

**FLUID AND LOCI:
DEATH AND MEMORY
IN SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS**

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To the
University of Exeter

As a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
In August 2012

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC) and the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme (ORSAS), whose scholarships and support have made my research possible. My thanks also go to those who have contributed to this thesis and supported me in one way or the other.

First and foremost, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisors Professor Philip Schwyzer and Dr Pascale Aebischer for their invaluable advice, kind encouragement and unfailing patience through the course of my PhD thesis writing. I really appreciate Professor Philip Schwyzer's excellent supervision and his invaluable time devoted to reading my drafts and giving me comments. Due thanks also go to the Centre of Early Modern Studies and the College of Humanities at the University of Exeter where I have met a lot of helpful staff who either gave me insightful suggestion on my research or helped me in other ways.

Second, I owe a great deal to the conferences at which I had opportunities to present my papers to international scholars with similar interests, whose stimulating questions and valuable comments have helped shaping my thinking in immeasurable ways. At the British Shakespeare Association (BSA) Conference 2009 and 2012, I had opportunities to talk with Professor Alexander

Huang and Professor Bob White; to the latter I owe my warmest thanks as he kindly gave me some constructive comments on my paper. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor William Engel for his much-appreciated feedback. Due thanks also go out to the editors, Professor Paolo Santangelo, Assistant Professor Jeremy Lopes, Yves Camus and others ,who have helped me to publish my papers. My deepest gratitude also goes to the examiners of this thesis, Professor Gerald Maclean and Dr Tian Yuan Tan.

Third, I would like to thank Hunan University, and specifically the College of Chinese Language and Literature where I obtained my BA and MA. My final thanks are to my friends, teachers and family members for their support, encouragement and love.

Abstract

This study combines formal analysis of Shakespeare's texts with an investigation of early modern English culture in order to explore the social energy circulating between. It argues that the conceptual categories of fluidity and loci are two features prevalent not only in Shakespeare's plays specifically, but also in early modern English culture generally. Chapter One maps out the scholarship on death and memory in early modern English culture; Chapter Two investigates fluidity and loci in numerous forms, including humoral bodies, identities, money, commodity and texts, as regards physiology, economics, cosmology and politics. Chapter Three on *Hamlet* investigates corruption and fragmentation regarding both death and memory, and it also argues that Hamlet is troubled by memory's excessiveness and fickleness. Chapter Four explores time, memory, emotion and death in *Macbeth*, followed by a study of *Henry V*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* in Chapter Five.

There are two points underlying the argument of the whole thesis. The first point is that, whereas the brain-centred understanding of memory was predominant in early modern England as in other European countries, there was also a heart-centred tradition. Although the brain and reason still occupied pivotal positions in early modern England, the heart and emotion were given

substantial attention by Shakespeare among others. As regards the relationship between the heart and the emotions, there were also two divergent attitudes to emotion: praise of emotion and denigration of emotion. As the connotations and history of the term “emotion” are complex, this study distinguishes between it and its synonyms such as passion, affection, feeling and the Chinese concept of *qing*. Other Chinese philosophies such as Daoism and theories including Yin-Yang theory and “Three Immortality” are also explored to shed light on the foci of this study.

Secondly, this thesis argues that there are two categories of memory, namely, locative memory and fluid memory, and Shakespeare was influenced by both. It also contends that the eradication and displacement of memory provoked anxiety about memory, just as the displacement and annihilation of corpses, mainly caused by plagues and the Reformation as well as other factors, lead to heightened anxiety about death in early modern English culture.

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