

## English and Comparative Literary Studies research seminars, Spring 2025

All research seminars take place in the Student Hub (FAB5.49). All are welcome. Drinks and nibbles are provided.

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### Monday 3 February, 5-6pm

#### **‘Interdisciplinary Madness: working with Klein’s Manic Defence in a study of early modern comedy’**

Professor Bridget Escolme, Queen Mary University of London

This talk outlines the disciplinary tensions that have emerged - and partially resolved themselves - in a book project about laughter and power on the early modern stage, to which Escolme has contributed work on an initial practical experiment at Shakespeare’s Globe, and two chapters. Through this research, Escolme’s collaborator, former psychiatrist and psychotherapist Maria Grazia Turri, has developed a new theory of laughter as a manifestation of Melanie Klein’s theory of omnipotence phantasies and the manic defence. In her contributions to the volume, Escolme outlines how this theory might be used in the analysis of archetypal objects of early modern theatrical laughter such as the incarcerated mad figure and the cuckold or jealous husband. What are the cultural implications of accepting that these figures are funny not because the audience enjoys a complacent, Hobbesian superiority to them, but unconsciously relates to their wild phantasies of power? What are the scholarly implications for a post-Cultural Materialist critic, of applying Klein’s theories to four-hundred-year-old texts, or suggesting one can discuss unconscious emotional processing in historical audiences? This talk offers analysis of some triumphant early modern cuckolds and madpeople, and explores the undoing of the conservative ‘superiority thesis’ of laughter in works by Thomas Dekker and William Shakespeare.

**Bridget Escolme** is Professor of Theatre and Performance at Queen Mary University of London, where she researches and teaches early modern theatre in performance, histories and representations of emotion and mental health, and histories of fashion and costume. She is co-convenor of the MSc Creative Arts and Mental Health, a collaboration between QMUL’s Department of Drama and the Centre for Psychiatry and Mental Health.

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### Wednesday 26 February, 5-6pm

#### **‘Shakespeare Broadcasts and the Question of Value’**

Dr Beth Sharrock, University of Warwick

In a talk to mark the launch of her book *Shakespeare Broadcasts and the Question of Value* (Cambridge Elements ‘Shakespeare and Text’ series), Beth Sharrock gives an overview of her work. What is the role of theatre companies, adapters, and editors in the shifting value of Shakespeare’s plays? Her book considers how RSC live theatre broadcasts of rarely performed, often critically maligned, works are presented to contemporary audiences through the ‘paratextual’ interviews and short films streamed alongside a live performance in cinemas. Setting these broadcasts in conversation with late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century print editions and adaptations, she traces an earlier history which uses marginal spaces in both print and performance to (re)negotiate the value of canonically marginal plays. Her book uses three case study broadcasts: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (2014), *Titus Andronicus* (2017), and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2018). In so doing, her work explores

paratextual articulations of excusal, apology, and disappointment to question the role of the theatre institution in mediating the ‘difficult’ value of Shakespeare’s works.

**Beth Sharrock** is a Teaching Fellow in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies. Prior to her role here, she taught at the University of Birmingham, Coventry University, and the University of Nottingham. She has previously been a research assistant on the AHRC-funded network, *Adapting the Classics*. In 2022, she was awarded an M4C Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the University of Birmingham to undertake work on the (anti)sociability of Shakespeare’s eighteenth century editors.

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**Wednesday 28 May, 5-6pm**

**“Food Sovereignty” and Subalternization: Towards “Communism in Living” in the Late Marx and Leslie Marmon Silko’**

Dr Daniel Hartley, Durham University

In 2015, Jason W. Moore proclaimed that ‘food – not just land – has become a central site of the world class struggle in a way that is entirely unprecedented, and unthinkable even three decades ago.’ A central concept to have emerged from this stage of world class struggle is ‘food sovereignty,’ which the 2007 ‘Declaration of Nyéléni’ defined as ‘the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.’

The aim of this paper is to articulate certain contradictions at work within the concept of ‘food sovereignty.’ It will begin by reconstructing the notion of ‘communism in living’ in the late Marx’s so-called *Ethnological Notebooks*, taken from the work of Lewis Henry Morgan to describe the communal socio-ecological relations of the Native American *gens* (tribe or nation). It will elaborate a connection between ‘communism in living’ and ‘food sovereignty’ as a way of framing the potential pitfalls of the latter concept. The final part of the paper will then argue that Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999) offers a rich set of reflections on food sovereignty and autonomy from the perspective of peoples who have been violently and systematically dispossessed of their socio-ecological modes of reproduction. Ultimately, the paper will argue that, taken together, the writings of the late Marx and Leslie Marmon Silko oppose a vision of *socio-ecological reproductive autonomy* (based on women’s independence, collective living, and agroecology) to the historical reality of ‘familial’ social reproductive subalternity (based on patriarchy, private households, and commodification).

**Daniel Hartley** is Associate Professor in World Literatures at Durham University. He is the author of *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (2016), and has published widely on Marxist theory and modern world literature. He is currently working on a book project provisionally entitled *Peasant Modernism: Marx, Culture and Agrarian Struggle*, for which he was awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship (2023-4).