

Early Modernity Workshop, march 18

Via zoom

12.30-12.45: welcome, short round of presentations

12.45-13.30: Joseph Sterrett: Trusting one's word in *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet is a play that seems fascinated with the status of words and their substantive value. Over and over again the question is raised whether the meanings of words can be trusted or, more importantly, whether the one who utters them can be trusted. This repeated focus — famously culminating in Juliet's "What's in a name?"—is keyed to wider philosophical debates that underpinned many of the Reformation disputes. Indeed, the playwright's handling of this theme suggests the play could be his oblique contribution to these debates, a contribution that tied trust and the word to the same conditions of performance that were so familiar to him on the stage.

13.30-13.45: Break

13.45-14.30: Anne-Sophie Refskou: 'Compassion and Colonialism' i *The Tempest* og *The Sea Voyage* (Fletcher/Massinger)

This presentation is based on work in progress for a book chapter which compares Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) and John Fletcher and Phillip Massinger's collaborative play *The Sea Voyage* (1622), also part of the King's Men's repertoire.

My reading of the two plays attempts to tease out the complex relationship between early modern compassion and colonialism. That is, I argue that early modern affective discourse played a significant part in shaping early colonial discourse and the engagement with New World indigenous peoples. Early modern descriptions of compassion frequently refer to an Aristotelian premise of affinity – e.g. in status or situation – between the compassionate observer and the sufferer, but this correlation between 'kindness' and 'of the same kind' is put to the test during encounters with New World Otherness. Simultaneously, the compassionate disposition of indigenous peoples is used to assess their level of humanity (and consequently their rights). In my presentation, I will try to contextualise – and complicate – select passages from the two plays with contemporaneous references and artefacts.

14.30-15.15: Gordon McMullan: Cormorant Shylock'

When Satan arrives in Eden in *Paradise Lost*, he settles in the Tree of Life 'like a cormorant'. Beginning with Milton's curious choice of creature, I trace the early modern history of the cormorant and of its taxonomic cousin the pelican, mapping the interchangeable symbolic relationship of these birds in readings of a key speech in *Richard II* and, more fully, of the oppositional pattern of *The Merchant of Venice*. I outline the connections made in early modern England between cormorants, Jews and usury in order to develop a new understanding of the Shylock/Antonio relationship. In the process, I address the channelling of anti-Semitism through animal symbolism, reflect on the tensions between zoology and symbology in the analysis of early

modern nonhuman creatures and offer a provocative solution to one of the best-known of Shakespearean cruxes.

15.15-15.30: break

15.30-16.15: Laura Søvsøe: Mathematicians in English Drama 1500-1600

In my talk I will briefly introduce the arguments and casestudies in the article “A Magazine of all Perfections”: Early Modern English Drama and the Portrayal of the Mathematician (co-written with Professor of the history of mathematics Henrik Kragh Sørensen (University of Copenhagen)). I would also very much like to get your feedback and inputs on which journal we might submit the article to (we usually have problems with these interdisciplinary articles, because the literary journals think it is too mathematical and history of science/maths journals thinks it is too literary/humanistic).

16.15-16.30: Concluding remarks