



Inaugural Spotlight Talk

Citing Race and Seeing Death in Shakespeare

Talk by Professor **Arthur L. Little, Jr.**, University of California, Los Angeles

Wednesday, November 15, 2023
4:00 p.m. PST

[UCLA William Andrews Clark Memorial Library](#)
& livestreamed on the [Center's YouTube Channel](#)

This talk, which begins with Ben Jonson's reading of Shakespeare in the First Folio and ends with the promotion of the iconic image of Lawrence Olivier as Hamlet in that play's graveyard scene, focuses in between on the citation of a racialized Blackness circulating throughout Shakespeare's plays. By "citation," this talk means the act of gesturing towards a Black presence, for example, the jewel in an Ethiop's ear in *Romeo and Juliet*, without the possibility of the Black figure being so conjured having any interlocutory or subjective possibilities. In the words of this presentation, such figures in Shakespeare (somewhere in the order of twenty of them) establish Black subjects as constitutively dead objects. From the archives to the texts of Shakespeare's plays, what does this linkage of Blackness to death mean in broader conversations about race and Blackness and how, arguably, does it anticipate what Orlando Patterson has famously called the construction of "social death" within the system of American chattel slavery? While the construction of a racialized whiteness within Shakespeare's texts is an important project, this particular talk seeks to understand Shakespeare's Black citational practices by reading them through a paratextual white framing with Jonson on one end and Olivier on the other.

Arthur L. Little, Jr., an associate professor in the English Department at UCLA, received his bachelor's degree from Northwestern University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. His research focuses on Shakespeare and early modern race, gender and sexuality, and whiteness in the humanities. He is the author of *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (Stanford 2000) and editor of *White People in Shakespeare* (Bloomsbury 2023). His works in progress include *Shakespeare and Race Theory* (forthcoming from Bloomsbury) and *Black Hamlet: Disciplining Race, Memory, and the Geno-Performative*. In addition to these works, Professor Little has published numerous articles and has lectured widely both nationally and internationally, including in England, South Africa, Spain, and Australia. His work on Shakespeare and whiteness is proving to be particularly generative for Shakespeare scholars both in and outside Shakespeare and early modern race studies. He has worked closely with the Shakespeare Association of America, the Globe Centre in London, and the International Shakespeare Conference (Stratford-upon-Avon).

This talk is free to attend with advance registration. In-person registration will close on Monday, November 13 at 5:00 p.m. No registration is required to watch the livestream.

Registration

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For questions, please contact the Center at c1718cs@humnet.ucla.edu or (310) 206-8552.

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