

IASEMS



Italian Association  
of Shakespearean and  
Early Modern Studies

*Affective Shakespeare and the Early Modern Imagination:  
Empathy, Voice, and Spectatorship*

The Seventeenth IASEMS Conference  
University of Naples Federico II, Naples, 28–30 May 2026  
Convenors: Michele Stanco, Angela Leonardi, and the IASEMS Executive Board

The Seventeenth IASEMS Conference explores how Shakespeare and early modern culture fashioned, staged, and theorised affective experience, with a particular focus on empathy both as a mode of knowledge and a cultural and embodied practice. The conference examines how Shakespeare's works, and early modern English literature more broadly, engage audiences and readers at affective and empathic levels through the interplay of language, poetic form, imagery, musicality, rhetorical figures, the embodied power of acting, theatre architecture, and the dynamics of performance.

Building on developments in performance studies, cognitive and affective humanities, and early modern literary scholarship, the conference approaches Shakespearean theatre as a site of cognitive and affective simulation capable of activating emotional intelligence and ethical reflection. It interrogates how affective and empathic experience was staged, conceptualised, and theorised within the cultural and literary milieu of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and considers how theatrical, poetic, and rhetorical practices shaped forms of emotional knowledge and intersubjective engagement.

The conference welcomes interdisciplinary and methodologically innovative contributions engaging with performance studies, cognitive and affective humanities, sound and voice studies, and practice-informed research. We welcome papers that examine empathy not only as a theoretical construct but also as a cultural and embodied practice, with attention to voice, listening, sound, rhythm, silence, and spectatorship as key affective vectors in early modern drama.

The conference includes a **graduate session** open to PhD candidates and researchers who have been awarded their doctorate within the past five years. Applicants wishing to be considered for the graduate session should indicate this at the time of submission.

**Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:**

- empathy and literature
- rhetorical strategies and figures of pathos
- affect, race, and gender
- grief, care, passion, compassion, and cruelty

- acting, performance, theatre architecture, and spectatorship

**Keynote Speakers:** Terri Bourus (Florida State University); Rory Loughnane (University of Kent); Gary Taylor (Florida State University).

Proposals for twenty-minute papers are invited. Please send a 500-word abstract and a 200-word curriculum vitae by **15 March 2026** to [info@iasems.org](mailto:info@iasems.org).

Notification of acceptance will be sent by **31 March 2026**.

Selected papers will be considered for publication in a peer-reviewed collection or a special issue of an academic journal, edited by the conference convenors with the support of the IASEMS Executive Board.