

2018 SAA Seminar: Shakespeare, Marx, Our Moment 1
Leaders: Hugh Grady, Arcadia University, and Jean Howard, Columbia University
Consultants: Donald Hedrick, Kansas SU and Sharon O’Dair, Univ. of Alabama

Emelye Keyser, Univ. of Virginia

**“Wits diversely coloured’:
Coriolanus, Hegel, and Tragic Representation”**

Studies that anatomize the tragic nature of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* often adumbrate flaws within the titular hero: he is too proud and too brutal, and in the words of one of the Roman citizens in the play, he “hath faults, with surplus, to tire in repetition”. Yet the setting of *Coriolanus* — a republic recently transitioned from monarchy — invites audiences and readers to think critically about the form of government that Rome has recently chosen, and to consider social conditions and shifting political ideologies as determining forces in Coriolanus’s destruction. *Coriolanus*, I argue, is best read as a Hegelian tragedy: a dramatic articulation of a set of problems without any clear solution, arising from competing legitimated values. In this case, the conflict coalesces around the concept of representation and competing notions about the structure that a relationship between the government and those governed should take. Characters embody different modes for this relationship – should a representative stand with the people, or above them? – and the incompatibilities between these positions force a tragic conclusion for the central character.

Recently, Richard Halpern has explored an alternate, Marxist-Hegelian theory of tragedy, whereby ethical forces are opposed not by each other, but by their contingent material conditions. Halpern’s reading follows the lines of Marx’s critique of Hegel: *Geist* alone does not shape the world. Through this lens, conflict in *Coriolanus* arises not just from competing characters’ expectations about politics, but from the disjoint between ideologies of representation and material constraints. Applying such a reading to representation in *Coriolanus* exposes the play’s prescient critique of all representative relationships.

Walter Cohen, Univ. of Michigan

“Poor Tom’s a-cold” Shakespeare and the Little Ice Age

This paper argues that ecological catastrophe is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of major social and literary change. It posits a model of literature based on pairs of preceding texts that predict the crisis and anticipate long-term trends, followed by pairs of succeeding texts, the earlier ones of which may have a conservative feel later superseded by more revolutionary innovation that makes good on the earlier instance of literary anticipation. *King Lear* is understood as predictive of the nadir of the Little Ice Age in the mid-17th century. Such a reading pushes against those that emphasize social and moral regeneration, though not entirely. The other three texts, or sets of texts, surrounding the Little Ice Age are then sketched in; and comparable patterns are detected for the earlier Antonine Plague and Plague of Cyprian; the Plague of Justinian; and the Black Death. In conclusion, three issues are raised: possible problems with this constellation, the relationship of environmental to more narrowly social and political crises, and the daunting hypothesis that only catastrophe can generate durable reductions in economic inequality.

2018 SAA Seminar: Shakespeare, Marx, Our Moment 2
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Danielle Drees, Columbia University

**Brexit *Cymbelines*:
Sleep, Social Relations, and British Daily Life**

My paper uses the staged experience of sleep to examine how the Brexit-era United Kingdom is understood to care for the social reproduction of its residents. I compare two 2016 productions of *Cymbeline*—Melly Still's version for the Royal Shakespeare Company and Matthew Dunster's adaptation *Imogen* for Shakespeare's Globe—that use Cymbeline's refusal to pay tributes to the Roman Empire as a jumping-off point for projecting a nativist British identity separate from Europe at the moment of the EU referendum. In both productions, Innogen's two sleep scenes—endangered by Iachimo in her royal bedroom, and then drugged and homeless in the Welsh mountains—raise questions about how these versions of Britain will be able to care for its inhabitants in their most vulnerable moments. By reading Innogen in these productions as a prototypical British political subject, I argue that these productions see more promise in restructuring the social relations of British daily life than in either remaining in or leaving the EU. I draw on materialist feminism's contribution to Marxist theory, understanding sleep as a part of the undervalued work of social reproduction and using *Cymbeline's* sleep scenes to track the conditions of sleep and shelter in the productions' imagined future Britains.

Rachel Eisendrath, Barnard College

**“Give o'er the Play”:
Problems in Dispelling Illusion**

Theodor W. Adorno critiqued historical materialism by showing how it can fall into its own kinds of illusion. A Marxist, he was responding in part to Marx and Engels's claim in *The German Ideology* that they wanted to use material realities (real-world facts that can “be verified in a purely empirical way”) to dispel illusion, or ideology. What Adorno saw was that empiricist materialism could unconsciously harbor its own illusions and that, as Simon Jarvis explains, “the more rapidly and brutally thought cuts itself free from illusion, the more it is entangled.” Adorno didn't want to reject historical materialism, but wanted to redeem it by developing its complex relation to critical thought. In this paper, I explore how his materialist-anti-materialist critique was in some ways anticipated in the Renaissance, when poets were confronted with the rise of empiricism. Empiricism is like materialism in that it attempts to cut through the illusions of textual authorities by seeking direct contact with “things themselves.” In response, poets raised complex questions about truth-seeking and illusion. I use as my case study *Hamlet*, specifically the character of Polonius, in order to explore Shakespeare's analysis of how truth-seeking investigations can slip into illusion just when they claim to be dispelling illusion.

2018 SAA Seminar: Shakespeare, Marx, Our Moment 3
Leaders: Hugh Grady, Arcadia University, and Jean Howard, Columbia University
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Ali John Madani, Brown University

**“Germany is *not* Hamlet”:
Shakespeare, Marxism, and the Politics of Contemporary Book History**

This short essay considers a contemporary divide in *Hamlet* criticism between those invested in the history and materiality of the text and those concerned with the play’s subjectivity effects and interiority. To this end, I investigate the political stakes of recent turns in early modern book history insofar as they depart from the field’s stated foundational commitments to Marxism and cultural materialism. I utilize this drift of political investment within book history to respond to the method’s detractors, here nominated “philosophical critics” (borrowing H. H. Furness’ term) and, for the purposes of this essay, represented by Paul Kottman and Peter Holbrook. While some have charged recent work on the history of material texts with the sin of apolitical antiquarianism, these critics see instead the trappings of post-structuralism and justify their adherence to a stable text and author with an appeal to liberalism. The individual, they maintain, must be defended from both “bureaucratic forces” and the specter of Marx. I argue that these characterizations of book history apply more to its early 1990s polemical origins and less to the current state of the field. I conclude by examining a nineteenth-century iteration of this methodological split in the 1877 Furness variorum edition of *Hamlet*, seeking to ground recent debates in a longer history in which scholars have negotiated the proper bounds of criticism in light of German idealism and Romanticism.

Aaron Kitch, Bowdoin College

The Labor of Playing in Shakespeare’s Theater

How does Marx help us to understand early modern playacting as a form of labor? Historical evidence about the conditions of playacting in Shakespeare’s England are both sparse and confusing. The language around acting, both then and now, is not reducible to labor. Still, we have some evidence that different kinds of actors—shareholders, boys, hired hands—received different forms of training and received different sorts of payment. The “craft” of acting was often learned through a process of apprenticeship that followed practices among guilds, even as early modern theaters engaged in newer modes of commercial investment and consumption. I suggest that Marx’s earlier writings on the alienated labor of capitalism, especially his concept of “species being,” help us to understand the labor of acting in relation to a non-capitalist language of human essence and sociability. Playing as a mode of species being may help to explain how theater can resist capitalist modes of exploitation, in fact. Bookended by brief considerations of Falstaff as a histrionic actor who labors in his “vocation” in the *Henry IV* plays, I also explore the emergence of “personation” as a form of naturalistic acting in the 1590s associated primarily with the actor Richard Burbage.

David Morrow, College of St. Rose

**“[G]ood pasture makes fat sheep”:
agrarian capitalism, the law of value, and early modern English husbandry manuals**

2018 SAA Seminar: Shakespeare, Marx, Our Moment 4
Leaders: Hugh Grady, Arcadia University, and Jean Howard, Columbia University
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This paper brings together the recent work of Marxist ecological historians and early modern English husbandry manuals to sketch a narrative of the development of agrarian capitalism that considers parts of that process that are often not accounted for—including technological innovations and the appropriation of what Jason Moore terms unpaid human and extra-human work/energy. I show that husbandry manuals are enmeshed in agrarian capitalism, responding to its biospheric transformations by commodifying peasant knowledge and by theorizing the appropriation of unpaid labor. The essay closes with suggestions on how these concerns might offer a fresh look at Shakespeare's rural laborers.

Christian Smith, Independent Scholar

Shakespeare and Revolution in Paris, 1844

In the Left Bank of Paris in 1844, Karl Marx underwent an inversion in his thinking from Left Hegelian into communist. He wrote his first communist texts “On the Jewish Question”, the “Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, and the “1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”. Marx underwent this transformation in the presence of and in collaboration with Heinrich Heine. This collaboration with Marx resulted in Heine writing his most radical prose and poetry, including “Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen” and “Die armen Weber”. Marx borrowed imagery from Heine, including the images of the “inverted world”, the “opium of the people”, and the “lumpenproletariat”. Marx also met Friedrich Engels at the same time in Paris and began his lifelong collaboration with one of his two primary working comrades. The other comrade was Marx’s wife Jenny, who worked at the table with Marx, Heine and Engels, debating and offering her collaborative effort in the theory-building. While Jenny only wrote a few texts of her own, she did offer Marx imagery and words, and helped to research for his texts. All four comrades were consummate readers of Shakespeare and quoted from and alluded to Shakespeare’s drama in their texts. Much of the influence that flowed back and forth between these writers was originally sourced from Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare was the presiding literary spirit at this transformative table on the Rue Vaneau in St. Germain. It was here that Marxist communism was born.

Rinku Chatterjee, Woodenville, WA

In “The Future Results of British Rule in India,” (July 22, 1853), one of the thirty-three articles he wrote for the *New York Tribune* between 1853 and 1858, Marx notes that an unintended result of British policies in India, regarding the construction of the railways and other means of communication, had led to the rise of a new social class. This class was educated in schools established by the British, especially in Calcutta, and who had access to the more popular publications of the western world. This had a somewhat homogenizing effect as far as a literary experience was concerned. In the case of pre-colonial India, for example, a literary experience would have been essentially heterogeneous, not only because of linguistic differences, but also due to entirely different conceptions of literature across the country. While on the one hand the linguistic and literary homogenizing effect of colonialism was indispensable to giving rise to an Indian national sentiment, the idea of the orient was irretrievably shaped by colonial discourses

2018 SAA Seminar: Shakespeare, Marx, Our Moment 5
Leaders: Hugh Grady, Arcadia University, and Jean Howard, Columbia University
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on the other. Literature, then, began to be experienced through the prism of a Western perspective. The study of Shakespearean texts and the performance of Shakespeare's plays was an important part of the colonial agenda. In his lecture in 1907, for example, Rabindranath Tagore extolled the greatness of Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala* by comparing it to *The Tempest*. In my paper I propose to explore how far this colonial conditioning continues in post-independent India by looking at examples of performance of Shakespeare's plays, and their criticism in both pre and post independent India.

Charles Whitney, Univ. of Nevada, Las Vegas

Political Economy and the Web of Life: *Oikonomia* and *Oikeios*

Capital's powerful account of primitive accumulation by land expropriation over three centuries concerns an essential feature of capitalism, the appropriation of natural processes and resources planet-wide, which continues apace. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* by Jason W. Moore (2015) focuses particularly on that aspect. It comprises a milestone in environmental interpretation of Marx and in environmental-justice studies.

Rejecting the poisonous binary Nature/Society established in the seventeenth century, Moore reinterprets Marx's point that capitalism disrupts a viable "metabolism" between society and nature. Subsuming biopolitics, Moore does so by building from the ancient botanist Theophrastus' ethical and ecological notion of *oikeios* to define "the creative, generative, and multi-layered relation of species and environment" that grounds "humanity-in-nature as a world-historical process." Capitalism appropriates that necessarily "co-productive" relationship, making wages low and nature "cheap."

Moore's book offers insights that can provide a useful perspective on early modern notions of the human-in-nature, as well as on enclosure controversies. In its light I consider attitudes toward enclosure in relation to an evolving early modern standard of *oikonomia* relatable to Moore's *oikeios*. A 1589 enclosure "riot" a few miles north of the Theatre performed by women "armed and great with child" foregrounds such biopolitical relations of production.

Zora Jelic, Southwestern College

The Emergence of a New Type of Heroine at the Onset of Capitalism

The objective of this paper is to show that with the transition of England from feudalism to nascent capitalism, and the stratification of the lower class, a bold type of heroine has risen in literature. A particular emphasis is on the characters of Portia and Kate. These proactive young women do not settle to be mere commodities with whom their fathers dispose of according to their will as merchants would with their possessions. They engage in a battle of wits in the most cunning way to persevere and gain control over their sovereignty. Furthermore, they show that a woman's place in society can be more meaningful and productive than just being confined to the realm of the domestic sphere. They challenge the status quo of the male/female struggle within the patriarchal social system by taking advantage of the newly emerged societal conflicts and

2018 SAA Seminar: Shakespeare, Marx, Our Moment 6
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market economy. The last part of the paper focuses on the male/female struggle and looks into the progress (or not) that has occurred in the last thirty years (in comparison to the issues in the above-mentioned plays) and how these audacious female characters are interpreted today.