

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

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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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