2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare's Forms, Part Two
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One Form To Rule Them All

Professor J. Anthony Burton
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I hold that form in Shakespeare's drama is neither an incidental detail nor separable from consideration of the work as a whole. By his own report, it is the necessary first condition out of which his poetry becomes intelligible. I take Theseus' well-known speech in Act 5 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a true description of the way Shakespeare experienced the creation of his own work. It places his work product -- the speech, action, and imagery of a play – as being governed by some originating form, and the end product of a succession of increasingly concrete forms consistent with it but all still "airy nothings," until the whole complex appears in its local habitation and name. I examine *Hamlet* as a study text for evidence whether and to what extent Theseus' description is useful for understanding a real play. My conclusion is that it is, and noticeably so in *Hamlet*.

Network Forms in *King Lear*

Dr. Rana Choi
University of Chicago

This paper focuses on how approaching literary interpretation through Levine's "design" conception of forms enables consideration of the strategic arrangement of textual features as a total, designed, unity—a critical vantage point whose value has in the main been discredited theoretically and sidelined practically in historicist readings, which tends to excavate meaning in texts piecemeal. This charge can be levied against the conventionally formalist practice of close reading as well.

One such arrangement of features that is undoubtedly a crucial dimension of artistic construction is considerations of the structure and progression of the plot as a whole. To illustrate this with an example, I look at old "unresolved" debates in Shakespeare, such as the artistic motivations behind the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear* that have been heavily reliant on historicist, legal, or "symbolic" explanations for Shakespeare's artistic choices. While Levine and other literary critics have analyzed the ways narratives themselves evoke form in order to represent a conception of social organization, here I take a look at form as a lens to adduce another interpretation of the blinding scene from the point of view of the plot as a whole.

Forming Plots on the Early Modern Stage

Dr. Dori Coblentz
Georgia Institute of Technology

As Caroline Levine points out, literary critics have developed "a range of subtle practices for thinking about temporal patterning, addressing such forms as meter, seriality, and plot" (51) that

can be put to important political uses. I take Levine's interest in the non-teleological organizing potential of narrative as my cue in this paper, which is part of a larger project that analyzes a set of plays with unusual plot structures. This paper is on the unusual, repetitive tempo of action that characterizes *Arden of Faversham.* Assuming that multiple forms coexist and collide, attempting to organize and manage attention (rather than a single hegemonic ideology squashing dissent), I explore the interaction between the stage's kinesiological and literary heritages. I argue that early modern playwrights drew from the affordances of fencing forms as well as literary forms when it came to depicting antagonistic, dissimulatory character interactions such as those between Alice and her husband: the zig-zagging structure of the device of combat co-existed with the more familiar narrative pyramid of rising and falling plot action. I find that in *Arden of Faversham*'s adaptation from prose historical account to domestic tragedy, the new affordances of the stage shifted the play's underlying theme of judgment from a *moral* judgment to a *kairotic* one. That is, the didacticism of the *Chronicles* account as it recounts the fate of wives who turn against their husbands (and, by extension, subjects who turn against their sovereign) gives way to a theme of right-timing that is qualitative and embodied. God's judgment, while certain still thematically important, is eclipsed by this other kind of judgment: a form of kinesthetic reasoning governing one's time and position.

My hope is that this work on the varying plot tempos will be of interest in its own rite to literary critics, as a window into the narrative strategies of dramatists and the theatrical experiences of players and playgoers. Even more, I believe that recognizing these temporal patterns can have broader application – as Levine points out, the specialized tools developed by scholars to analyze formal literary patterns are useful in parsing political and social forms as well. Together, the forms of drama and fencing for representing causality offer a robust theory of strategic, deliberate waiting. While purposeful stillness may seem to represent extreme political quietism, I will argue that the re-introduction of certain forgotten forms of attunement to temporality will enable rather than obstruct action. The forms of fencing and of drama yield insight into the art of actively suspending judgment, and offer a portable and sophisticated set of gradations to the ways in which we wait.

Formal Fugitives in *The Winter's Tale*

Dr. Claire M. Falck
Rowan University

This paper explores how generic forms are coded through movement and directionality in *The Winter's Tale. The Winter's Tale* is famously hybridized in its form, and famously open about this fact: the traditional view is that the tragic first half is "hinged" to the comedic second half, the hinges guarded by the alarming figures of flying Time and the pursuing bear. Complicating this conception of the tragicomedy as a static diptych, this paper considers how the tragic and comedic forms of the play are portrayed as migratory, moving through the conceptual and physical spaces of the play and stage, all the while being continually de- and re-formed through these migrations. Rather than imagining the generic forms of the play as stable spaces that characters and audience enter into, this paper analyzes how these forms are created through the

continual movements of meetings, partings, entrances, and exits that bound and anchor the play's action. Drawing on recent work in new formalism and space theory, this paper examines the extent to which dramatic and linguistic forms intersect with the discourses of space and directionality, and the ways that the markers of comic and tragic forms move, mutate, develop and devolve throughout *The Winter's Tale.*

A Theory of Formes

Professor Jeffrey Todd Knight
University of Washington

Formes, not "forms." This paper will draw on the "Rhythm" chapter of Levine's *Forms* to think through the points of connection between a revitalized New Formalism and Shakespearean book history. A "forme" in early printing was a technical term for the assemblage of type that was locked in a chase and then inked and impressed to produce two or more pages. Here I'll use it as a proxy to consider the affordances of literature in what Levine calls "institutional time": the bibliographic rhythms, rituals, and recursions that "both preserve *and* violate the specificity of cultural situations" (61). I don't know where this is going quite yet, but I'll likely make a case study out of either Sonnet 59, where the speaker yearns to find an image of his beloved in an "antique book" from the dawn of written history, or in the origin myth of Thomas Bodley dismissing Shakespeare's books as "riff raffs" at the founding of his library in Oxford in 1612.

All that Jazz: Triadic and Dyadic Forms in *Hamlet*

Dr. Laury Magnus
United States Merchant Marine Academy

It has frequently been observed that Shakespeare's shaping imagination tended to work in both verbal and dramaturgical patterns that are both dyadic and triadic as well.[1] My paper will focus on the doubling and tripling forms that collide (to use Levine's term) and reverberate in *Hamlet.* The play uses three dramatic foils—structural melodic lines that enfold innumerable riffs, mirrorings, overlappings, inversions and reversals in a fluid interweaving, constantly lending the play spontaneous new directions. Because of this fluidity,[2] the three parallel plot lines of conflict and struggle for dominance, however, are better understood as exfoliating characterological developments that parallel Hamlet's, keeping him the central focus of the triad of dramatic foils—three young men whose fathers' stories are imposed on their sons. Hamlet's struggle to

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[1] As critics from Harry Levin to George T. Wright to Terrance Hawkes have noted, the play's duplicative rhetorical figures are legion and its two favored tropes involve doubling: *Antanaclasis* (i.e., using one word in two contrasting senses), as in Hamlet and Gertrude's use of the word "common," and *Hendiadys*, as in Hamlet's consciousness of his fate as both "scourge and minister." The factor of linguistic duplication works hand-in-hand with the play's character doubles.

[2] Dana Gioia, in a brilliant essay on Chekhov's "The Lady with a Dog," talks of Chekhov's revolutionary idea of having every plot development in the story derive from the characters themselves. Gioia got it wrong by several hundred years!

become "Hamlet the Dane" is inherited from Old Hamlet against his "mighty opposite," the Danish "King Without a Name" (as Bernice W. Kliman dubbed Claudius) for revenge and political sovereignty. It mirrors and is mirrored by Fortinbras's struggle, inherited from Old Fortinbras and also situates him as both nephew, royal son, and geopolitical rival of both Claudius and Hamlet. In turn, this framing dyad mirrors and is mirrored by Laertes's struggle, imposed by his father's accidental killing, for revenge against Hamlet (and, in 4.5, when he challenges Claudius, for political sovereignty as well). In their encounters and plots against one another, the central triadic figures create further dyads and triads among the rest of the dramatis personae. (Laertes' struggle against Hamlet, of course, encloses a gendered dramatic foil in the character of Ophelia—a dyadic split within the triad—which time constraints will not allow me to pursue).

The political situations of the dramatic foil characters in *Hamlet* never remain neat in Hamlet's lines or the consciousness they reveal: they move, they change, and in turn create a constellation of other characters who ae either "foils" or doubles—or both—for Hamlet, or his antagonists, interacting with him singly, whether in pairs (mirroring his pairing with Horatio) or, with him, forming their own triad (e.g. Gertrude, Ophelia, Hamlet; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Hamlet). They shed light on the hero's predicament and the changes he undergoes as he seeks to square his complicated revenge mission with his quest for justice. The three structural foils all have their own lineage and established power relationships, their divergent back stories, and ambivalences, and Shakespeare keeps all this in further play by a constellation of literary, mythological, or biblical analogues Hamlet himself usually introduces in his allusions to figures such as Niobe, Hercules, Jeptha, Cain, Pyrrhus, Priam, Hecuba, Lucianus, etc. The "affordances" these allusions create waver with the protagonist's volatile moods and with the quickly pivoting plots and plans of Hamlet's antagonists, conscious or unconscious. An example is Hamlet's editorial intrusion in 3.2, when he explains to his uncle that the play's murderer, "Lucianus," is "nephew to the king." I will conclude by observing that the *s*wirling dyads and triads of *Hamlet* build not so much to the revenge action —Hamlet's double murder of Claudius—but rather to Hamlet's leave-taking of Laertes and Horatio. Surprisingly, these last are the culminating events, again, a product of character rather than plot. Closural emphasis overthrows the play's foundational act of fratricide and replaces it with mutual acts of fraternity based on forgiveness and remembrance rather than revenge.

Embodied Forms:
A Levinian Exploration of Dance in Shakespeare

Dr. Linda McJannet
Bentley University

I propose to explore the relevance of Levine's taxonomy of forms—whole, rhythm, hierarchy, and network—to my current collaborative project on Shakespeare and dance. Since dance encompasses both socio-cultural practices (ballet or classes for children, proms, weddings, raves, folk dancing groups, urban hip-hop) and highly skilled theatrical forms (the Bolshoi, Alvin Ailey, Butoh, Savion Glover), it might be particularly responsive to Levine's conjoining of social

and aesthetic forms as topics of analysis. Dance intersects with Shakespeare's texts primarily in its social forms—by means of stage directions such as "*A dance*" or "*They dance*" or equivalent dialogue cues. Most dances enacted or referred to in the plays (including the witches' dances in *Macbeth*, and the fairies' dances in *Midsummer*) invoke the court and country dances of Shakespeare's day (roundels, branles, bergomasks, galliards, pavanes, etc.). In non-period productions, however, other kinds of dance and movement are substituted for early modern forms and, in some body-centered productions, choreographed movement is integrated throughout the performance. To explore the usefulness and/or limitations of Levine's formalist method, I will consider how the embodied forms of the Cheek by Jowl/ Pushkin Art Theatre production of *Measure for Measure* (first performed in 2013 and still touring in 2019) collide with or reinforce other aspects of the text and the director's vision.

Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum*

Dr. Christopher Ross McKeen
Renaissance Society of America

In *Forms* (2015), Caroline Levine draws analogies between literary and institutional forms, arguing that our critical techniques for studying the former can be applied to the latter. This is an insight, I will argue, that she shares with the sixteenth-century statesman Sir Thomas Smith (1513-1577). Smith is best known for his treatise on the English government, *De Republica Anglorum*, written while he was a diplomat in France in the late 1560s and printed posthumously in 1583. The book presents England in terms that map onto Levine's four forms: the unity of English "commonwealth" (whole), the regular calendar of judicial sessions (rhythm), the interdependence of the ranks from yeoman to monarch (hierarchy), and the circulation of people, goods, and political authority between London and the outlying counties (network).

Forms of Political Desire

Professor Sharon O'Dair
University of Alabama

Forms is "intended to act as a methodological starting point" for a revised literary criticism whose goal is "radical social change," including a "redistribution of the world's wealth" (23, 18). This revised literary criticism, moreover, is one Levine insists can be *exported* to other disciplines, such as, I suppose, political science and economics. Much is to be lauded in Levine's *Forms*, which, along with Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* and Joseph North's *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* among others, offers a rebuke to the methodological status quo in our field. I laud her criticism of our mind-numbing use of "binary oppositions," of reductionist intersectionality, of a causality that is assumed but rarely established. But before we can begin to *use* or *put into practice* this methodology—if "a starting point" can be called a methodology—it seems to me we need to interrogate it. That is, much is to be questioned in *Forms* including a) the notion that we have something to teach other disciplines and b) the political desire wrapped in *Forms*, the book's motivating force, Levine's

desire for radical social change. This is a desire, I will argue and yet once more, that is as unrealistic and counter-productive as the political desire behind the binaries and intersectionalities and overbearing causalities she rightly critiques.

Prospero's Masque and the Forms of Colonial Land Posession in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Ms. Ashley Sarpong
University of California, Davis

Despite the bounty of criticism on how Shakespeare's *The Tempest* figures sixteenth and seventeenth century formations of colonialism, many critics frequently overlook the ways in which the structure and form of the play shapes the patterns of colonial relations. In my paper, I offer a reading of Prospero's masque in act 4, in order to elucidate how Prospero's appropriation of pastoral conventions and agricultural treatises enacts an ecological vision of the island that traffics in colonial logics of land possession. If, as Caroline Levine argues, "because [forms] are abstract organizing principles, shapes and patterns [they] are iterable—portable" (7), it stands to reason that Prospero adopts a logic of land use afforded in traditional concepts of English husbandry to solidify his dominion over the island. I contend that the masque Prospero arranges as an engagement celebration mobilizes what scholars like Patricia Seed have shown early modern English colonists used: a belief in spatial arrangements predicated on enclosure and husbandry that justified English land possession both in England and extra-English colonial endeavors. By mapping husbandry discourses onto Prospero's masque, I hope to reveal how English colonial interests in organizing land (both as private property and as larger territorial expanses) along the principles of English husbandry provided an enduring and seductive rhetoric of land possession.

Number and Narrative in the London Bills of Mortality and *All's Well That Ends Well*

Dr. Rebecca Totaro
Florida Gulf Coast University

Humans have used number to manage the public experience of catastrophic change since the advent of the London Bills of Mortality in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This numerical management of the plague experience became a model for population studies—a fact recently discussed at a Folger Institute seminar on the bills. The bills also lent form to the documentation of other natural crises, as the earthquake experience became a Richter scale number and that of hurricanes and cancer became category and stage numbers. Such numbers whitewash the complexity of the experience of catastrophic change—its attendant effects, the communities formed around and altered by it, and individual responses to it. In the case of the London Bills of Mortality, their formal qualities muted the community of women searchers whose labors produced the reported numbers. The bills also turned those who died in each parish in England into a single weekly number, with no mention of those left to live in the plague's wake. Scholars Richelle Munkhoff and Deborah Harkness are among those making great strides

in bringing to light these individuals and the complex processes involved in creating the seemingly straight-forward plague bill. In this paper, I seek to expand the conversation by using Caroline Levine's *Forms* to think through the contrast between the form of the plague bills and the forms of the women's labor and parish communities that they reductively articulate. I will also make some suggestions for the relevance of this examination for study of Shakespeare, with focus on *All's Well That Ends Well* and the representations of Helena's work and worth.

"Let Confusion Live": A Rubric for Poetics from *Timon of Athens*

Ms. Maria Vrcek
Rutgers University

It is no secret that Shakespeare and Middleton's *Timon of Athens* can be a frustrating play for scholars because of its indeterminacy, especially at the levels of character (is Timon a tragic hero? Is he even a character?) and genre (Is it a tragedy? Is it a satire?). Excerpted from a larger dissertation chapter, my essay claims that the play's frustrating indeterminacy is a deliberate feature of the text, not collateral of its incompletion. The play is, indeed, a satire, a term whose Latin root, *satura*, suggests that the play is a medley and mixture. Shakespeare and Middleton signal the play's satiric work with the words "confusion" and "confound," words used more times in this play than in any other by Shakespeare, and whose Latin root, *confundere*, refers to processes of blending, pouring together, mixing, and mingling, as well as diffusing, suffusing, and spreading over. In the larger chapter, I argue that "confused" characterizes both the play's poetic operations and the conditions for living and quality of life the play endorses as a consequence of its satire. For this essay, I'll be focusing just on how the play theorizes and endorses a poetics of confusion, a poetics where "imitation" involves disorder, not resemblance or a play of likeness and difference.

Form in Motion: Geography, Genre, and Restoration Shakespeare

Professor Seth S. Williams
Barnard College

How does form generate meaning not in those instances when it is static—and hence, we might wish to suppose, the stable object of a critical gaze—but in those instances when form shifts and moves? This paper examines the changing structural contours of dramatic genre during the Restoration (specifically, tragicomedy), their relationship to fluid choreographic genres (specifically, sarabands), and how novel intersections of these repeatedly force us to contend with questions of geography. By the late seventeenth century in England, the migration of sarabands from the New World and then across Europe allowed the genre to call to mind places both near and far, exotic and familiar, from México and North Africa to Spain, France, and Italy. This paper looks as two sarabands performed by Moll Davis in two Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare in which Davenant and Dryden had a hand—*The Tempest*, and *The Law Against Lovers* (a mashup of *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado About Nothing*)—and argues that the palimpsestic geographies of the saraband allow the dance to manage the collision of settings in

these plays, which forge new connections between the New World and the Mediterranean, between Sicily and Vienna. The perpetually shifting formal features of the saraband were particularly suited to these plays precisely because Restoration tragicomedies placed new emphasis on forms in flux: sutured fragments, interpolations, and duplicated characters.

Forms of Fighting

Dr. Gillian Woods
Birkbeck University of London

What forms did combat and fights take on the early modern stage? The stage directions indicating their presence in plays – '*battle*', '*excursions*', '*fight*' – offer an indication that something took place, but not precisely what. This paper will analyse the 'affordance' of such instructions, exploring the various implications of the different possible practices signalled. It also considers the formal significance of combat within the pattern of dramatic action. Caroline Levine points out that narrative 'best captures the experience of colliding forms.' The embodied and multi-sensory nature of dramatic narratives increases the number and kinds of such collisions. In this paper, I'm interested in the particular 'collisions' created by battles and fights. Formally agonistic, battles might physically enact the crux of a play's plot. The arrangements and actions of the actors on stage are the physical contestation of the play's political structures (e.g. France against England; rebel against king). But while battles might superficially seem to represent binarized oppositions and a will to assert a clear-cut hierarchy, the forms of combat in many Renaissance plays fracture into more complex arrangements. Soldiers on the same side frequently behave in contrary ways, and the oppositional structure of battles is often riven by a range of competing principles (kinship, chivalry, social rank, etc.). This paper suggests that looking closely at the physical and ideological forms of battle, provides new ways of thinking about how audiences are engaged with characters and of understanding the social forces that enmeshed them.