

**“Cease more questions: Thou art inclined to sleep”:
Anatomizations of Shock in *The Tempest***

In the final scene of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Ariel leads Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, Antonio, and their attendants into the center of a “magic circle” that Prospero has traced on the stage (5.1 stage directions). Having determined to abandon his art, Prospero resolves to lift their enchantment within this circumscribed space: “My charms I’ll break, their senses I’ll restore, / And they shall be themselves,” he proclaims, before drawing the circle with his staff (5.1.31-2). As a symbol of reunion and integration, the circle’s inscription stands in stark contrast to what we might anachronistically call Prospero’s power to induce states of dissociation in his subjects: that is, his ability to render others no longer themselves – to shock them – as when Caliban describes that Prospero’s “pinches” “[m]ake us strange stuff” (4.1.233,234), or when Prospero “incline[s]” Miranda into the “good dulness” of enchanted sleep, meeting her threatening inquisitiveness with his chilling command, “give it way – I know thou canst not choose” (1.2.185; 185, 186). Indeed, through the vehicle of Prospero’s magic and that of his proxy, Ariel, who in his capacity to “[flame] amazement” seems the very personification of psychic shock (1.2.198), *The Tempest* presents a spectrum of dissociative conditions, from ecstatic “wonder” and “amazement” to various states of numbness and embodied distress, beginning with the play’s titular crisis, the tempest itself, which causes Ferdinand such fright that, with hair “up-staring— then like reeds, not hair,” he throws himself overboard (1.2.213). This paper will look closely at such descriptions of estrangement from the self, paying particular attention to the *ligature* that Shakespeare develops between experience *in extremis* (not only shipwreck and physical torture, but also romantic love and dramatic spectacle) and the emergence of an altered state of consciousness. What might depictions of shock reveal to us about the anatomization of crisis in the period? And furthermore, what might we make of Gonzalo’s dramatic assessment, in the play’s final act, that there is a productive dimension to the shock that the king’s men have experienced: namely, that “in this poor isle . . . all of us [found] ourselves / When no man was his own” (5.1.212-13)?

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Here and Not All Here: Consciousness and Early Modern Out-of-Body Experiences

In a sermon on the Resurrection, John Donne remarks that at the general Resurrection, “*Ego*, I, I the same body, and the same soul, shall be recompact again, and be identically, numerically, individually the same man. [...] I shall be all there, my body, and my soul, and all my body, and all my soul.” Donne immediately contrasts this with his present condition, adding: “I am not all here, I am here now preaching upon this text, and I am at home in my library considering whether St Gregory, or St Jerome, have said best of this text, before.” He then makes a similar observation of his congregation, saying, “You are not all here neither; you are here now, hearing me, and yet you are thinking that you have heard a better sermon somewhere else, of this text before; [...] you are here, and you remember your selves that now ye think of it, this had been the fittest time, now, when everybody is at church, to have made such and such a private visit; and because you would be there, you are there.” Donne describes an experience of the self and of the relationship between sensory perception and thought that is simultaneously embodied and disembodied. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Salerio describes a similar experience when, in response to Antonio’s opening statement that he has “much ado to know [him]self” because sadness has made a “want-wit” of him, he responds: “Your mind is tossing on the ocean” with your “argosies.” In my paper, I consider the implications of comments like these for theorization about the mind-body relationship (and its application to audience experience) by drawing upon cognitive theories of consciousness and, in particular, research into out-of-body experiences, other examples of being “not all here.”

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Abstract: The Burdens of Mindreading in Shakespeare's *Othello*, or How Iago Gives the Lie to Cognitive Theory

Critics have generally agreed that Iago's power over Othello stems from his exquisite attunement to Othello's temperament. Iago's evil seems to be sourced in his talent for what cognitive theorists would describe as "mindreading," the relative ability to access imaginatively another's mental world and, in Iago's case, to manipulate cruelly that world. Inversely proportional to Iago's mindreading ability would be the mindblindness or metacognitive deficits of Othello, who seems too obtuse and closed-off from others to fathom Iago's unimaginable designs. This paper attempts to integrate a cognitive and psychoanalytic approach to understanding Iago's character: if theory of mind helps us to understand Iago's hyperattunement to others (as well as his problems with self-attribution), psychoanalytic theory can supplement the cognitive approach in helping us to assess the manner in which Iago works through his theory of mind impairments.

Jessica Tooker

SAA Abstract: Shakespeare and Consciousness

Title: Hath Not the Audience Eyes?: Onstage Violence and Empathetic Witnessing in *The Merchant of Venice*

Shakespeare called it a “comedy.” That said, it is no secret that *The Merchant of Venice* generates ethical uncertainty in the observant audience member. Aside from the infamous pound of Antonio’s “fair flesh,” that spectacular specter that remains in the audience’s collective mind throughout the play, the audience is subjected to scenes of violence (predominantly verbal and psychological) that problematically stimulate conscious responses to what it witnesses. If we pause to ask why the play demands this type of forked ethical engagement, we must also ask what and where the interpretive gains are when we witness an act of onstage violence. For, I’d argue that when we witness onstage violence we move past a purely mimetic, one-sided relationship to the performance (the actors touch us, we don’t touch them) towards engaging with the performance as a series of interactive sites, each of which rebound our gaze back onto ourselves. Clearly the interaction between actors and audience is not reciprocal in the traditional sense, but the exchange of affect is there: we feel it on our bodies and in our minds, even if we can’t respond “in the moment” to the actors provoking our feelings. If we pause to validate our affective responses to what we are witnessing onstage, to privilege them as legitimate interpretive guides to our understanding of the play, it becomes clear that there is much that is weirdly sacrificial—and reciprocal—about the “spectatorial” process of what I call “empathetic witnessing.” For this reason I argue that, regardless of the obvious heterogeneity of the audience members, a collective, empathetic response is often required by the “affective technologies” of the play itself. To this end, my paper examines how the audience’s “inefficient” processing of the onstage violence (visual, verbal and psychological) against Shylock, becomes the morally and ethically productive “X-Factor” of the play that reveals why interpreting him as a humane figure is, inarguably, the right reading.

Lachlan Malone

“Mark me”: Rendering Celestial Dissonance in *Hamlet* (Revised Abstract)

The 1970s saw the rebirth of moral panic and occult lore in suburban America. Often labeled the “satanic panic” in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, preachers identified pervasive sound, embodied in contemporary black metal music, as the instrument behind subliminal messages that supposedly provoked sexual abuse and enticed youths to practice hellish rhetoric. Likewise, the 1580s through to the 1620s heralded a flux in English anti-Catholic literature that depicted Roman Christians as contagious vessels capable of infecting impressionable minds. Similar to the “satanic panic” that swept throughout America, Protestant polemicists recognized dissonant sound to be a cognitive trigger that could spark treasonous acts and stimulate buried inherencies. Indeed, this Protestant consciousness reimagined the relationship between dangerous sounds and English corporeality. Perpetuating the notion that hearing certain noises could induce specific, hellish reactions in a susceptible body, early modern plays, sermons, and scientific accounts relay to readers the dangers of hearing illicit reverberations. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a markedly unique text, however, in that it personifies the aforementioned early modern beliefs whilst reducing said beliefs to conscious decisions through fashioning the experience of hearing. This paper, then, will not only analyze the scientific and religious impact of sound on the early modern body, but it will also suggest that Shakespeare’s ghostly tragedy calls into question the role of a dominant belief once it impassions a collective psyche with spiritual fervor.

Jennie M. Votava
Shakespeare and Consciousness Seminar
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***Hamlet* and the Phenomenology of Conscience**

Abstract

Recent analyses of the role of conscience in Shakespeare's plays have emphasized the moral and theological underpinnings and the personal as well as political ramifications of this fundamental concept in early modern psychology, which in certain ways prefigures later notions of selfhood, subjectivity, the "unconscious," and even "consciousness." In *Hamlet*, a play concerned with both the status of the self-conscious subject and the transformation of internal awareness into external action, various permutations of the concept of conscience also coexist.

Returning to the word's basic etymology from the Latin verb *conscire* (literally "to know with" or "to know together") as well as invoking theories of mind including Aristotelian and Thomistic psychology, early modern treatises on the conscience, and twenty-first-century cognitive neuroscience, my reading of *Hamlet* examines the conscience as a cognitive faculty that takes on a crucial mediating role both within the play and in our own phenomenological encounters with Shakespearean drama. Like theater and, indeed, like consciousness itself, conscience in *Hamlet* depends for its function upon the proper integration of the "internal" and "external" senses. The problem of "knowing with" thus becomes not only a moral problem but also a problem of epistemological coherence – both within individual minds and between and among different minds, in the context of both the theater and the (mind-) body politic.

Head in the Clouds:
Historicism, *Hamlet*, and Neurophenomenology

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What's consciousness to historicism or historicism to consciousness? This paper seeks to outline the complicated and often strained relationship between New Historicism and subjective experience, examining both the criticisms of New Historicism for failing to account for aesthetic experience as well as New Historicism's attempts to analyze various dimensions of experience in Renaissance England. I conclude that both sides of this debate betray a pronounced uneasiness with the current methodological models, and I advocate for a *neurophenomenological* approach, which involves reciprocal constraints between first-person phenomenological reports, third-person scientific data, and historical-cultural information. Although this is a relatively young method, it remains the most promising way to do justice to the texture and power of experience while remaining sensitive to cultural and historical differences. After a brief description of neurophenomenology and a consideration of some potential points of friction with New Historicism, I provide a neurophenomenological reading of *Hamlet*. Using both Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness and modern cognitive science studies of temporal experience, I argue that memory in *Hamlet* is used only as a gateway to an examination of the subjective dimension of time. By attending to invariant biological constraints, contemporary experience, and cultural-historical information, neurophenomenology can bridge the gap between contextualist and formalist approaches to the play.

Zsolt Mohi

An Involuntary Shift in Othello's Mode of Perception

In the course of his hearing before the senate of Venice, Othello presents us with two ways of seeing: he subdues his audience, as he did Desdemona, and elicits their sympathy with an immediate, unreflected sensation of images, and then demonstrates with examples that he is able to rise above this to the level of a socially conscious, ideologically conditioned perception of his world. He applies these modes of perception to facilitate his inclusion in the political elite of Venice, first via the help of his rapport with Desdemona, then at the expense of it. In a half-conscious agreement, Othello enters an anachronistic feudal mechanism of exchange, a symbolic vassalage, in which he offers military service for the Duke's endorsement of his marriage. The terms of the agreement, however, exclude him from the possession of his wife and remove him from the city. The dreamlike, timeless ideological mechanism of vassalage, at the same time, envelops his consciousness and determines his perception until he awakes into a nightmare.

Irene Middleton

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SAA Seminar: Shakespeare and Consciousness

“Blood and revenge are hammering in my head”: Lavinia’s Effect on an Audience

In Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* Aaron adroitly blends the physical and metaphysical—blood pulsing through his brain conducts the idea of a bloody revenge. Audience members watching live theatre similarly negotiate twisting paths among physical stimuli and interpretation, among unconscious and conscious cognitive processes. The 2006 production at Shakespeare’s Globe, directed by Lucy Bailey, created emphatic physical responses from attendees. This production increased empathy for Lavinia in the opening scenes by creating a romantic connection to Bassianus. On Lavinia’s gruesome return in 2.4, this empathy caused audience members to turn away, groan, and faint as she revealed the extent of her injuries. The intensity of the reaction was guided by the “realistic” physicality of Lavinia’s injuries but also by the cognitive processes that make sense of Marcus’s speech. Together, these elements inspire grief and a sense of guilt over the pleasure taken from the spectacle of horror. Wanting to eliminate these negative emotions, audience members are led by the play to turn their grief and guilt into a longing for revenge.

The conscience of Shakespeare's inheritance: an approach to productive engagements with the playtexts

Sergio Nunes Melo

Abstract

Despite editorial variations, Shakespeare's scripts have been considerably stable since the original practices; their immanence therefore is not as problematic as their transcendence. After all, at a time of glorification of unrestricted relativism, productions of the plays may cynically appropriate the cultural capital of their pretexts with little – if any at all – engagement with them. Shakespeareans have polarized as to the nature of a productive relationship of the playtexts with their contemporary stagings. On the one hand, Alan C. Dessen divides these scholars into “historians” and “modernists” and defends “the assets in recovering the original ‘logic’ of presentation.” (1984, 156) On the other side of the spectrum, “modernists” claim the text does not contain objectivities that can be transferred to the scene. W. B. Worthen asserts that “[w]hether it is possible to recapture early modern subjects in contemporary performance seems [. . .] at best an open question [. . .].” (1994, 54) Drawing upon Roman Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art* (1947-8), which remains insuperable as a phenomenological reference, this paper will argue that both current theoretical approaches are reconcilable. The paper will identify and localize the strong points and shortcomings of both perspectives while arguing its standpoint is truly in tune with Deconstruction.

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**RECOVERING THE PRODIGAL: INWARDNESS AND MONARCHY IN
SHAKESPEARE'S SECOND TETRALOGY**

This paper proposes that in using Katherine Maus and Harry Berger Jr., among others as starting points, we can look towards Richard II and Bolingbroke/Henry IV to establish inwardness as a necessary, and necessarily balanced, prerequisite of theatrical kingship. With either too much or too little inwardness, respectively, the king's jeopardize their ability both to rule and to rule successfully. Looking at the plays of *Richard II* and *Henry IV Part 1* will provide a model for approximating just how much inwardness is needed in order for a king to be successful. Having demonstrated the importance of a balanced royal inwardness, this paper will then push towards a reading of Hal's famed soliloquy in *1 Henry IV* in a Machiavellian light—and ultimately the entire persona of the Prince—as the projection of a false interiority which Hal constructs over the course of the Henriad, essentially putting into practice lessons learned from the kings preceding him. Taking a skeptical approach allows us to depart from the traditional narrative that Hal “knows he never *was* but only *played* the prodigal” (Berger), and doing so for the sake of arguing that Hal's royal ambitions are mere self-delusion and, ultimately, that this process of self-delusion unfolds unto a unified portrait of Henry V that accounts for the many facets of his character, including his intermittent ruthlessness and seemingly practiced stoicism.

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“These deeds must not be thought after these ways”:
Macbeth and Lateralized Brain Function

The character scripted by Macbeth’s dialogue and soliloquies presents readers with problems. If he has a conscience, how can he commit murder in cold blood? Why does he praise the woman who verbally unmans him in order to persuade him to kill the king? How could an experienced commander hear “until/ Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill/ Shall come against him” (4.1.108-10) and not immediately think of camouflage? Readers may argue that Macbeth is evil, insane, or titillated by horror, but such interpretations ignore the ways his speeches throughout the play reveal a troubled or, more precisely, a divided mind. As Stephen Greenblatt has observed, “If the mind is subject to ‘supernatural soliciting’ (1.3.129) from some bizarre place, it is gripped still more terribly and irresistibly by ‘horrible imaginings’ (1.3.137) from within.” (822). More precisely, from within the right hemisphere of the brain. That is, examined closely, Macbeth’s language reflects a dichotomy in cognition that some psychologists describe as left-brain vs. right-brain thinking, with the left hemisphere’s activities centered on temporal, sequential, and other forms of analysis; logic; denotative use of language; and mathematics, and the right hemisphere’s functions involving insight, emotional expression, visual and other sensory information, artistic expression, and connection/nonlinear association (connotation, punning/ humor, figurative language). The “left hemisphere is better at using the rules of grammar, whereas the right is better at understanding metaphors”; the left governs literal use of words, while the right hemisphere enables us to connect words and images in unexpected and non-literal ways. Lateralized thinking is, of course, a modern formulation. Shakespeare and his contemporaries might have identified these modes as thinking vs. feeling, reason vs. imagination/ fancy, mind vs. soul and conscience or heart, and/or as masculine vs. feminine styles of apprehension and expression; these are all concepts the play’s characters apply or imply in reflection. That Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have no clear way to articulate these distinctions in cognition, or to affirm the power and/or value of right-brain as well as left-brain modes, is what leads them to collaborate in planning and enacting Duncan’s murder, to alienating themselves from themselves and each other, and, in Macbeth’s case, to committing more murders. Their deaths mark their return to acting on the basis of lateralized thinking: that is, when they cease to prioritize left-brain thinking and instead incorporate rational/systematic and emotional/associative modes of reflection, what they find in the mirror of consciousness is unbearable.

Josh Magsam
SAA 2013

Revised Abstract

“There’s No Such Thing”: Embodied Cognition and Metarepresentation in *Macbeth*”

As E.O. Wilson notes in the foreword “from the scientific side” to the 2005 anthology *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, “[t]he mind is a narrative machine, guided unconsciously... in creating scenarios and creating opinions” (xi). Macbeth himself represents just one instance in which a particular mind can be seen in the process of constructing a narrative that protects itself from the pangs of a guilty conscience. I take Macbeth as an independent agent capable of higher-level cognitive acts, and focus on interpreting the processes behind those actions in order to analyze his words and behavior for purposes of textual interpretation. As such, I emphasize the text and de-emphasize the contemporary theoretical framework underpinning this reading, although I draw attention to primary theories and perspectives on embodied cognition and its effects on human behavior throughout. Broadly defining the cognitive mechanisms at work in this process, I then demonstrate how Macbeth subconsciously constructs a narrative that allows him to disavow complete responsibility for Duncan’s murder by picking up on elements of sense data from the natural world (the feel of the dagger in his hand, the howl of a wolf, the moonlight) to construct a scenario in which he is merely an agent of a larger, more powerful consciousness. Macbeth engages in an act of embodied cognition which enables him to off-load even his “black and deep desires” (1.5.83) onto the supernatural consciousness he perceives to be guiding his steps, and thus the words and actions of the character provide a textual cut-away model of the mental processes underlying unique instances of creative story-telling which aid decision-making functions.

Marie Theresa O'Connor

Abstract for Shakespeare and Consciousness Seminar

The Phenomenology of "Perfection": *Macbeth* and the Union Issue

My paper considers how King James VI and I's controversial project to unite Scotland and England following his 1603 English accession raised questions about how the world may or must be perceived and how *Macbeth* may have intervened in such phenomenological uncertainty. In an essay on James's Union project, Conrad Russell reflects: "it has been borne in upon me while I have been preparing this essay that the crucial ambiguity over whether James ruled over one body or two pervades the whole of the official literature of the subject." This paper follows up on the phenomenological implications of such ambiguity over what exists, whether "Britain" or Scotland and England. During the Union issue, which lasted from roughly 1603 to 1608, James asked his subjects to regard an immaterial world (Britain) as superior to what actually legally and institutionally existed. In a 1603 proclamation, James theorized Britain as formed and needing only to be "perfected" and commanded his subjects during this work of perfection mentally to inhabit "Britain," in other words, to perceive England and Scotland as already united. This paper argues that *Macbeth* focuses on a paradox in James's idea of Britain as needing only to be perfected, specifically in the idea's simultaneous demands that James's subjects perceive a superior immaterial world as already accomplished and that they actively interpret what is that world and how might it be realized.