Early Modern Sensory Interactions (SAA 2016 Seminar)

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Abstracts

Pavneet Aulakh (Vanderbilt University)
Feeling Sight and Sensuous Knowledge in *King Lear*
In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Edmund's promise to provide his father, Gloucester, with "an auricular assurance" (1.2.92-93) of Edgar's patricidal intention suggestively echoes Othello's desire for the "ocular proof" that will confirm Desdemona's infidelity. Though these phrases ("auricular assurance" and "ocular proof"), with their invocation of testimony, squarely position them within the field of law and the determination of facts, they equally place them within an inherited rhetorical tradition, specifically its treatment of what the Greeks called *enargeia* and the Romans *evidentia* [vividness or perspicuity]. In focusing on *Lear*, this paper seeks to develop the connection between language and sensuous experience explicit in Quintilian's treatment of *evidentia* as a rhetorical strategy that makes the verbal visual. Drawing on the latter's citation of a Senecan example of *evidentia*, in which he provides an instance of hearing-as-seeing that suggestively prefigures Gloucester's own experience of blindness, as well as Michel Serres' distinction between a knowledge rooted in æsthesis and the anæsthetizing effects of language, it will concentrate on the exchange between Edgar and Gloucester on the cliffs of Dover to address what *Lear* thinks it means to see something feelingly.

Jessica Beckman (Stanford University)
Picturing the Devotional Poem
It is a truth universally acknowledged that the 1633 print edition of *The Temple* does not hold a candle to Tanner 307, the presentation manuscript of George Herbert's text produced by the community of scribes at Little Gidding. This essay interrogates what sensuous experiences are seemingly lost between manuscript and print, and proposes that print must find alternate methods for catalyzing devotional experience. It asks: if *The Temple* printed by Buck and Daniel is indeed a failure, what alternatives proved successful? How might we see a Protestant interest in devotion as a sensuous experience, so readily available in manuscript, translated into print? This essay argues that the multisensory investments of Herbert's text speak to how sensuous experience is reimagined even when it is at odds with Protestant iconoclastic theology.

Roya Biggie (CUNY Graduate Center)
'Restless Passions' and Sensory Empathy in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*
This paper orbits around questions of itinerant passions and disembodied sorrow in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. As Hieronimo encounters the lifeless body of his son, Horatio, hung from a tree, he does not mourn the loss inwardly; rather, Hieronimo describes how his "restless passions" move beyond his body and destroy the surrounding landscape. I suggest that, through these moving passions, Hieronimo engages in a series of sensory and transformative encounters. Hieronimo locates his passions first within a stranger's face and ultimately within his son's bloodstained handkerchief. Drawing on theories of vision and tactility in early modern medical texts, including Wright's *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* and Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia*, I argue that a disembodied understanding of sorrow—in which the passions travel beyond the body's frame—inspires empathetic bonds, allowing the bereaved to merge with the deceased.

Specifically, I examine Hieronimo's encounter with Bazulto, another bereaved father, and Hieronimo's fixation with Horatio's handkerchief. Hieronimo experiences a moment of solipsistic empathy as he gazes upon Bazulto's face and sees his own image within the stranger.

This moment is short-lived, and Hieronimo quickly shifts from seeing his own reflection to mistaking the stranger for his son. I suggest that Hieronimo's externalized view of grief, embodied within his moving passions, leads him to conflate his own physicality with that of his son. In the play's final moments, as Hieronimo clasps his son's handkerchief, he imagines himself and Horatio interwoven within the fabric's threads. I argue that, in doing so, Hieronimo discovers an expression for his sorrow and physically merges with the spectral presence of his son.

Darryl Chalk (University of Southern Queensland)
Simular Proof and Senseless Feeling: Synaesthetic Overload in *Cymbeline*
Cymbeline is filled with moments where characters are forced to process complex sensations. In these instances of intense sense-awareness, standard sensory experiences overlap and become confused, challenging in particular the veracity of the 'surest sense': sight. Touch, hearing, and taste regularly supplant seeing as modes of determining the legitimacy of objects or events. Innogen, upon waking from her drug-induced coma, which has been "murd'rous to th' senses" (4.2.330), and finding what she thinks is the headless corpse of Posthumous, cannot believe what she sees—her "dream" (299) must be "felt" (309) as she touches parts of Cloten's body to confirm the seeming "shape" (311) of her beloved. The "simular proof" (5.6.200) concocted by Giacomo to falsify Innogen as an adulterer, a "picture, which by his tongue being made" (175), dupes Posthumous into seeing what he only hears: a synaesthetically confused vision of the false Italian "tast[ing] her in bed" (2.4.57). The play features repeated images of the senses pushed to their limits: eye-strings crack, ears are infected or wounded, taste is overwhelmingly bitter or poisonous. Becoming 'senseless' (the term appears more frequently in this play than in any other by Shakespeare) is a frequent response to such sensory overload as characters are seized by sleep or dream states and the desire to be unfeeling. With such ideas in mind, this paper will examine *Cymbeline*'s intricate sensorium, reading its synaesthetic perceptions in the context of emerging early modern thinking about the embodied mind's interaction with the world in treatises concerned with medicine, disease, and the passions.

Rana Choi (University of Chicago)
Unconscious Knowing
There are numerous instances in Shakespeare where the body seems to know otherwise than what a disguise would have one believe: in *Twelfth Night,* Duke Orsino falls for Cesario; in *Winter's Tale*, Leontes and Perdita somehow feel compelled to try and touch the "statue" Hermione as one would a real person. In each case, it appears as though some sense perceives something other than what is the main object of another sense modality. It is also possible that, as in Daniel Heller-Roazen's account of Aristotle's doctrine of *aesthesis*, "the senses perceive something other than their characteristic sensible objects; [Aristotle] grants that sight, for instance, receives something other than the visible and that hearing, in the same way, perceives something other than the audible."

In this paper I will explore instances where the senses respond astutely to a situation, and overcome masks and disguises to inadvertently discover the truth about a situation, even unknownst to themselves. While depicting situations of this kind of sensing of vitality seems to be Shakespeare's specialty, the inverse—the sensing of the draining of the sense of life—may be more Marlowe's specialty.

Natalie Elliot (St. John's College)
Shakespeare's Sense Experiments in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*
In the past several years, scholars have begun to take note of the many allusions to scientific theories and technological innovations that appear in Shakespeare's plays. Some have explored Shakespeare's presentation of Copernican astronomy in *Hamlet*; others have explained the

significance of atomism and corpuscularism for *King Lear*; still others have observed Shakespeare's attention to novel technologies, including gunpowder, the compass, and the printing press. This line of research is significant because it draws our attention to the fact that Shakespeare, in addition to being deeply familiar with the science of his day, also used his dramatic poetry to respond to the burgeoning scientific world. One of the most significant features of Shakespeare's dramatizations of science is that he captures moments of cognitive disorientation that arise with the spread of new theories, particularly theories that have not yet been verified empirically. Frequently, he presents characters who are grappling with cosmologies implicit in new scientific theories, and he often has them turn to unconventional forms of sense experience to try to make sense of the world. By exploring a series of sense experiments that Shakespeare presents in *Hamlet* and *King Lear,* we can deepen our understanding of Shakespeare's fascinating view of the scientific debates of early modernity.

Natalie K. Eschenbaum (University of Wisconsin, La Crosse)
Playing with Sensation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the characters, whether human or faerie, attempt to distinguish their realities from their imaginations by using their physical senses. Of course, in the topsy-turvy world of Athens' forest, the characters' senses are disconnected from reason, and nothing actually is what it looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels like. In this paper, I am particularly interested in Bottom, a figure both animal and human, and his ability to see through his current reality, and to reconnect sense with reason. To inform my readings of Shakespearean sensation, I will examine a few early modern tracts that describe the senses that are most closely linked with human reason. Stephen Gosson, for instance, in his anti-theatricals, argues that one of the problems with theatre is that it is digested with hearing, and thus affects both the stomach and reason. Shakespeare's Bottom, somewhat ironically, helps us to make sense of the most human of the early modern sensations, as they are described by characters, experienced by playgoers, and understood by readers.

Marc Geisler (Western Washington University)
Riotous and Merry: Drinking and Smoking Together at the Play
Renoir's portrait (1872, oil on canvas) depicts Monet sitting alone in a luxurious, black smoking jacket gazing intently at a book set on a desk before him, the pipe held firmly in his mouth and left hand, apparently settled into a deep, profound contemplation. Unlike our contemporary advertisements representing the pleasure of smoking, the smoke itself has not been carefully removed but instead rises playfully from the heavily packed pipe. Here we have a serious artist, enjoying the book and pipe in a highly refined practice of interpreting language. In contrast, early modern descriptions of smoking at plays tended to emphasize excess as well as the consumption of wine. Early modern play goers, like Monet, enhanced their experience of language with tobacco, but the pleasure experienced was not as individualized and refined: Thomas Platter describes gallants smoking "as a pleasure and the habit is so common with them that they always carry the instrument with them, and light up at all occasions, at the play, in the taverns and elsewhere, drinking as well as smoking together, as we sit over wine, and it makes them riotous and merry" (*Travels in England*, 1599). As Michel Serres might have noted in *The Five Senses*, the language of the play and the reading of the book is celebrated not in a prison house of language but through the revitalizing synesthesia of taste and smell as experienced with the help of the pipe, making the sensory experience of words more immediately physical and pleasurable. In this paper I'm interested in exploring how early modern subjects experienced the pleasures of play going as riotous and merry gatherings, before the age of print and refined smoking habits transformed this mingling of smoke and words into a quiet practice of solitary contemplation.

Colleen E. Kennedy (Shippensburg University)

The Synæsthetia of Shakespeare's Olfactory Poetics

In the epigraph to his short story "The Name, the Nose" (1972), Italo Calvino envisions an anaesthetic, deodorized future and he writes poetically of the "deaf nostrils" unable to enjoy the synaesthesia of smells and sounds: *harmonies, assonances, dissonances, counterpoints, modulations, cadenzas.* This blurring of the olfactive and auditory, this synesthetic attempt to capture the essence of perfumery in the more developed vernacular of music, was proposed by perfumer George William Septimus Piesse (1857) who claims that "there is an octave of odours like an octave in music."

Even earlier, Francis Bacon, in his essay "Of Gardens" (pub. 1625), links pleasurable odors and sounds: "And because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air" (198). His language blends terms that apply to both senses: *air, breath, sweet.* It is easier to utilize terms and ideas from the richer and more familiar musical vernacular—octaves; top, middle, and base notes of perfume; composing a perfume; chords—than to employ the unfamiliar, vague, simplistic, or arcane olfactive terms.

Patricia Cahill concludes her study of the recent trends in Renaissance sensory scholarship by listing several newer works that study the entire sensorium, but "with that said, I do think it would be a mistake for Renaissance scholars to move too quickly away from studies of the individual senses, for literary and historical investigations of smell, taste, and touch have just begun…" (1025). This essay, then stubbornly and poignantly focuses on one sense—smell—but in the multisensory vocabulary.

For Michel Serres, empiricism and phenomenology cannot be properly expressed through language. For early modern thinkers, however, language is often one of the additional senses. Therefore, language does not need to be read purely as the destruction of our sensuous experiences but can be read in communion with the early modern sensorium. Language, Shakespeare, eloquently asserts in his many sonnets is the only way to preserve the ephemeral. Our richest vocabulary for odors is created through the comparative poetics of smell, outlining the ways that odors are signified through similes, metaphors, and analogies, especially the vernaculars of the other senses. This paper attempts to reconstruct such early modern multisensory etymologies, to recover Calvino's "precious lexicon" and to make sure that our scholarship on early modern literature is not "speechless, inarticulate, illegible" when it comes to the olfactive imagination (Calvino 68) by turning to key moments in several of Shakespeare's works: *Twelfth Night, Much Ado About Nothing, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Venus and Adonis, The Sonnets,* and *King Lear.*

Alex MacConochie (Boston University)

'Here I clip/ The Anvil of My Sword': The Soldier's Embrace in *Coriolanus*

This essay explores Shakespeare's use of the soldier's embrace in Coriolanus, focusing on Aufidius's act four greeting of the play's hero. When the hero of Martius, banished from Rome, arrives among the Volscians, his mortal enemy Aufidius greets him with a passionate embrace. "Let me twine," he exclaims, "mine arms about that body," launching as he does so into an erotically-charged effusion unprecedented in Shakespeare's sources, in which he expresses an intense desire for contact that is both violent and intimate. Through touch, as with Martius's battlefield embrace of his fellow Roman Cominius, each warrior affirms the other's "noble," martial identity. Yet, strangely, Aufidius does not always directly address Martius. Rather, he proclaims, "Here I clip/ The anvil of my sword," setting up a contrast between touch as felt and as observed and interpreted. In order to draw out the implications of this contrast, I consider Coriolanus's martial embraces in light of recent work on early modern conceptions of theater as a tactile experience. Drawing on James Bromley's analysis of intimacy in the early modern

period, I argue that Aufidius's embrace of the body his spear could not pierce is connected to the audience's inability to see within Martius—but that the play covertly presents "superficial," non-penetrative contact as valuable in itself, rather than problematic. Play over the surface of Martius's body, through touch and in Aufidius's lengthy descriptive language, is foregrounded ahead of the frustrated sense of sight. This play of touch serves to help Aufidius reconstruct his own identity: Martius's body is an "anvil," a site of creation through violent contact. Aufidius's gesture thus operates much like the caress as described Michel Serres, an act of giving the other back to himself, However, Aufidius does not seek to give but, ultimately, to possess. Thus his verbal interpretation of the embrace, which objectifies Martius as a passive "body" and "anvil," contains the seeds of the play's final act of destructive violence. That violence is conditioned by the fact that Martius and Aufidius continue to be enmeshed within social systems that preclude, for characters in their social positions, the kind of intimacy that would enable reciprocally constructive contact.

Lauren Robertson (Washington University in St. Louis)
'How now, who's this?': Impersonation Seen and Heard in *Look About You*
Performed by the Admiral's Men in the 1590s, the anonymous *Look About You* is a remarkable play: it features over a dozen disguises that, in all but three instances, are designed to impersonate another character onstage. Two characters in particular don several disguises over the course of the play, more than once in order to impersonate the same third character. What would an early modern audience have made of this dizzying theatrical experience?

In this paper, I will argue that *Look About You's* repeated use of impersonation offered its audience a sensory education in the discernment of false appearances from true ones, using a complex interplay of both visual and aural cues to create convincing impersonations. Andrew Gurr and Peter Hyland have both used *Look About You* to make arguments regarding the sophisticated spectatorial skills of early modern audiences; the play's complex, layered, and manifold disguises prove, they contend, that only audiences well-versed in the theatrical conventions of disguise and doublings would have been able to follow the play. Drawing on another literary genre that exploded in popularity during the early modern era—rogue pamphlets—I will complicate their work by arguing that the culture's larger fascination with the identification and social containment of counterfeits is made spectacular in *Look About You*. The multi-sensory, competing impersonations staged in the play simultaneously reinforce and undermine the audience's ability to discern false from true. The sights and sounds of counterfeiting in *Look About You*, I will contend, exploited early modern audiences' anxieties, beyond the social threat of rogues, that a fractured, malleable identity was the only thing exposed when the veil of outward appearances was lifted.

Carla Rosell (University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign)
'A Savor that May Strike the Dullest Nostril': Slander and the Senses in William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*
In this paper, I will investigate how King Leontes's senses both generate and nourish his inexplicable jealousy of his wife and best friend, Queen Hermione and King Polixenes, in William Shakespeare's late play, *The Winter's Tale* (1610-11). At the start of the play, Leontes's distrust springs from the sight of Hermione and Polixenes holding hands and conversing; he goes on to feed this overwhelming emotional response by continually interpreting innocent actions, such as held hands, as a metonymy for imagined, intimate relations. Leontes shares his suspicions with his court, but refuses to listen to reason when numerous advisors desperately attempt to argue Hermione's innocence, demonstrating that he has allowed his sight to stop his own ears to the truth. Early modern treatises focusing on slander and the ills of the tongue often argued that slander stopped the ears of listeners, creating a barrier to the truth. Focusing on Leontes's diseased imagination, as well as one of its symptoms, the slanders he voices against

Hermione, I argue that *The Winter's Tale* uses sensory imagery to portray the various dangers that Leontes's jealousy poses to the country of Sicilia. The sensory images exhibit the political damage that the King's suspicions present to the reputation of the royal family and the royal lineage.

Jonathan Shelley (University of California, Berkeley)
'When the play was over they danced marvelously': Closing with Dance in Shakespeare's Plays
In the 1599 account of his travels through England, Thomas Platter describes seeing "an excellent performance of the tragedy of the first emperor Julius Caesar with a cast of about fifteen people." "When the play was over," he continues, "they danced marvelously and gracefully together as their custom is, two dressed as men and two as women."[1] This paper explores the effects such intersensorial experience—the switch from linguistic-based content to rhythmic movement—had on playgoers and performers. This sensory shift, I argue, conceives of dramatic closure as a chiefly bodily and corporeal phenomenon. It also suggests the primacy of movement over other sensory experiences. Dance, however, was also understood as a virtuous and moral practice that was part of a civilizing process; thus, while such concluding dances registered a sense of closure, they also registered the play's ability to engender moral improvement long after it was over.

Suggested Reading

- Michel Serres, 'Hermes and the Peacock', in *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies (I)*, trans. by Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 38-52
- David Howes, 'Scent, Sound and Synaesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory', in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, M.J. Rowlands and Patricia Spyer (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 161-72

[1] *Thomas Platter's Travels in England* (1599), rendered into English from the German and with introductory matter by Clare Williams (London: Cape, 1937), p. 166.