

SAA 2025: Displacement in Renaissance Drama

Convenor – Alexander Thom, University of Leeds

“Hamlet the Dane!”: The Interplay of Displaced Social Position and Physical Location in *Hamlet*

Stephen Deng, Michigan State University

In a few instances within the play, Hamlet complains about his displacement: once when Claudius “popped in between th’ election” and his “hopes” of succeeding his father (5.2.64), and later when he “must to England” (3.4.198) being sent there under Claudius’s command, with suspicion that his “two schoolfellows” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern “bear the mandate, they must sweep my way / And marshal me to knavery” (3.4.202-3). Indeed, he is displaced twice more while aboard the ship – once by having the schoolfellows be the ones who “bear the mandate,” even though Hamlet, holding a higher position as prince, should be the one to do so, and once again when he ends up aboard a pirate ship, which eventually enables his return to Denmark, where he announces himself as “Hamlet the Dane.” Place and position are often interconnected for nobles and royalty, which is why Mowbray in *Richard II* calls his banishment “speechless death, / Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath” (1.3.174-75). Although Hamlet is not technically banished, when he announces himself as “Hamlet the Dane” upon his return, he reclaims both country and his rightful position as his father’s heir. In fact, physical displacement seems to be a condition that enables the restoration of this position. In this paper, I will explore the interplay of these two forms of displacement in *Hamlet* – that of physical location and that of social position.

Displacement as opening in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Darlene Farabee, University of South Dakota

At the beginning of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine claims that only by displacing himself can he escape the effects of “living dully sluggardized at home,” that will “Wear out [...] youth with shapeless idleness” (1.1.7-8). Thus, Valentine pointedly describes what he imagines will be Proteus’ future if Proteus does not leave Verona with Valentine. Proteus does depart (by the end of 2.2) and the play offers no real contradiction to Valentine’s assertion that, “Homekeeping youth have ever homely wits” (1.1.2). In this paper I am interested in exploring how characters’ desires for and refusals of displacement propel the narratives of plays. I will be using *Two Gentlemen of Verona* as a test case with characters who engage with displacement in a variety of ways. I am revisiting Edward Said’s *Beginnings* and some of A.D. Nuttall’s work on narrative to consider how displacement performs a narrative necessity, particularly in drama.

As You Like It and the Republic of the Landless

Tohni Lee, Tufts University

This paper will argue that the political import of *As You Like It* is inseparable from the experience of theater; and that this experience depends on the audience's ironic identification with Orlando, a disenfranchised gentleman who, like Dickens’ David Copperfield, must find himself by first being traumatically reduced to the condition of vagrancy. I will argue that *As You Like It* is able to convincingly respond to the contemporary reality of migration not despite but *because* of the ironies built into the structure and medium of theater. The play represents the history of migration insofar as the journeys undertaken by its heroes, Orlando and Rosalind, constitute a heightened imitation of the action undertaken by real migrants, who, while compelled to leave, do so in pursuit of a better life elsewhere.

Migration as an act of negation is built upon the promise of an affirmative future. Gratification is deferred but not prohibited; you will feel better later, if you can go now in content. What is at issue, I suggest, is precisely the human capacity to reflect on the meaning of one’s action, to live one’s life thoughtfully. It is vitally important that

Orlando, in becoming homeless, does not turn savage. As Duke Senior reminds the famished Orlando when he desperately charges in with a sword in hand: “Your gentleness shall force, / More than your force move us to gentleness” (2.102-4). Arden becomes meaningful primarily as a site of humanist education—in civility, philosophy, and love—needed to fashion a gentleman-migrant. Or rather, what is being fashioned is a republic of migrants, one articulated through a series of dialogues aimed at rethinking the conditions of social existence.

I am an assistant professor at Tufts University specializing in early modern English literature and drama. My current book project on the history of migration literature, *Migration and Mimesis in the English Renaissance: From More to Milton*, explores the relationship between migrancy and fictionality. The present draft comes from a section on a chapter on pastoral literature.

‘Accost!’: The Economy of Travel in *Twelfth Night*

Sophie Lemerancier-Goddard, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon

From the ‘unscene’ of the shipwreck that strands Viola on the shore of Illyria to Malvolio’s self-exile at the end of the play, *Twelfth Night* presents a multiplicity of dispossessed and displaced persons who have lost their bearings and try to find a place for themselves in a new community. As they pick up their scattered selves, they navigate a fluid and mobile Illyria that offers them a sense of exhilarating freedom inseparable from a sense of homelessness. Among the multiple displacements envisaged in the play, displacement of bodies, gender, and words through multi-layered puns and quips, I will examine the cost of mobilities for its voluntary or accidental travellers. Drawing on Steve Mentz’s water-centric thinking, I propose to consider Shakespeare’s poetic geography in light of contemporary maritime exploration projects – accounting for Sir Andrew Aguecheek’s metamorphosis into a frozen explorer of the Arctic seas. I will thus strive to understand how the green world of Shakespearean comedy turns into a blue world: Viola the castaway becomes an outcast but the play never fully turns its back to the sea. Ultimately I will propose an ecocritical reading of the play, showing how the sea promotes images of errancy, dislocation and relocation.

Sophie Lemerancier-Goddard is Associate Professor of English Literature at Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon. Her research focuses on issues of space, identity, translation in early modern drama but also in voyages of exploration of the period. She has published several articles on Shakespeare, Webster, and Elizabeth Cary. With Sophie Chiari, she is the editor of “*Work, work your thoughts*”: *Henry V revisited* (PUBP, 2021) and *John Webster’s “Dismal Tragedy”*: *The Duchess of Malfi Reconsidered* (PUBP, 2019), and with Chloe Houston and Ladan Niayesh, of *Writing Distant Travels and Linguistic Otherness in Early Modern England (c. 1550-1660)* (Brepols Publishers, forthcoming 2025).

Hamlet’s Chronotopic Conscience

Jennifer E. Nicholson, University of Sydney

Hamlet is lost. While the play in which he exists does offer him some closure, his literal and metaphorical layers of banishment from his roles at Elsinore remain present even at the end of the text. Moreover, though, for readers or audiences revisiting him, Hamlet could also be described as lost amongst his many parts displaced in and between different iterations of Shakespeare’s play. This paper will consider language and selfhood as two aspects of Hamlet’s sense of displacement and how those come to bear on readers’ own sense of displacement in the text. I will do so by considering how the philosophical questions raised by this text echo and respond to Montaignian philosophies about expressing oneself in language, whether one’s own or that of another. By considering elements like commonplacing - displaced quotations? - and translation, I hope to consider the concept of displacement historically, but with audiences’ experiences of hearing or reading also in mind.

Jennifer E. Nicholson is an early career scholar working in early modern drama, considering how locating Shakespeare and Marlowe at the porous edges of French and English generates new readings of uncertainty. To develop her book project on this topic, she is working on the presence of “French English” in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, deepening work begun during her PhD in English at the University of Sydney, completed in 2019. Jennifer is also working on critical whiteness studies and *The Winter’s Tale*. Since conferral, she has taught as a sessional academic and as a secondary English teacher. She can be found online @justjenerally.

Exile and the Novella Tradition in *Cymbeline*

Patrick Soto, Yale University

This paper will investigate the literary-historical dimensions of exile in *Cymbeline*, focusing in particular on Posthumus' banishment and its ramifications throughout the play. As I will suggest, Posthumus' flight to Italy transpires not only geographically (that is, spatially and politically) and temporally (for the Renaissance Rome he encounters is out of step with the play's ancient setting), but also generically. Posthumus, we might say, takes refuge in the novella tradition, unwittingly entering a 'wager plot' drawn from the *Decameron* and *Frederyke of Jennen*. Despite the Italian setting of this scheme, however, this subplot quickly intrudes on events in Britain, when Iachimo, posing as a merchant, journeys to Britain to manufacture the outcome of his bet with Posthumus. Taking this episode of exile and foreign exchange as a commentary on the relationship of place to (literary) origin in *Cymbeline*, this paper will examine how the play stages its encounter with the novella. Additional lines of inquiry may include how the logic of finance pervades this encounter between genres and how this episode figures its novella sources as a hostile presence.