognition at the start of a performance by a boy's company introduces gender and sexual instabilities, which are taken up in jokes, insults, and innuendo. These make the gendered relationship between boys and men and boys and women less clear. If the sexual maturity of the boys is a problem of which everyone is aware, then it is not as if their masculinity sinks into the background in favor of some more ambiguous gender identity.

While it is not entirely clear what conclusions we may draw from this play about gender in the Renaissance, it does strongly indicate that the problem is much more complicated than a mere antithesis.

Ashley Brinkman (Columbia University): "The Stage and the Sympathetic Passions in Renaissance England"

This paper focuses on sympathy – also known as the sympathetic passions and fellow-feeling – on and off the Renaissance stage. It concerns itself with the ways in which characters onstage respond to each other's emotions and what stage displays of communal emotion might tell us about a play works on its audience. To this end, the essay examines emotionally charged scenes in Renaissance tragedies and puts them in dialogue with anti-theatrical tracts of the period. In plays, the sympathetic passions have the power to change how characters relate to and interact with each other. The anti-theatrical tracts, on the other hand, imagine a world in which spectators sympathize with characters in "prophane plaies," channel characters' emotions, and alter their behavior and affections according to what they see onstage. In examining the sympathetic passions on the stage and on the page, this paper seeks to answer the following questions. How does sympathy differ from pity? What are the social stakes in moments of sympathy? What are the limitations of reading the anti-theatrical tracts' comments on the sympathetic passions against staged representations of them?

James M. Bromley (Miami University): " '*Ecco La Fico*': Gesturing in/toward the History of Sexuality"

This essay examines references to anal-oral sex on the early modern stage in order to challenge the interpretive matrices that structure our histories of sexuality. I start to uncover these references by way of the history of the gesture known as the *fico*. In plays such as Jonson's The Alchemist, Shakespeare's Henry V, and Middleton's More Dissemblers Besides Women, I find anilingus, or more colloquially "rimming," to be implicated in medical discourse, courtesy, nationality, and even the boundary between human and animal. Anilingus unsurprisingly tends to figure negatively in these discourses, associated with waste and disease, flattery, foreignness, and bestiality.

Perhaps surprisingly, though, references to this practice do not seem extensively implicated in the discourse of gender difference; it can involve two men, as in Gammer Gurton's Needle, or a man and a woman, as in The Taming of the Shrew. Responding to this practice's gender indeterminacy, previous critics have substituted the vagina for the anus or the penis for the tongue in analyzing these references, hoping to reintroduce genitality and gender difference and thereby locate sexual identity. Alternately, critics have tended to apply to these references the rubrics of sodomy and/or scatology with which rimming overlaps but to which it is not reducible. I seek instead to focus on the practice's particularity and use its gender indeterminacy to offer one way into the history of sexuality that brackets the search for inchoate forms of sexual identity in early modern texts. After all, what modern identity is specifically organized around anilingus?

This is, thus, not an essay about how widely practiced anilingus was in the early modern period. Instead, I am mapping out the cultural sites to which early modern audiences connected anilingus, and my unusual route through the history of gesture provides an example of how we might expand our points of entry by bringing unexpected histories to bear on the history of sexuality.

Jim Casey (High Point University): "A Man's Office, a Woman's Shield: Reading Gendered Bodies as (In)Appropriate Sites of Violence"

In his book-length study of Shakespeare and Violence, R.A. Foakes notes that "Violence has always been associated chiefly with masculinity," describing violence, and a fascination with violence, as inherent traits of human beings-"especially males," "especially among males," "especially men," "especially males," "usually a man," and "especially in males." The gendering of violence is so common that it is not even a cliché; it is a truism. Derek Cohen is typical in his assertion that "women are the obvious and natural victims of violence within patriarchal structures" and "Acts of violence belong to patriarchy as surely as fathers do."

But Shakespeare's plays challenge the common, nearly universal claim that, as Teresa de Lauretis puts it, "the subject of violence is always, by definition, masculine," and the object of violence is always, by definition, feminine. Instead, Twelfth Night, Macbeth, Much Ado About Nothing, and King Lear all demonstrate the fact that, while men may be the subject of violence, they are also the more appropriate object of violence. Violence is, after all, "a man's office." Women, on the other hand, are the obviated, unnatural victims of physical violence within Shakespeare's patriarchal structures, shielded by their feminine bodies, which are read as inappropriate sites of violence. Male and female bodies both have violence enacted upon them, but violence against male bodies is laudable, while violence against female bodies is shameful.

Vanessa Corredera (Northwestern University): "'False face' and 'False heart': Faces, Characters, and Physiognomic Tension in *Macbeth*"

Macbeth and Banquo's encounter with the witches establishes Macbeth's potential future and incites the play's dramatic action while at the same time developing important recurring thematic interests and discourses, notably the interest in and discourse of the signification of the body. Neither Macbeth nor Banquo know who or even what the witches are, leading Banquo to ask, "I'th' name of truth, / Are ye fantastical or that indeed / Which outwardly ye show?" (1.3.50-52). Banquo's question creates a division where the "fantastical" or imaginary directly contrasts with "outward show," which stands in for the correlating piece of the binary, the "real." In other words, for Banquo, the body serves as a representation of reality that can be known and understood. Yet at the same time, he struggles to read the body, as revealed in his description, "You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so" (1.3.43-45). These lines demonstrate Banquo's continual inclination to interpret the body, and coupled with his subsequent emphasis on "outward show," they introduce two significant sets of interests. This first is the tension developed by reading these lines together. Banquo wants the body to provide knowledge that can help him understand these strange figures that appear menacing but "sound so fair" (1.3.50). Yet the body does not work that way; it cannot be read easily, for the beards on these otherwise feminine-looking figures complicate his understanding of them. Thus, his confusion illuminates the tension between believing that the body signifies some sort of legible truth and the body's failure to do so, what I term the "physiognomic tension." The second interest is the site Banquo turns to for bodily interpretation in his noting of "skinny lips" and beards—the face. Examining both these interests, I contend that *Macbeth* explores the "physiognomic tension" specifically through the discourse of the face. Ultimately, the play reveals a deep concern over the breakdown of epistemology and order when this tension cannot be resolved and a desire for a world in which the tension does not exist.

Edward J. Geisweidt (University of Alabama): "'Cherishing a Loathsome Excrement': Reading the Variant Scenes of Faulkner's Enforced Haircut in *The Book of Sir Thomas More*"

The early modern English regarded their hair with a certain cultural ambivalence rooted in a dispute over the nature of that bodily substance. Was it a proper body part partaking in the life and nourishment of the body, or was it excrement analogous to the other bodily waste products? In this essay, I examine how the collaborative authorship of the play *Sir Thomas More* reflects the dual notions of hair's bodily status. The scenes involving the long-haired ruffian Jack Faulkner reveal an understanding of the varied ways in which hair created or sustained both personal identity and human status. Both the original play text and a revision portray the state-mandated haircut of the long-haired ruffian, Faulkner, whose reaction to his barbering differs from one text to the next. In both the original and revised versions of his scenes, Faulkner is defined, as a character and as a representative English body, largely by his hairstyle. What changes between the versions is the type of identity that hair is thought to create, and the extent to which haircuts are imagined to change one's identity. Drawing on the moral and humoral discourses on pilosity, I read More's reading of Faulkner, and Faulkner's reading of himself, as substantiated by the competing philosophical understandings of the nature and bodily status of hair itself.

William Germano (The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art): "Cassio's Lips"

Othello 3.3, the narration of Cassio's dream, is a fantastical erotic quartet in which three men and one woman are represented by two male bodies. The language of Iago's narrative, with its explicit physical direction and play-acted homoeroticism, generates an unanticipated theatrical shock. Cassio's dream -- neither dream nor Cassio's -- is a case study in the early modern physiology of ephialtes (the incubus or nightmare), the limits of agency, and the dangers of sleep. This essay reads the dream narrative against its most potent reinterpretation, the Verdi-Boito *Otello* (1887), examining the role of verbal economy and musical expression in shaping dramatic meaning. Despite the linguistic constraints operating in Boito's libretto, Verdi's operatic treatment offers an interpretation of Cassio's "dream" that illuminates the function of mouths, bodies, and subjects in Shakespeare's tragedy.

Tiffany Hoffman (McGill University): "Unmasking the Shy Body: Bashfulness, Blushing, and the Limits of Pride in *Coriolanus*"

As a recurring image in *Coriolanus*, the blush has received competing interpretations. For some scholars the hero's blushing signifies virtue and modesty, for others it becomes a sign of the shame, abasement, and humiliation Coriolanus suffers when he stands in the market place unable to expose himself to the Plebs. In considering classical and early modern moral and medical tracts on blushing, bashfulness, and *the fear of shame*, I argue that the hero's many self-conscious references to his fear of blushing are revelatory of his sense of guilt. If exposed, Coriolanus' blush would reveal his pride and heroic self-interest, qualities that conflict with the self-abnegating public service demanded by the Roman republic. Throughout the play the hero attempts to retain his honor and self-sufficiency by concealing, masking, and at times angrily fending off his uncontrollable propensity to blush. When traditional tactics of facial and bodily concealment are no longer available, I suggest that Coriolanus' fear of blushing extends into bashfulness. As a socially inhibiting emotional response, bashfulness protects the boundaries of the self against the physiognomic gaze, yet at the same time it is a hyper-social emotional state that fractures the hero's egocentrism and autonomy. I uncover Coriolanus' ethical and social reintegration into Roman society, something that is not overtly apparent, by paying particular attention to the gestural and corporeal language of social humility and to the hero's ability to read relational meaning into the blushing of other characters.

Naomi C. Liebler (Montclair State University): “Bare Ruin’d Choirs: The poet faces (and bodies) old age in the sonnets”

As part of a longer project on Shakespeare’s geezers, my paper for this seminar focuses on the sonnets. Written across the poet’s lifetime (from his late 20s until their quarto publication when he was 45), these poems show a persistent obsession with aging, its process, its betrayal of face and body, and what today is called the biological clock. A cursory reading identifies a dozen or fourteen among these that address the threat, the toll, or the warning of encroaching old age, inscribed mainly upon the face (though sometimes also on or in the body). This obsession raises a number of questions: is age, like gender, neither more nor less than a social construct? What is the truth-value, the weight, of such perception? When youth looks at age, what does it see, and how is that different from what age sees when it looks at itself? Mirrors, too, come under discussion in these poems, raising questions about the relation of visual perception to assignments of values such as beauty, accuracy, deception, distortion. The sonnets enclose a trajectory (though not in any consensus of order) arcing from anticipation or apprehension to regret, much of it visible (or imagined as such) upon the face. And yet, these poems are also in the main poems of courtship (the poet’s own or his intended reader’s), describing an optimism in tension with resignation, a torsion/distort(s)ion of assumptions about aging, a generous push toward “generativity” and at the same time a self-conscious narcissism.

Liam J. Meyer (Boston University): “Outing the Upstart: the Signifiers of Social Mobility”

My submission will use Pierre Bourdieu’s writings on bodily hexis and class habitus to examine moments of social evaluation and classification in London comedies. I’m interested in how the failed performances of gentility by upstarts and parvenus begin to interrogate the social construction of gentility itself. Maintaining status and collective identity in the early modern world involved what Bourdieu calls the “ideology of charisma.” Elite groups must legitimate their exclusions via a process of “social alchemy” whereby learned behavior is presented as a marker of innate or essential difference. The central paradox of gentility was, of course, its foundation in both myths of the inborn superiority of certain groups and a complex matrix of culturally acquired fashionable tastes and behaviors. Dramatized representations of keen social perception –seeing through bluffs by reading someone’s origins—ostensibly serve conservative ideologies of class essentialism, but these “outing” scenes threaten to disrupt the ideology of gentility by revealing the body to be a socially produced artifact. Focal texts depend on which exact section I end up submitting, but likely candidates include *Every Man Out of his Humor* and *Michaelmas Term*.

Kelly Neil, “The Performing Suicidal Body and Kaleidoscopic Space”

Tentatively titled, “The Performing Suicidal Body and Kaleidoscopic Space,” my paper explores the ways in which attempted suicides on the stage make visible the performative aspect on which all suicides rely for their symbolic power. Indeed, the very term *felo de se*, the legal description of a felonious suicide in early modern England, translates as “felon of the self,” and imagines two selves occupying the same body while questioning the very terms of bodily ownership. As both a legal “fact” and a fiction, suicide is a uniquely theatrical crime that demands new ways of imagining the self and the self’s relation to its body. In *King Lear*, Gloucester’s attempted suicide is a purifying act which reunites father and son by remedying

Gloucester’s madness. I argue that this is because suicide invites moments where one’s inwardness is imagined as coming to the surface of the body where it can be read, defined, categorized, and possibly re-written. This moment shows how the power of a suicide can be in its performance, and how suicide can have functions other than being a visual symbol of despair or a representation of heroic bravery. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra performs attempted suicides in order to evoke pity or effect political change by manipulating Antony. As acts imagined to be private but actually intensely public, suicide in Shakespeare’s plays offer us new ways of thinking about space. Lacan’s concept of kaleidoscopic space may be particularly useful because these performances have implications for both those who perform it and those who observe and judge it; the playhouse audience, like the eye witnesses and jurors in suicide trials, delineate the boundaries of not only the suicide’s selfhood, but their own as well.

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Anna Riehl (Auburn University): “Face as Text in Early Modern England”

This paper explores the ways the early moderns articulated their views of the face as a text. Conduct books, popular in the period, were concerned with composing the face. At the same time, physiognomic treatises provided guidelines for reading the face. These two genres were complementary in the Tudor period. Both seek to empower their readers by maximizing the rhetorical potential of the face. In doing so, ironically, these writings work at cross purposes. The crucial difference in approaching the face through the courtesy books and physiognomic treatises is defined by their investment in the human face as a fixed or mobile entity. The courtesy books assume conscious control of mobile physiognomy, thereby treating the face as a mask to be manipulated. Not only fixed physiognomy lies outside the scope of these conduct writings, but they also omit the possibility of an unconscious mobility of the face. This idea is present in many of the classical texts in which the face reveals even when it is supposed to mask. The focus here is on production rather than interpretation, composing rather than reading. The physiognomic treatises, in contrast, deal primarily with fixed physiognomy and the problem of interpretation, rather than production. These books are rarely interested in how one’s features have acquired a particular shape or color: their approach to a face as a set of stable significations brackets the fleeting facial expressions as a source of meaning.

David Schalkwyk (The Folger Shakespeare Library): “Proper Names and Common Bodies”

This paper examines the effect of embodying the proper names that resonate in mythology or history with the burden of accumulated ideological meaning on Shakespeare's stage. If, as Juliet remarks, a name is neither “hand nor foot/ Nor arm nor face nor any other part/ Belonging to a man”, then how are proper names conjoined to common bodies in the theatre? Is there a space in the making flesh of the name that the theatre necessitates, for the body carrying the name to change or divert its weighted historical significance? The paper will focus on the embodiment of Cressida as the archetype of female faithlessness in Shakespeare's play, with some glancing references to Cleopatra and Juliet's analysis of her lover's name.