

Early Career International Research Fellowship 2017

Naya Tsentourou

'The Breathless Renaissance: Sighs and Emotions in Early Modern Literature'



As part of its international research collaboration, the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions funds outstanding international scholars in the field to visit one or more of the Australian nodes for a period of between four weeks and two months, to work with members of the Centre on a research program of their choice. Visitors are invited to present their work in lectures or symposia, where they will receive feedback from and engage in discussion with members of the Centre, promoting collaborative research.

Naya Tsentourou held an Early Career International Research Fellowship in 2017 and travelled to Australia to work with the Centre for a period of one month at The University of Western Australia node. Naya is a Lecturer in English at the University of Exeter and completed a PhD at the University of Manchester in 2013. Her publications include a monograph, *Milton and the Early Modern Culture of Devotion Bodies at Prayer* (Routledge, 2017), a collection of essays co-edited with Lucia Nigri, *Forms of Hypocrisy in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 2018), and articles published in *SEL Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* and *Literature Compass*.

Naya comments on her time as an Early Career Research Fellow with CHE, below.

I visited The University of Western Australia (UWA) in Perth as an Early Career International Visiting Fellow with the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions in April 2017. The UWA node offered me the warmest welcome one could expect

from a research centre, with many opportunities to share my work at an early stage, to shape my project based on insightful and constructive discussions with members of CHE, and to be inspired by participating in a lively and stimulating research environment.

My research at UWA revolved around my new project, 'The Breathless Renaissance: Sighs and Emotions in Early Modern Literature', which investigates how early modern subjects relied on their breath, and specifically on sighs, to convey a wide range of emotions including joy, relief, ecstasy, relief, abjection and sorrow. This work seeks to study sighing not only as a symptom of these emotional states, and therefore reductive to a pathological view of the body, but as a breathing strategy for enhancing communal subjectivities and wellbeing. In uncovering an early modern poetics of sighing, the project highlights the interaction between medical, religious and literary understandings of breath in a period when religion and medicine were not distinct spheres of practice and a comprehensive knowledge of the mechanism of respiration was not yet available, while in the process offering new and alternative readings of canonical authors (Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Milton) and seeking to explain how they use the physiology of breathing to articulate spiritual, confessional and even gendered identities.

During my time in Perth, I took part in a work-in-progress workshop (18 April 2017) where I was able to communicate the early findings of this research to a community of scholars that work on emotions from an astonishing variety of methodological perspectives and principles in a delightfully interdisciplinary setting, and where the study and practice of early modern dramaturgy productively co-exists alongside the study of medieval ethics, reformation theology, and adaptation. It was a particularly fruitful afternoon of discussion, with encouraging insights and valuable feedback from CHE members at UWA, including Bob White, Kathryn Prince, Kirk Essary, Paul Megna, Bríd Philips, Giovanni Tarantino, Joanne McEwan, Ciara Rawnsley and Danijela Kambaskovic, amongst others. The event allowed me to reflect further on spiritual and theatrical uses of sighs in particular, and helped me to complete two research outputs: a conference paper ('Holy Breathing in *The Temple*') that I presented at the 'George Herbert in Paris' conference (Sorbonne, 18 May 2017), and a chapter contribution to a volume on breath and literature I am currently co-authoring. The feedback has also fed into an article I am completing on *Lucrece*, and I am especially grateful to Kirk Essary and Bob White for their suggestions and for sharing materials that I have since incorporated into my project. The social coffee mornings and the impromptu lunches by the bay allowed for equally stimulating exchange of ideas at this beautiful leafy campus.

During the fellowship, I was invited to deliver a keynote lecture at the 'Hamlet and Emotions: Then and Now' symposium (10–11 April 2017), organised by Bob White and Paul Megna. This proved a wonderful opportunity to test my ideas of sighing in *Hamlet* next to the historical, linguistic and philosophical readings of the contributors, drawing on sources and methods as diverse as translations, semiotics and theatre practice. An actors' workshop, and the chance to hear from directors such as Geoffrey Borny and Steve Chinna, were very

useful and revealing in considering the live possibilities of sighs on stage, and I have since been in touch with performance artists to arrange similar workshops. Visiting at the same time as other international visitors Kevin Curran, Richard Meek, Jane Rickard and Kathryn Prince proved particularly rewarding in terms of thinking about emotions in Shakespeare. Kathryn's expertise in performance history, in particular, generated exciting ways of thinking about the spatial dynamics of the air circulating on stage between bodies and audience. The symposium, on the whole, generated diverse and constructive feedback that has shaped the chapter on *Hamlet* and emotions I have now submitted to the forthcoming collection ('A Dream of Passion: Emotion and *Hamlet*') being edited by the organisers, Paul Megna, Bríd Phillips and Bob White.

My fellowship at UWA allowed me to improve my new project by solidifying its theoretical and methodological basis, and draft parts of the outputs, and pushed me to consider the impact and public engagement potential, which I am currently refining for funding applications. My time with CHE has been thoroughly rewarding and I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to experience such an exciting research culture first hand. I am, therefore, very much hoping to maintain ongoing research relationships with individuals and to cultivate opportunities for international collaborations. I am immensely thankful to Pam Bond for the excellent organisational support and to Bob White for generously and amiably sharing his time and input during my stay.