

'Monumental alabaster': statuary, memory, and whiteness in early modern drama

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The relationship between flesh and stone is among the metaphorical wells that Shakespeare returns to most frequently across his works, and its applications vary widely, expressing binaries of past and present, stillness and animation, speech and silence, life and death. In this paper, I will explore static bodies on the early modern stage, including explicit reworkings of the Pygmalion story in *The Trial of Chivalry* and *The Winter's Tale* as well as brief allusions to stone bodies in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Rather than pursuing the relationship between objectification and passivity (theorised by Valerie Traub, Abbé Blum and others), I will consider the early modern body's aspiration to monumentalisation in relation to the persistence of knowledge and memory—exploring the body as statue on the early modern stage in relation to today's white supremacist insistence on the role of statues in the preservation of cultural memory and hegemony.

This discussion is informed by the work of scholars such as Diana Taylor, who positions 'archive' and 'repertoire' as two forms of cultural memory that are characterised by stillness versus animation, and proposes that the colonisation of the Americas led to the partial displacement of an animate, repertoire-based form of cultural memory with the static, written, archive-based forms preferred by European epistemologies. Sianne Ngai offers a provocative complement to Taylor's alignment of stillness with whiteness, arguing that 'animatedness' is among 'ugly categories of feeling reinforcing the historically tenacious construction of racialised subjects as excessively bodily subjects' and excluding racialised subjects from the power and control represented by the monument.

Body Doubles

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SAA 2025, Performing Bodies in Early Modern Drama I

Part of a larger project on staged bodies in the King's Men repertory, this paper will examine embodied identity in *Cymbeline*. As in the *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, characters in *Cymbeline* bear distinctive moles, marks that allow others to certify the bearer's identity and to prove their intimate knowledge of that body. However, in Imogen's case, that proof only extends to Iachimo's voyeuristic scrutiny as she sleeps—he can cite the mole to identify her body, but the audience understands that he does not really have the tactile, sexual familiarity he boasts of.

In contrast, one might expect Imogen to have that intimate knowledge of the body of her husband, Posthumus. She and other characters repeatedly differentiate him from the spoiled prince Cloten, a project that collapses when Imogen misidentifies Cloten's

headless trunk as that of her husband. This paper will examine the implications of doubling the roles of Cloten (alive and dead) and Posthumus, putting the stage trick of Cloten's corpse in conversation with related body doubles in King's Men's plays, including the simultaneous staging of corpse and ghost in *The Lady's Tragedy*, by Thomas Middleton. Questions I am interested in are: to what extent does a stage corpse perform identity? Is it necessary for the corpse to be performed by an actor? By the same actor who performed the living character? To what extent can an effigy or dummy be "embodied"?

The Enterprise of War, Prosthesis, and Crip Subjectivity in *A Larum for London* (1602)

Jifeng Huang (University of Zurich)

Abstract

This paper will explore how *A Larum for London* formulates crip subjectivity with a prostheticised body. First performed in 1599 and published in 1602, during the Anglo-Spanish War, the play allegorises the atrocious sack of Antwerp in 1576 as London's potential future, appealing to the audience's nationalistic sentiments and their sense of urgency for military readiness. Yet, as the play demonstrates, what might wreak havoc on the city are not only raids from abroad, but also bureaucratic failures in the state's own administrative system. It thus troubles its own principal didactic message, drawing attention to the city's systemic nonfeasance and thereby casting doubt on its civic structure that it simultaneously calls on the audience to defend. The most forceful vocaliser and personification of this critique in the play is none other than Stump, an amputee soldier whose disability embodies as much the violence of war as the state's structural problems. For an increasingly commercialised society, military warfare was, more than ever, to defend its national interest in a material sense, and war was by implication an enterprise where soldiers' bodies were weapons qua commodities to be purchased and consumed for the state's benefit. Having borne the brunt of the enterprise of war, Stump has, nonetheless, developed a sort of class consciousness sensible of his relations with other actors in their social strata. Moreover, his prostheticised body signals, for him, the material links he has with different kinds of bodies, be they organic or inorganic, individual or

institutional. The paper will survey the exchanges between Stump's body and these bodies, and how his subjectivity takes shape in reaction to them.

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Paper for SAA 2025 Seminar 28: Performing Bodies in Early Modern Drama

Title: Can one embody intertextuality? Intertextual Embodiment in Plautus's *The Rope (Rudens)* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

This paper will look at two questions about embodiment that emerge from Shakespeare's intertextual and interdramatic ties to ancient Roman comedy and romance. *The Rope (Rudens)* opens with two shipwrecked young women with difficulty pulling themselves up on a beach having lost everything in the storm that destroyed the boat they were in. Both are slaves and have been enforced into prostitution, and one is described as dark skinned or bronzed. I would like to put the scene of Viola washed up on the beach after shipwreck that begins *Twelfth Night* in conversation both with this scene and with the scenes described by Bruce Smith in "The Shipwrecked Youth" in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* which examines the ancient and Renaissance romance scenarios linking a shipwrecked youth with male same sex desire. It goes without saying that there are many other sources for and parallels to this opening scene in *Twelfth Night*, so I use *The Rope* and the romance theatergram of the shipwrecked youth as ways to raise some questions rather than answer them.

These questions include: how does one, or can one, or should one embody intertextuality? Does doing so open up new possibilities, new understandings of the body?

Does the difference between the two young women created by their racialized embodiment in *The Rope* get erased in *Twelfth Night*, thereby whitening the story? Or does it have a role in either the story of Sebastian or of Viola? Does the intertextual link to a slave story have a different effect when we consider questions of embodiment? Does it, for instance, give a different sense of the "service" Viola performs, particularly regarding potential sexual expectations of the master.

Second, if Viola and Sebastian both in part belong to the romance theatergram of the "Shipwrecked youth," suggesting, following Bruce Smith, the attractive nature of male beauty, how should Viola be embodied? Does this romance topos make us see her as a figure likely to provoke homosexual desire? Does it make her seem more male or more a trans man or woman? These intertextual questions together may allow us to envision a different kind of embodiment for Viola, as both more sexually available and potentially more volatile in terms of her gender identity. While the idea that Viola could be seen as a trans figure has seemed attractive to some, she seems in fact to oscillate between longing for her female identity and endorsing her male one. Can her embodiment capture this dual reality and how do these intertexts of slave, sexualized and racialized bodies shift our understanding of someone who might seem to embody white, virginal purity (as a character like Marina does in *Pericles*)?

Dieterich Abstract

This seminar paper will examine the body of Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*. Much scholarship has attended to how Aaron's blackness, foreignness, and Moorishness typify the way that the early modern commercial stage participated in the construction of phenotypical notions of 'race' and of negative racialization. This paper will look specifically at the *performance* of the role of Aaron, investigating how the play itself and the historical records of drama for a sense of how a player—and his body—would have executed this role on Shakespeare's stage. I am interested in understanding how aspects such as Aaron's voice,

movements, gestures, blocking, and (cosmetically altered) appearance contributed to the overall work of the play, engaged with existing dramaturgical conventions, and set precedents for future drama. This paper is part of the second chapter of my dissertation, a project that explores affective dramaturgical technologies of the Elizabethan commercial theater and connects technologies of playing and playgoing with emerging concepts of race. In terms of bodies, in this paper, I am concerned not only with bodies *on* the stage—such as Aaron’s— but also how embodied performance impacted the bodies of audiences in the affectively porous sensorium of the early modern playhouse.

“Oh, that I had him, / With six Aufidiuses, or more”: Dis- and re-embodiment of Aufidius in the teaser trailer for the National Theatre’s 2024 production of *Coriolanus*

To promote its 2024 production of *Coriolanus*, starring David Oyelowo as Caius Martius Coriolanus, the National Theatre released a teaser trailer in which Oyelowo is filmed in closeup against the backdrop of a large concrete space (likely part of the lobby of the National Theatre building), quietly — perhaps even mildly — performing a portion of the speech Martius gives his enemy Aufidius when, exiled from Rome, he enters the Volsce’s home. There are no soliloquies in the play, therefore any speech used for promotional material has implicit or explicit addressees towards whom Martius’ attitude generally ranges from combative to downright abusive. The teaser uses one of the mildest examples of antagonistic speech, defanging it by excising most references to the violence perpetrated against the Volces. Several reasons could have motivated the choice of this speech, not least the fact that it helpfully provides a synopsis of the play. As part of a larger project which questions modern modes of spectatorship (characterized by streaming and the circulation of images on social media and the internet more broadly) in the embodied representation of Aufidius, my interest in the choice of this speech in particular, and the direct address to the camera, focuses on the way Aufidius is dis- and re-embodied by the substitution of the viewer’s body for the Aufidius-actor’s. In this paper, I analyze the way the teaser uses cinematic tools (closeup, handheld camera, sound design and mixing, acting modulated for the screen) to encourage an embodied response that provides critical insight into Aufidius’ reaction in this scene, with an attention to the performance history that, in Marvin Carlson’s term, haunts the viewer.

Schaffert: Disabled bodies on the contemporary UK Shakespearean stage

Recently, the UK theatre industry has been criticised for its lack of diversity, both onstage and within creative and administrative spheres. Responding to movements like #MeToo, #GiveArtistsAChance and #TheatresPullUpOrShutUp, institutions have worked to increase representation of communities marginalized by race, gender, sexuality, and disability, on and off-stage. The Shakespeare industry is a core part of this, and central institutions, like the RSC, National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe, as well as many more fringe companies, have worked to improve their institutional diversity.

As a result of this movement and wider disability activism, more disabled actors have been able to take up space on the contemporary Shakespearean stage: for example, Arthur Hughes played the RSC's first disabled Richard III in 2022, and Shakespeare's Globe's 2024 production of *Antony and Cleopatra* was bilingual in BSL and English and featured many deaf actors, including Nadia Nadarajah as Cleopatra.

However, is simply casting more disabled actors the solution for better institutional diversity and representation for disabled people onstage? Performance scholars have raised concerns about the strategies of the Shakespeare industry to improve diversity, discussing how 'performative' diversity can end up causing harm to implicated communities, and productions hailed as 'progressive' often fail to anticipate the implications of their choices, resulting in the reinforcement of harmful views and stereotypes.

As part of a wider thesis that interrogates the place of disability within the Shakespeare industry, this paper will outline the unique semiotics of disabled bodies on the contemporary Shakespearean stage: how they act in dialogue with the play and characters' performance and cultural history, and how they interact with the historically weighty space of the Shakespearean stage. It will consider the meanings these interactions create, and the hurdles that come with more diverse casting as a result.

Betteridge: *Desire and Bodies in Shakespeare.*

The gentle woman said, 'Sir you have a beard above and none beneath'. And he hearing her say so said, in sport, 'Mistress you have a beard beneath and none above'. Marry, quote she, 'then set the one against the other'. Which answer made the gentleman so abashed that he had not one word to answer', *A Hundred Merry Tales*, 1526.

Everyone has a beard – above or below. The young man in this merry tale, like Absalom in *The Miller's Tale*, is abashed to be confronted with the possibility of the satisfying or confronting the reality of his desire – the mature desiring feminine body.

In this paper I will discuss the bodily economy of Shakespeare's drama focusing in particular on the way that figures like Rosalind and Joan la Pucelle generate different kinds of bodies. Rosalind's offer at the end of *As You Like It* to 'kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me' is often seen as a re-assertion of heteronormative sexual desire. As the quote above suggests, however, everyone in the audience has a beard, of one kind or another. Rosalind is therefore offering to kiss everyone in the audience regardless of sex or gender – any who have good faces, sweet breaths and good beards. Joan la Pucelle destroys English masculinity. Her effect on the Talbot and his men is to render them helpless in face of her feminine power.

Where is my strength, my valor, and my force?

Our English troops retire; I cannot stay them.

A woman clad in armor chaseth men. Talbot *1 Henry VI*, 1.7.1 – 3.

The impact of Rosalind and Joan on those around them is to create a plurality of bodies and desires – captivating, seductive, dangerous and transformative. In the process Shakespeare imagines a world which escapes the binary oppression of heteronormativity; one in which everyone with a beard is kissed and could be satisfied.

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SAA 2025: Performing Bodies in Early Modern Drama

Sexual Scripts and the Production of Memory in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*

This essay reads Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII (All is True)* asexually, interrogating the ways that bodies are imagined in the play as correctly or incorrectly sexual within a sexually normative framework of Jacobean Protestantism and reproductive futurity. In the play's memorializing of King Henry, the titular character is depicted as amorous, even fecund, despite the succession crisis hinging on his gendered failures to produce an heir. In contrast, Wolsey's celibacy makes him paradoxically beastly and effeminate, even as the play anticipates the virginal Elizabeth I as the spiritual mother of future kings. In tracing these paradoxes, I argue that the play demonstrates an impossible master narrative of sexual normativity, dependent upon the same contradictions as patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Henry VIII's obsession with legacy aptly demonstrates the ways power creates convenient sexual scripts.

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Performing Early Modern Mixed-Race Infancy in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

In his reading of Shakespeare's exploration of blackness, Ian Smith suggests that Shakespeare's sustained interest in blackness should be recognized as an investment in race: "The

fact of blackness in Shakespeare's world and work is sufficient to claim his considerable investment

in race is more far-reaching and complex than we have historically been prepared to acknowledge"

(2). Smith implores scholars, actors, students, and readers of Shakespeare to not neglect Shakespeare's attempt to present his varied representations of blackness. In his recent monograph on Shakespeare's marginalized white figures, David Sterling Brown underscores the playwright's cultural influence on race-making, "And more than a symbol with unlimited cultural capital, Shakespeare, I argue, is a chief literary architect of how hegemonic whiteness was (re)produced and negotiated in early modern England" (4). For Smith and Brown, Shakespeare contributes to early modern constructions of blackness and whiteness. We know how Elizabethans responded to Shakespeare's representations of blackness and whiteness however, how did Elizabethans react to his representation of mixed-race children? And what encoded meaning was ascribed to the bodies of infants born from an interracial relationship? This paper will examine Shakespeare's representation of mixed-race children in *Titus Andronicus* (1594) to consider the encoded message ascribed to mixed-race children and how it contributes to our conversations about early modern race constructs.

Works Cited

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Smith, I. (2022). *Black Shakespeare: Reading and Misreading Race*. Cam

'O Nature, place Pandora in my sphere': celestial bodies in John Lyly's *The Woman in the Moon* (1597)

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In the geocentric universe, the moon, gendered female, sat at the threshold of the celestial and terrestrial spheres. The movement of this celestial body through time and space fed into myth, cultural memory and folklore, inspiring writers to imagine new worlds in the moon as they grappled with the ineffability of the universe. These explorations of space are poised precariously between the real and known, and the imagined and unknown. As new systems for conceiving the cosmos increasingly destabilised understandings of the relationship between the celestial and the terrestrial, writers began to reconceive the relationship between the terrestrial and extraterrestrial bodies. This essay addresses the relationship between bodily motion, emotion, matter and embodiment in John Lyly's *The Woman in the Moon* (published 1597). What I am concerned with here is how planetary motion is presented as affecting emotion and how this connects to speech and time, celestial and terrestrial bodies, and geocentric models of the cosmos. In focussing upon the creation of Pandora by Mother Nature from matter and characteristics taken from the planets, I hope to argue that a play that

seems to be exemplary in its articulation of Elizabethan misogyny through its characterisation of unbridled, mad, female speech presents more complex representations of gender and feeling.

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Staging 'your shape and making': Fairies, Lovers, and Animals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

How do the fairy bodies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* complicate the comedy's games with human embodiment? Their unstable scale means they are dwarfed by 'cowslips tall' (2.1.9) and yet are also large enough to engage in a relationship with an adult (asinine) weaver. Shape-shifters whose metamorphic energies can be turned on 'mortals', they have the power to recalibrate human desire and understanding, thereby testing the boundaries that organize civilized society: animal and human; friend and enemy; lover and attacker. However, the fairy physics of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* presents a range of impossible challenges for theatrical embodiment. The play requires, at various moments, a visible actor to be seen as an invisible character, human players to be scaled to the insect-proportions of fairies, and a man to be accepted as a talking ass. Its representational mechanisms are openly (and joyously?) inadequate to the task it sets itself. At the same time, the comedy foregrounds other bodily skills that focus attention on the actors' bodies as both effective and affective. In particular, dance figures more prominently than in any other play by Shakespeare, with the fairy royals reconciling through a staged dance (4.1.82-4), the 'mortal' section of the play being concluded through the craftsmen's 'Bergomask' (5.1.340), and the fairies finally blessing the play's marriage and happy ending with a song and dance (5.1.378 SD). This paper takes the difficulties and opportunities of theatrical embodiment as a means of understanding the comedy's epistemological questions about what it means to be human in a social world and a natural environment.

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Dr Lynsey McCulloch (Research Fellow, Royal Shakespeare Company)

The 'Defect of the Matter': Dance, Disability and Shakespeare's Fools

Early modern actors were accomplished dancers. But some performers appear to have specialised in dance. Will Kemp, well-known as a comic actor or clown in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, was recognised during his career as a specialist in danced jigs. Kemp's dance performances were not confined to the playhouses either. In 1599, Kemp morris danced from London to Norwich, a performance he described as his 'Nine Days Wonder'. 'Kemp's Jig' even appears in John Playford's 1651 dance manual, *The English Dancing Master*. Catherine E. Doubler has considered Kemp's physical fitness as a dancer, contrasting the muscular persona he presents in his marathon morris dance with his performance as the 'fat rogue'¹ Falstaff in *Henry IV, Parts 1 & 2*. In Doubler's reading, Kemp's danced performance of himself, as athletic and able-bodied, amplifies Falstaff's physical deficiencies, demonstrating the way in which bodily difference had

¹ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*, 1.2.193.

begun to be marked in this period.² And yet the close association of dancing and antic fooling on the early modern stage challenges any easy separation of dance and disability. Like Kemp, performers for whom clown roles were devised had a very particular skillset, encompassing comedic, musical, verbal and physical attributes. The parts they performed demanded dancing ability—an advanced movement practice that, far from representing bodily ‘perfection’, more often depicted figures identified by their apparently physical, or cognitive, weaknesses. While the performance of impairment by non-disabled actors only exacerbates the issues of representation at work in the period, the peculiar identification of the comic actor and his dramatic roles—as seen in Hamlet’s ‘let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them’³—once again complicates the distinction between dance and disability. Working from Kemp’s life-writing alongside Shakespeare’s dramatic clowning, this paper takes another look at disability as a feature of fooling and asks whether a broader conceptualisation of dance—one that moves away from assumptions around peak condition and aestheticized motion—can contribute to crip readings of Renaissance culture and inform our understanding of the diversity of performing bodies in early modern drama.

Publicover: Intoxicated Bodies: Cassio and Lepidus

Focusing on *Othello*’s and *Antony and Cleopatra*’s drinking scenes, and in particular their most inebriated participants, Cassio and Lepidus, this paper explores Shakespeare’s understanding of what alcohol does to human bodies and to relations between them.

There has, in recent years, been much excellent work on drinking in Shakespearean drama. Scholars have considered representations of inebriation in the context of early modern medical theories, for example, and also in relation to the social history of drinking: specifically, there has been interest in the legal and ethical questions raised by alcohol consumption in the early modern period, such as the extent to which an intoxicated individual has responsibility for their actions. Such work has often illuminated how Shakespeare’s drinking scenes resonate with and develop their respective plays’ wider concerns: for example, how Iago’s strategy for getting Cassio drunk resembles, in miniature, his temptation of Othello.

While drawing on such work, this paper will maintain a relatively tight focus on the theatrical representation of drunkenness. What evidence does dialogue provide as to how early modern actors performed intoxication? *Antony and Cleopatra*’s drinkers are said, by a servant, to be ‘ill-rooted’; but Lepidus, the most inebriated of them all, is by Antony said to be venturing on ‘quicksands’ and liable to ‘sink’: the two expressions suggest subtly different understandings of the drunken body’s (and perhaps the drunken mind’s) behaviour. In the scene from *Othello*, Cassio’s lines express thoughts he cannot

² Catherine E. Doubler, “‘Gambol Faculties’ and ‘Halting Bravery’: Falstaff, Will Kemp, and Impaired Masculinity,” in *Disability, Health, and Happiness in the Shakespearean Body*, ed. by Sujata Iyengar (London: Routledge, 2015), 154–169.

³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.40–42.

bring into focus or fully verbalise; in a manner not unique within Shakespeare, but still relatively uncommon, his obscure remarks on salvation ('there be souls that must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved') seem to bubble up from a depth we cannot fathom.

Building especially on the work of Rebecca Lemon, I want also to consider how Lepidus's and Cassio's drinking relates to camaraderie, and how these scenes' representations of fraught sociability take physical form in their staging of relations *between* bodies: the joining of hands and communal singing in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Iago's attempts, through songs and remarks about England, to bring *Othello's* playgoers into the drinking scene's rhythms.