Performing Repetition, SAA 2026
Titles and Abstracts

Group One: Gender, Theatergrams

Emily Shortslef
"The Decoy Couple"
This paper examines a device that repeats across three of Thomas Middleton's city comedies: a trick wherein a decoy couple is the means by which a marriage between an actual couple comes off. In *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, the spendthrift Witgood has his penniless mistress pretend to be a wealthy widow who wishes to marry him, at which news his creditors offer him money, jewels, and more credit, and his uncle gives back his mortgage and promises to make him his heir—all of which enables Witgood to marry the wealthy young woman he has been quietly pursuing all along. In *The Roaring Girl*, Sebastian pretends that he is courting the notorious Moll Cutpurse in order to make his actual fiancée, Mary Fitz-Allard, seem an acceptable match to his father by comparison. And in *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, Philip Twilight's man Savourwit invents a plan for Philip to conceal and preserve his secret marriage to Grace: he will marry his friend Sandfield's beloved Jane and Sandfield will marry Grace, while a shared house will allow the decoy couples to swap partners at night. (A plan that proves unnecessary in the end because of an earlier substitution of Grace for Jane). This particular repetition is most immediately meaningful in regard to Middleton's preoccupation with questions of economic value: in each of these plays, the decoy couple is a gambit through which a character's value on the marriage market is increased, realized, or recovered. But I hope to also be able to say something about how this repeated comic device reveals something about the dramatic value of repetition itself.

Sarah Lewis
"Wedding without the bedding"
This paper will explore the repetition that defines the convention of delayed marital sexual consummation. We find this convention in plays loosely defined as comedies: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. Crucially, this convention is not just repetitious in form, it is repetitious in 'content': it is a convention which demands that we engage with the concept of repetition itself, and in doing so, I suggest it offers us intriguing ways to understand the performance of early modern gender identities and sexuality.

The commonly protracted process of early modern marriage, from courtship to consummation via trothplighting and solemnisation, was driven in part by what could be considered a fanatical need to assert and reassert – to repeat – the heteronormative union. In these plays, the act of consummation (anticipated), which was considered to shore up this union, is established as a final point of realisation in opposition to an earlier act of betrothal (remembered), itself positioned as a point of origin for the lengthy marital process. However, repetition allows for a doubling of temporal function: consummation is decisive and momentary, but it is also always a repetition of an earlier statement of union. This most decisive of momentary actions is therefore defined as retrograde. Similarly, the time in between these identity defining points of action is

never really inactive, sterile, or non-generative. It does not only resist or delay consummation, but also, of course, enables it. It is that potentially queer and liminal time between betrothal and consummation which empowers characters to reframe and reposition the requirement to, in a range of ways, 'come to a point', which is the focus of my paper.

Arya Sureshbabu
"Schrodinger's Wives in Shakespearean Tragedy"
After suffocating Desdemona, Othello does a double take. Hearing Emilia at the door, he panics— "she'll sure speak to my wife"—before the realization hits— "My wife, my wife! what wife! I have no wife" (5.2.95-6). As it turns out, he is not quite right. A few lines later, Desdemona seemingly comes back from the dead, regaining consciousness just long enough to acquit Othello to Emilia. In this paper, I explore how the double (or perhaps more accurately, doubly reported) deaths of wives in two Shakespearean tragedies inflect the plays' representations of marital intimacy and modulate spectators' or critics' willingness to suspend disbelief. Desdemona's status as simultaneously dead and alive has rarely been ascribed to textual error, but Othello features another Schrodinger's wife who may very well be a typo—critics have raised eyebrows at Iago's opening description of Cassio as "almost damned in a fair wife," suggesting that Cassio's wife is a holdover from an earlier moment in the composition process (1.1.20). Iago's formulation, however, also anticipates his eventual use of Othello's "fair wife" to bring down Cassio—a resonance that suits a play in which wives and mistresses incessantly echo each other. Similar debates cluster around the twinned report of Portia's death in Act 4, Scene 3 of Julius Caesar, which is typically glossed as either a faulty transmission to print or a testament to Brutus's stoic public persona. Reading Julius Caesar alongside Othello reveals how these two scenes bring us face-to-face with the difficulties of representing death in the theater—a difficulty that lies in the fact that actual dying is simply not repeatable. At the same time, the proliferation of twice-dead wives in Shakespearean drama perversely reframes the ideal of wife as double—as always, in some sense, an echo—that undergirds conceptions of companionate marriage.

Charlotte Artese
"Reference, Repetition, and the Folktale Ecosystem of George Peele's *The Old Wives Tale"*
George Peele's play *The Old Wives Tale* (published in 1595) is the product and portrait of a folktale ecosystem, that is, a system of complexly interacting types of folktales. This ecosystem can be described with ten folktale types (generic plots derived from many versions of a traditional story) and about sixty motifs, as defined by the standard reference works of folktale studies.

One of these ten tales, "Bird, Horse, Princess" (tale type ATU 550), illuminates two cruxes in the play. In the first, a speaking head rises from a well and advises three times, "Gently dip, but not too deep, / For fear you make the golden bird to weep," although "bird" has been changed twice to "beard" in half of the four extant quartos from 1595. If we understand the "golden bird" as a reference to the golden bird that cries out as it is being stolen in "Bird, Horse, Princess," we are led by a chain of overlapping motifs to another crux in which a line is repeated three times. When Eumenides wakes the sleeping Delia with the line "God speed, fair maid, sitting alone:

there is once," he repeats the line with "there is twice" and "there is thrice." The latter two instances, however, do not include "sitting alone," although editors routinely supply it.

These two moments of repetition in the play offer windows into the interacting and overlapping folktale types that supply the materials of *The Old Wives Tale*. Repetition is a hallmark of traditional narratives with their roots in oral culture, and Peele builds much of it into his play. The repetition of motifs among folktales creates the densely woven web of allusions that characterize *The Old Wives Tale*, and paradoxically can lead to what seem like non sequiturs, like the weeping golden bird.

Group Two: Performance, Props, Prosthetics

Emily MacLeod
"Roaring Devils: Technologies of Race and Performance on the Early Modern English Stage"
The image (and sound) of the "roaring devil" became a commonplace in early modern English drama, both in quotations from plays and epigrams/eyewitness accounts of performance. Repeated references to roaring in Shakespeare alone can also refer to animals (R&J, Midsummer), the sea and weather (The Winter's Tale, Pericles), beggars (King Lear), etc. The performance of roaring onstage as an aural effect is linked to cosmetic blackness associated with devils in medieval drama and was employed specifically to highlight racial difference through vocal and physical skill in the performance of black African characters in plays like *Othello*. When read intertheatrically, roaring becomes a particular kind of stage technology associated with racecraft on the early modern English stage. The repetition of roaring as a racialized stage technology habituated audiences to see Black characters as emotional excessive (and associated with devils and hell) while also providing pleasure at witnessing the actors' skillful performances. This paper will focus on how the repertory of the children at Blackfriars imitated the roaring of Edward Alleyn and Richard Burbage as part of the portrayal of the blackface disguise of Lorenzo in George Chapman's *May Day*.

Adhaar Desai
"Stately Marches"
Naming the appurtenances of elite style, "stateliness" required educational attainment to both produce and appreciate; its increasing prominence in the sixteenth century indexes the English nobility's gradual transformation from a feudal warrior class to a bookish leisure class. While tracking stateliness as an early modern aesthetic judgment applied as readily to architecture as to verse, this paper studies the "stately march" as an intersection of theater, choreography, and rhetoric whereby physical strength and temporal durability were abstracted into conspicuously artificial signifiers of power via solemn, and even tedious, performances of repetition. To walk in a "stately" manner—as does the Ghost of King Hamlet (*Ham.* 1.2.202), or the "hot and fiery steed (*R2* 5.2.10) that Bolingbroke rides upon in triumph in *Richard II*—is to temper one's gait with an almost ostentatious performance of discipline and constraint. By studying depictions of royal processions in Shakespeare's history plays alongside accounts of Elizabethan triumphal

marches and processional pageants such as at Kenilworth Castle and Hampton Court, this paper attempts to recover a phenomenology of the stately march as an embodied practice. Thinking, with Max Weber, James C. Scott, and Pierre Bourdieu about how stateliness becomes an aesthetic program for the routinization and legibility of elite status, I then consider the stately march on the early modern stage as rendering suspect, while nevertheless reproducing, this program.

Corinne Zeman
"Love-Ability: Blindness, Blackness, and the Stuart Romantic Comedy"
This article explores the convergence of race- and disability-making discourses in an assortment of university and public-theater farces by John Leanerd, George Wilde, and the Thomases Duffet, d'Urfey, and Doggett. These comic dramas subject characters with auditory, visual, and/or mobility impairments to scenes of eroticized humiliation involving Afro-diasporic women. Many showcase a trope well summarized by the oft-repeated idiom "Blind men should not judge of colours"—a phrase which castigates blind individuals for their supposed sensory indifference to normative racial logics. In brief, the blind were presumed metaphorically "colorblind." Early modernity worked from the presumption that blindness induces erotic misjudgment—an inability to adjudicate between objects of romantic attachment and to properly value whiteness over and above Black beauty. Playwrights exploited this trope for comic set-pieces—farces of courtship in which blind suitors exuberantly grope the bodies of Black women. The early modern presumption that blindness precludes allegiance to white-normative racial schemas marks the beginnings of what O. K. Obasogie has dubbed "race *ipsa loquitur*"—the misapprehension that race is a "quintessentially ocular experience" dependent solely on "visually salient physical cues." These themes are made especially salient in *Love's Hospital* (1636), an Oxonian comedy by the Bishop of Derry George Wilde. This little-studied academic drama contains an ableist rejiggering of the conventional "bed trick" in which a blind character is unwittingly pressed into marriage with a stage-blackened maid. Both figures are laughed out of the marriage market and into the titular *hospitalis amoris*—a carceral, medicalized enclosure and representational prison. Regulating desire as the exclusive prerogative of the young, white, and ablebodied, the play frames somatic difference as genealogical disablement. The desires of disabled and Black characters are reassigned from the generative realm of procreation to the static, non-productive realm of stock characterization. In short, their reproductive sterility generates theatrical fertility—the comic plentitude of a racialized performance genealogy.

Katherine Schaap Williams
"Repenting Postures, Mortifying Performance"
This paper takes up Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene's *A Looking Glass for London and England* (1594) to consider how the Elizabethan play supplies a methodological crux for tracking performance beyond the scope of the printed line. *Looking Glass* offers a mashup of biblical history, allegorical drama, and civic jeremiad while it luxuriates in pyrotechnical displays made possible by using enormous stage properties. My investigation of repetition focuses on a unique edition of the play with prompter's notes for performance in the early seventeenth century, apparently after 1603. Among the prompter's marks, I trace an extra-semantic notation that appears in two theatrical scenes of embodied appeal—when the wicked

ruler of Ninevah repents, a demonstration of contrition echoed by the queen in the following scene. I speculate on how the marginal notation orchestrates the theatrical expertise required for the stage business of repentance, and how it cues a sequence of action that troubles the notion of repetition as, well, repeatable.

Group Three: Repetition as Continuity, Ethics, Text

Piers Brown
"Some Shakespearean Wave-Forms"
In this paper, I try to theorize repetition as arising out a combination of frequency and regular form, and ask how this might help us conceptualize different versions of repetition, whether it is Lyn Heijinian's claim (following Gertrude Stein) that repetition is a figure of insistence, or dying away of echoic repetition. I ground this investigation by reading two small moments where Shakespeare uses the wave as an example of repetition as continuity: in Act 4 of *The Winters' Tale*, when Florizel praises Perdita's dancing, saying "I wish you / A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do / Nothing but that; move still, still so, / And own no other function"; and Sonnet 60, where "the waves make towards the pebbl'd shore, / … / Each changing place with that which goes before" (1, 3). In this context, I ask what it might mean for repetition not to be something happening again and again, but "still, still."

Kent Lehnhof
"Verbal and Vocalic Repetition in *King Lear*"
This essay explores the many instances in *King Lear* in which characters repeat the same one or two words within the space of one or two lines, as in lines like "Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!" (4.5.181), "No, no, no, no" (5.3.8), "Howl, howl, howl!" (5.2.231), and "Never, never, never, never, never!" (5.3.284). I argue that these instances of repetition produce an effect known as "semantic satiation" whereby language loses its linguistic meaning and becomes mere sound. By courting this effect, Shakespeare's play frequently pushes language to its breaking point, reducing verbality to vocality. Yet the point is not to do away with communication. To the contrary, the objective is to show that human speech--even when stripped of verbal significance--continues to solicit and invoke.

In staking this claim, I draw on the philosophy of Adriana Cavarero, who advises in *For More than One Voice* (2005) that the sound of the voice has a revelatory function: what it reveals is precisely the material, embodied uniqueness of the speaker, and this expression of acoustic individuality stakes an ethical claim on all who hear it.

Kate Needham
"Elizabethan Metatheatre and the "Lamentable" Tragedy"
What does it mean to be a "lamentable" tragedy? 17 early modern plays include the word "lamentable" on their title page; in 9 of them this adjective directly modifies the noun "tragedy." Though this descriptor falls out of fashion after 1601, it appears in the titles of many significant

early tragedies like *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Edward II.* Many of these "lamentable" tragedies reflect the particularly fluid nature of Elizabethan tragedy and its thin line between tragedy and comedy: tragedies that mix kings and clowns like *Locrine* and *Cambises* (the latter with its multi-generic title later appropriated by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as "The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe"); *Arden of Faversham* and *A Warning for Fair Women*, domestic tragedies that specifically comment on their audiences' expectations of tragedy; *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*, tragedies that (in markedly different ways) reflect the proximity of comedy and tragedy in early modern stagecraft. What is the relationship between being "lamentable" and being a tragedy? A play might be "lamentable" because it invites audience outpourings of emotion, or because it performs extreme passion, or even because it ironically (or parodically) fails to meet tragedy's lofty aims. Building on discussions that identify genre as fluid and often indeterminate in early modern plays (Andy Kesson) or genre as not necessarily the predominant organizing principle of early modern dramatic structure (Louise Clubb), this paper examines the repetition of metatheatrical moments, specifically distinctions of tragedy and comedy, across "lamentable" plays to reveal more about what tragedy *feels like* to early modern audiences.

Paul Joseph Zajac
“Peace, War, Repeat: Performing Peace in Shakespeare’s Second Tetralogy”
The language of peace echoes throughout Shakespeare’s plays, especially his English history plays. His works in this genre account for approximately 250 of 550 total usages of the word “peace” and its variants. This essay takes a cue from contemporary peace studies and examines Shakespeare’s contributions to Renaissance peace discourse by studying his repetition of the word across the second tetralogy. From the opening scene of *Richard II* (in which John of Gaunt attempts to be a “make-peace” between his son and Thomas Mowbray) to the final scene of *Henry V* (in which the king woos Katherine for a marital treaty while his nobles negotiate additional terms offstage), Shakespeare keeps peace—with all its complexities and contradictions—at the forefront of his audience’s attention. As a word, a psychological condition, a political aspiration, and a religious ideal, peace pervades this subset of plays more than any other. In many cases, Shakespeare recycles received wisdom about peace, including the influential writings of sixteenth-century humanists like Erasmus. In other passages, however, characters revise and challenge preconceived notions by discussing peace in surprising, innovative ways. This essay both identifies broad patterns in Shakespeare’s invocations of peace (such as its associations with children, the clergy, and laziness) and also highlights moments that interrogate cultural discourses of peace. Through repetition, Shakespeare’s histories articulate the urgency and difficulty of peace in a divided world, and they display the role that language plays in making peace possible, or even imaginable.

Group Four: Parody, Contemporary Performance, Archives

Hannah Bredar
“Catching Conscience: Parody, Violence, and Ado’s Romantic Episteme”
How does a romance defined by slander and violence become legible as comedy? Claudio and Hero's courtship—the nominal "main plot" of Much Ado About Nothing—is defined by

superficial attraction, wooing-by-proxy, misogynistic stereotyping, public defamation, and threatened death. Because the play's final scene permits Claudio to marry a woman whom he has cruelly defamed, many argue that if he does not first recognize his error and role in Hero's demise, their marriage would be tragic: Claudio would be rewarded for villainous behavior that put Hero's life at risk and endangered Messina's sociopolitical order. To address the question of Ado's comedic legibility, this essay examines how Ado constructs a system of beliefs and attitudes that renders this narrative comedically legible. In my efforts to identify the mechanisms through which Ado constructs this comedic episteme, I examine three scenes that are central to debates about Claudio's romantic viability: the failed wedding of 4.1, the burial of 5.3, and the final marriage of 5.4. I demonstrate that each scene uses ironic repetition (i.e., parody) to situate Claudio's misogyny and credulity in recuperative social contexts. By ironically iterating Claudio's credulity—specifically, his trust in misogynistic "semblances"—Ado constructs an episteme that enables viewers' to recognize Claudio and Hero's alignment with patriarchal tropes in the play's final scene. I argue that the play's parody establishes this shared recognition as a fundamental component of comedic understanding in the play.

Hudson Vincent
"'First as tragedy, then as farce': Hamlet, Parody, and the Limits of Repetition"
Allusions to Hamlet abounded on the early modern stage. Already by 1606, the skull, the ghost, Ophelia's death, and Hamlet's madness were all functioning as theatergrams across a variety of London plays, including Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's The Honest Whore, Part 1 (1604); George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston's Eastward Ho! (1605); and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's The Woman Hater, or, The Hungry Courtier (1606). And as Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor have noted, these plays' repetitions of props, lines, characters, and scenes from Hamlet were all parodic. This paper begins by considering why so many playwrights turned to parody as a way of repeating Shakespeare's tragedy. What were the dramatic effects of parody and its associated modes of repetition, including satire and irony? To what extent might parody, even as it exaggerates, have an attenuating effect on theatergrams, working to foreclose further repetitions? And what practical effects did parody offer commercial playwrights who both collaborated and competed with one another? In the end, the paper turns to more recent, metatheatrical repetitions of Hamlet, including Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (1966), to consider the relevance of parody to our own artistic and critical repetitions of Shakespeare today.

Patrick Durdel
"Repetition in the Theatre in the Archive"
My paper explores how theatrical repetition manifests in the archival records of modern Shakespeare performance. As a case study, the paper draws on documents and photographs from the National Theatre's 1992 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (dir. Robert Lepage) now held in the National Theatre Archive (London), e.g. stage manager's reports, rehearsal and set photographs, costume designs with fabric swatches, and prompt scripts. I argue that different kinds of repetition are constitutive of theatrical performance (including rehearsal and repeat performance) to then explore what material form they take and how the material of repetition is collected, categorized, and made accessible in the archive. Given the general scarcity of concrete evidence of early modern English performance practice, my paper aims to sketch how the material traces of contemporary performance allow us to make informed speculations about what

it means to perform drama (and repetition) in the early modern period. It also shows how our scholarship today interacts with – and continues – repetitions of the past (be it 1992 or 1595).

Richard Preiss
"*Cymbeline*, or Aftereye"

Among the many peculiarities of *Cymbeline* – its flagrant anachronism, its macaronic assemblage of plots, its absurd contrivances, its perpetually absent protagonist – one that appears to have gone unremarked is its obsessive habit of repeating, verbally or visually or both, events that we witnessed or heard described just moments before. Not only are scenes meticulously restaged, indeed, but they are immediately rewound in order to be restaged, happening, un-happening, and then re-happening – an effect, *avant la lettre*, akin to the analog videotape technology of instant replay. Pisanio narrates the diminution of Posthumus aboard his ship until he vanishes, only to have Imogen recall him into visibility, only to imagine his disappearance again; Iachimo supplies details of Imogen's bedchamber the second time he describes it that were not present when he was present in it, creating a memorial overlay of the two episodes with no priority or precedence; Posthumus hands Iachimo his ring, then takes it back, then hands Iachimo his ring, then takes it back, then hands Iachimo his ring, seemingly on and on forever. I relate these perseverating effects and the experiential loops they form, both large and small, to the poetics of repertory in early modern theater, and to a theory of Shakespearean romance as fundamentally designed to incorporate its recursive, nonlinear logic.