

**2017 SAA Seminar: Cognition in the Early Modern Period Abstracts, Part Two**  
**Leaders: Mary Crane, Boston College, and**  
**Suparna Roychoudhury, Mount Holyoke College 1**

**Professor Sabina Amanbayeva, McNeese State University**

**The Form of Grief in *Hamlet***

I am interested in the ways in the politics of memory and the way 16<sup>th</sup> century literature through Shakespeare and his contemporaries configures memory. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is famously plagued by the Ghost's injunction, "Remember me," even as he seems incapable of taking a decisive action. Broadly speaking, remembering Hamlet's father in this context is an essentially conservative gesture – a harkening to the past, a commitment to the dynastic order where the son succeeds the father, and where the successor is worthy of his predecessor. Claudius, on the other hand, seems to configure a very different politics of memory: in contrast to Hamlet's vow to erase all past impressions and resist all new ones, Claudius is very much a man of the present. He enjoys the fruits of his spoils and actively schemes how to secure his future. In a somewhat parallel fashion to Claudius, Andrew Lethe, a protagonist in Thomas Middleton's city comedy *Michaelmas Term* (1604), is a proto-capitalist upstart who embodies the ultimate figure of forgetfulness. This gallant Lethe does not even recognize his own mother (who is poor and old) because he wants to seem a gentleman in the city. Broadly speaking, it seems that in the beginning of the seventeenth century, a certain kind of memory was in danger. While the topic is very broad, I want to cite one last example to show the contrast between the new and the old objects of memory. In *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), Thomas Dekker lovingly remembers an old, worn-out map of London, which he contrasts with Mollyneux's globe. Designed as a mock guide for aspiring gallants of the town, *The Gull's Hornbook* perversely laments the necessity of its own advice and in a manner strikingly similar to Stowe's *Survey of London* wishes to remember the past:

What an excellent workman therefore were he, that would cast the Globe of it into a new mould: and not to make it look like a Mullineux his globe, with a round face sleeked and washed over with whites of eggs; but to have it *in plano*, as it was at first, with all the ancient circles, lines, parallels, and figures. (Dekker 17).

In contrast to "Mullineux his globe, with a round face sleeked and washed over with whites of eggs," Dekker remembers the old world, emblemized in a flat old map, which preserves "all the wrinkles, cracks, crevices, and flaws" (17). My paper will focus on the politics of memory in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, paying special attention to how its objects of remembrance (Ophelia's flowers, Hamlet's tables and books, Horatio's story, etc.) envision a kind of distributed personhood, with certain culturally and time-specific objects "containing" human memories.

**Dr. J. F. Bernard, Champlain College**

**Shakespeare and the Early Modern Campfire**

"Why are we huddling about the campfire?" Ursula LeGuin asks, "Why do we tell tales, or tales about tales?" We tell stories, she supposes, as a way to connect ourselves to the world we live in and protect ourselves from it, and to insure our subsistence in it, even beyond our own

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existence. My paper examines the intersection of storytelling, theater, contagion, and cognition in Shakespeare. I suggest that by adapting narratives of various kinds that are familiar to his audiences (folk tales, prose romance, and dramatic texts) but presenting them as new, Shakespeare's theater proves fundamentally anamnestic. The tripartite model of communication offered by early modern theatre, from playwright (or play text) to actor/character, to audience member underlines its prime disposition to not only circulate but *produce* stories through what Steven Mullaney has termed its "inhabited affective technology." Audience members transform from story listeners, to story carriers, and eventually, storytellers themselves, re-initiating the transmission process outside of the theater. Looking as examples from *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*, and , my papers suggests that early modern theatre can be understood as not only, in the words of Evelyn Tribble and Nicholas Keene, a "complex human activity" requiring understanding across the entire system, but a radical form of storytelling at the level of cognition, affect, and contagion.

**Professor Raz Chen-Morris, Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

**Political Illusions, Scientific Instruments and the Production of New Knowledge in**  
**Shakespeare's *The Tempest***

Can illusions be a source of true knowledge? Is political power necessarily based on illusions and deceit? These two questions are entwined through Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as he critically probes the ambiguous role sensory illusions play in human cognitive processes alongside the power that illusions exert in fashioning human passions and aspirations. From the demise of Prospero's lost knowledge of the liberal arts, to the political irrelevancy of Gonzalo's humanism, Prospero's magical prowess and his forsaking his book of magic for political rehabilitation, the viewer of the play is confronted by the question of what real knowledge is, and how one can acquire such knowledge to direct a commonwealth on the path to true reform.

Investigating illusions as sources of knowledge was a main concern of early 17<sup>th</sup> century mathematicians and natural philosophers. My paper will examine this common ground, especially those crucial instruments for producing magical illusions, such as prisms and lenses, that Shakespeare kept silent about. These instruments are an embodiment of new early modern modes of cognition, combining hands-on practices with abstract and complex mathematical procedures. The ways in which Johannes Kepler in his *Dioptrice* (1611) and Galileo Galilei in his *Sidereus Nuncius* manipulate these pieces of glass reshape early modern cognitive skills, blurring the demarcation line between playful pursuits and serious deductions and geometrical proofs. Reading these instruments alongside Shakespeare's theatrical discussion of the use and abuse of the power of illusion in *The Tempest* will underwrite the political import of these devices in informing early modern notions of sovereignty in the emergent absolutist state.

**Dr. Douglas Iain Clark, University of Exeter**

**Stirring the Mind in *Troilus and Cressida***

Defining the features of embodied and cognitive experience expressed within, and

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produced by, early modern plays has been a fruitful area of study in recent years. I draw on this critical framework in order to consider how cognition is conceived of in *Troilus and Cressida*. Specifically, I aim to clarify the role that cognitive dissonance takes in this play, the role it takes in constituting the thinking subject, and how it is stimulated by the operation of the will.

Critical focus is placed upon minds which are stirred or disturbed in this play, so as to consider the importance that dynamic tension take in defining the processes of the mind in relation to early modern theories of cognition and Pre-Socratic concepts of flux. This investigative aim is complemented by illustrating the importance that conceptions of the will took in characterising cognitive processes and structure of the soul in other forms of early modern writing.

**Ms. Dori Coblentz, Emory University**

**Exercises in Judgment on the Early Modern English Stage**

*[H]ere the Feete labour equally with the Hands, the Eye and the Judgement walke together*  
– George Hale, *Private School of Defence*, 1614.

Hale's perambulatory metaphor captures a distinctively early modern understanding of judgment as an embodied skill. Perception and decision are not simply sequential or joined together, but they are mutually engaged in a quotidian physical activity with implications of motion, speed, and direction. Reading Hale's 1614 *Private School of Defence* alongside di Grassi's *Art of Defence* (1594) and George Silver's *Paradoxes of Defence* (1599), I will argue that Shakespeare's contemporaries viewed judgment as a specifically temporal skill that could be trained in both verbal and non-verbal ways. I will argue that the theory of opportunity found in fencing manuals contextualizes how time and motion inhere in processes of judgment. Ultimately, this model of judgment has implications for the "art of poesy" as well as the "art of defence," as language and techniques around judgment inculcation makes its way into contemporary drama.

**Professor Elise Denbo, Queensborough Community College, CUNY**

**Metaphor, Theatre, and Psychic Space: Falstaff as Hal's Imaginary Third**

Drawing on current cognitive approaches to literature and culture, this paper will focus on *1&2 Henry IV*, using Julia Kristeva's concept of the imaginary father. Kristeva explores the shaping influence of early modern passions as they circulate across bodies within the metaphorical matrix of Shakespeare's theatre. Hal's youthful narcissism as well as his ability to connect with the popular voice will be explored as a result of Falstaff's early presence in the 'prehistory' of his kingship. Falstaff's verbal *copia* – his belly full of tongues, recalls the unruly female tongue as the site of disorder, but also the mother tongue that confers national identity as a return to the vernacular richness of the land and its people. While Hal is able to organize the various dialects and settings of *1&2 Henry IV*, it is the body Falstaff who impregnates the play. As archaic father within the maternal/semiotic dimensions of Eastcheap, Falstaff takes on the

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role of mother, midwife, and mentor. Falstaff's wide girth, his verbal and corporeal excess, will extend Hal's personal struggle (and theory of mind) to the workings of earth, country, and cosmos, embodying and distributing diverse modes of cognition within the experience of the early modern theatrical event.

**Dr. Nicholas Ryan Helms, University of Alabama**

**The Finite Space: Solitary Confinement and Early Modern Cognition**

For "Cognition in the Early Modern Period," I would like to track how space and mental health intersect in Shakespeare's works. In particular, I would like to juxtapose two conflicting notions of solitary confinement: Hamlet's "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams" (*Ham.* 2.2.273-5); and Fabian's insistence that Maria's plot "shall make him [Malvolio] mad indeed" (*TN* 3.4.142). While Hamlet fantasizes a solitude that might remove himself from the rank prison of Denmark and thus ease his melancholy, Sir Toby, Maria, and Fabian confine Malvolio to darkness in order to instigate madness. How is it confinement can both cure and cause madness? Or, to rephrase the question in terms of our seminar, how is it that one relationship to space—an individual separated from others and outside stimuli—can produce divergent effects? To answer this question, I'll apply recent work in cognitive ecology to early modern theories of mental health and confinement.

This paper comes from my current book project, *The Mind's Construction: Mindreading, Misreading, and Shakespeare's Characters*. In that work I bring cognitive philosophy to bear on Shakespearean character criticism, contending that Shakespeare's characters can be understood via mindreading, which, despite the telepathic connotations of the word, is simply the cognitive ability to contemplate and anticipate the thoughts, emotions, and actions of other people. I argue that Shakespeare's plays are an "art to find the mind's construction in the face," an exercise in mindreading that teaches his audience to better read others (*Mac.* 1.4.11-2). By attending to how such understanding—and misunderstanding—functions both cognitively and ecologically, I illustrate how Shakespeare crafts his characters and how audiences, critics, and readers can read—and misread—them. Early modern depictions of madness are especially germane to my project because they can challenge contemporary models of mindreading with their complexity, putting pressure on these models that undergird larger public discourse on the powers and limits of empathy.

**Ms. Amina H. Tajbhai, Fordham University**

**Political Memory and the Papers of Cade's Rebellion**

This paper adopts Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* ("memory sites") and theories of situated cognition to explore how small objects can serve as interactive inducers of political memory in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. These objects, such as roses, crowns, and papers, can work with or against characters' rhetoric. In particular, I am interested in the way papers, as unique carriers of political memory, operate throughout Cade's Rebellion. Jack Cade,

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though downplayed by early modern memory scholarship, is the one of two characters in Shakespeare's first tetralogy who attempts to control various aspects of memory. He ultimately fails due to his commoner status; however, he displays an incredible understanding of the multifaceted nature of memory. After detailing the various strains of memory found in Cade's scenes and exploring Cade's attempt and ultimate failure to control political memory, this paper will end by drawing conclusions on how memory can be manipulated and inherited in the political sphere.

**Professor Evelyn Tribble, University of Otago**

**Remembering *Romeo and Juliet***

Memory is a subject divided by a common vocabulary. For many cognitive psychologists, memory has been seen as an intra-cranial phenomenon, best studied in laboratory settings, where it can be tested in isolation from confounding factors. Researchers in the humanities and the arts, in contrast, often view memory as a social and collective phenomenon. Historians, anthropologists and cultural critics tend to be much more interested in the social and public aspects of memory, as embodied in, for example, in museums, monuments, and commemorative activities, or as collective traumas are repressed or expressed by public acts of memory. There is often little overlap between these two paradigms for studying memory. For example, the cognitive-science oriented *Oxford Handbook of Memory* does not discuss social or collective memory at all; in turn, the historical-philosophical oriented collection *Theories of Memory: A Reader* ignores cognitive science completely.

This essay is a preliminary foray into bringing these two methods into dialogue with one another, using *Romeo and Juliet* as a test case. I propose to first examine internal dynamics of remembering and forgetting in the play, particularly the technique of retrospective story-telling, as characters attempt to shape and reshape memories for events that have just occurred. I argue that these dynamics – particularly the tendency to shape complex, contingent, and accidental events into binary categories that are more easily remembered – in turn affects that way that the play is received – how it is culturally (mis)remembered.

**Dr. Myra E. Wright, Bates College**

**“Poor Fishes’ Wand’ring Eyes”: Looking at Piscine Vision in Early Modernity**

In early modern angling literature, fish are people too—they think and feel; they strive and love. But above all, fish *see*. This essay gathers evidence about the fascination with the eyes of fish, a preoccupation that is found equally in practical and literary genres of the period. I consider representations of piscine vision as they appear in poetry by John Donne and Aemilia Lanyer, and place these accounts alongside the angling instructions of John Dennys and Isaak Walton. All of these writings demonstrate a certain sympathy with fish—a desire to understand their motivations and movements, and a limited compunction about killing them—that is grounded in the observation of their faces. As early modern writers watch or imagine the darting of fishes' eyes, they entertain the possibility that piscine and human vision are largely

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the same: a collection of cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive a goal and move toward it, but also sometimes play tricks on us. Using findings about *signal form* from the field of cognitive ecology, I argue that the early moderns were often right about how fish see.