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SAA 2025: PlayTime
Abstract

A Bastard to the Time: Little Arthur, Casting Children, and Adjusting Age in *King John*

Shakespeare, never one to strictly observe historical chronology, plays particularly fast and loose with time in *King John*. The events depicted in Act IV alone actually spanned sixteen years during the reign of the real King John. One particularly shifting element of the play is the character of young Arthur. The anonymous contemporary *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England* casts Arthur as an athletic teenager trained in combat. Shakespeare ages Arthur down about seven years so that Arthur's interactions with the adults in his life and his eventual demise elicit a more pathetic audience response than *TR*'s Arthur. Shakespeare's temporal decision introduces casting and staging questions, like who was the boy player talented enough to inspire Shakespeare to write such a voluble and vulnerable role? I suspect the boy was a tumbler and used his talent to effectively jump in Act IV Scene 3 and land safely while feigning death for the audience.

This paper explores the malleability of time from two directions: Shakespeare's play with time by manipulating Arthur's age, and the slipperiness of time in human age. The early modern concept of childhood was subjective and inconsistent, and temporal delineations of age were in continual flux until at least the mid-seventeenth century. Furthermore, the actor playing Arthur would not stay the age of the character for long and would quickly age himself. This paper contributes to the history of Shakespeare in performance and children onstage.

Meredith Beales
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Shakespeare Association of America Abstract
Seminar: Theatre History and the Question of Staging Time

Rome, Then and Now: Searching for a Roman *Coriolanus*

What happens when Shakespeare's plays are presented in an eternal present? While *Coriolanus* takes place in early republican Rome, a few years after the Tarquin kings were forcefully removed from power, the play is littered with anachronisms: the plebians toss their (early modern) caps in the air in response to both Martius's triumph and his exile. *Coriolanus*'s setting is thereby multi-temporal, both ancient and contemporary. This conflation of ancient and modern is rarely acknowledged in twenty-first century productions, most of which are set in something resembling the present. Focusing on clothing as a temporal signifier, this paper will argue that an insistence on the contemporaneity of ancient Rome ignores the multi-valent historicity of Shakespeare's original. By contrasting the "then" of North's narrative with the "now" of contemporary stage adaptations, I will demonstrate that by picking a particular setting, whether ancient or modern, many productions of *Coriolanus* have overlooked the multi-temporal resonances built into Shakespeare's last Roman tragedy.

Timing Emotion: Staging the Commodification of Time in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Sam Kolodezh

SAA 2025 Boston

The central conflict in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is often identified as Valentine's and Proteus's common struggle to negotiate friendship and desire within the confines of what is proper. Valentine pursues his desire in proper time, or the time sanctioned, conducted, and trafficked by the state, while Proteus is always untimely in his desire. Less explored are the discourses on time that begin the action of the play and continue subtly pervading the main and secondary action. They inform and develop concepts of exchange, subjectivity, and affect at the intersection of the dominant themes of friendship and desire. Throughout the play, the characters, especially Proteus, mistime their actions and in turn their relationships suffer with varying degrees of severity. However, to mistime action or to use time improperly suggests that within the play there is a clear and distinct understanding of time frames (natural, social, personal, economic, political) that the characters share, articulate, and evaluate in the interest of abiding by and bolstering those frames of time. Time is at once a metric by which to measure which course of action should be taken, and it is a commodity that can be accumulated or wasted, determining the value of action. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona* Shakespeare offers a playful model of how time might become commodified and measured through the performed relationship between Lance and Crab. In their relationship we also find how the process of temporalization depends on the affective exchange of a plural subject in a confused present rather than a singular one already imbricated in laminated forms of time and official processes of temporalization.

Time, Prophecy and Peace in *Henry VIII*

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Like all plays, Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* combines fictive time with stage time. As a history play, moreover, it includes two sorts of historical time: that of the play's subject matter and that of the play's first performance. Because *Henry VIII* is still performed, we should add the contemporary historical location of each performance. To stage time and playing time, we should therefore add three types of historical time. Finally, we should add existential time, as a series of characters confront their own deaths, and ethical time, as they confront each other. The play does not have a single time, but multiple times which overlap and sometimes collapse into one another.

My paper will argue that in the final scenes of the play, the various temporalities are manipulated so as to place Thomas Cranmer's final prophecy in an extraordinary, utopian time. Rather than simply representing a past that did not occur, Cranmer's prophecy represents an ideal which remains unrealized. It therefore constitutes one of Shakespeare's singular images of peace, against the war and political struggle of the rest of the play and much of the canon.

“PlayTime: Theater History and the Question of Staging Time”
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The Rest Untold

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This paper is about the endings of early modern plays. By this I mean not the dramatic denouement, the resolution of the plot and its attendant conflicts, but literally how plays *end*, their parting words and sentiments, the final images with which they leave us and we them, how they signal closure on a curtainless stage and usher their actors off it, projecting the fading outlines of their characters one minute, one day, one year into the future beyond the story they are concerned to represent. In particular, I consider the variant to which Shakespeare seems to have been inordinately attached: the invitation to further offstage discussion, typically at some gathering or feast, in order to rehearse the events we have just witnessed — a feature of no less than fourteen of his early printed plays, chiefly but not exclusively comedies. This aggressively minor topic, as we will see, has received at once too little and too much scholarly attention, with nearly every critic making identical claims about it: that the goal of this technique was to exemplify for early modern audiences proper critical engagement, modeling their own ideal behavior once they left the playhouse. I offer an alternative reading, more firmly grounded in the institutional motives and experiential structure of early modern theater.

SAA 2025 – Gerit Quealy

Tuning Time: A Delayed John Dowland performance Reconsidered

If pop culture connoisseurs are upset at having to wait a year for the second part of *Wicked* (the film), imagine how Queen Elizabeth I and her entourage felt when the final day of John Dowland's entertainment at Sudeley Castle in September 1592 was rained out, not knowing when or if they would ever see the conclusion. While technically not a cliff-hanger per se after the previous two days, the disappointment must have been palpable for the melancholic composer who was constantly trying to gain favour with Elizabeth. And even more so for Giles Bridges, Lord Chandos, who had gone to great expense to entertain the Queen on her progress and was looking forward to advancements in return for his efforts in hiring art stars and displaying lavish hospitality. This paper seeks to investigate the circumstances surrounding this stop on Queen Elizabeth's progress, the entertainment itself, and the aftermath of the truncated performance program on both Dowland and Bridges. And a perhaps hubristic attempt to reassemble the compositional pieces — get the “band” back together — for a 434-year-delayed world premiere of the entertainment in its entirety for the 400th anniversary of John Dowland's death in 1626.

John-Paul Spiro
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Death, Resurrection, and Stage-time

Several of Shakespeare's plays feature characters who are believed to be dead but emerge as "alive" at the conclusion of the play: e.g., Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*, Claudio in *Measure for Measure*, Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, and Juliet (briefly) in *Romeo and Juliet*. In these cases, the characters do not appear onstage while they are "dead"; their dramatic lives are suspended until their "resurrections." There are also characters believed to be dead who go about their lives onstage: e.g., Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, and Ferdinand in *The Tempest*. This pattern in Shakespeare's work has been widely addressed in the critical literature. Less studied, however, is the effect of these (mistaken) deaths and resurrections on stage-time. How do we experience a "dead" character onstage differently than a living one, and how do we experience the duration of a scene when we know that a "dead" character is experiencing a life, however cloistered or circummured, offstage? In extreme cases such as *The Winter's Tale*, how do we experience the contrast between stage-time and periods of sixteen years in the world of the play? I will consider these and other questions in my paper.

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Abstract of

Shakespearean Quantum Physics “in the name of Time” in *The Winter’s Tale* and Elsewhere

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Although it is obtuse Polonius posing them, the questions of “Why day is day, night night, and time is time” (*Hamlet* 2.2.88) are significant, as they have in succeeding years fascinated the minds of the deepest thinkers in the realms of physics and, most recently, quantum physics. *As You Like It*’s Rosalind asserts that “Time travels in divers paces with divers persons” (3.2.303-04), and in the twentieth century, Einstein proved that type of relativity true. In *Richard II*, Salisbury notes that, were they able to “call back yesterday, bid time return” (3.2.69), the king’s supporters could have prevailed, and Stephen Hawking argued in 1988 that, if the expanding universe collapses, time could indeed run backward. Shakespeare not only enables our view into “the dark backward and abysm of time” (*The Tempest* 1.2.50) but also depicts figures from the past who correctly gauge future representations of their present. Most astounding, however, are the instances when, in pondering “Time’s thievish progress to eternity” (Sonnet 77.8), Shakespeare depicts “the whirligig of time” (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.376) as releasing concepts very like those proved not only possible but probable by means of quantum physics.

In *The Winter’s Tale* 4.1, Shakespeare gives time itself a voice and personification, as Time, the Chorus. After brief explanations of the relevant principles of quantum physics and their versions in Shakespeare’s various works, this paper will focus on the choric figure of Time in *The Winter’s Tale* as prefiguring both current findings on Time itself and the quantum physics Observer.