

Abstract: Boy Players' Theatre and Acting Skills in the *Ho!* Plays

David Carnegie

I wish to examine the skills of players in the Early Modern London theatre. As a case study, I intend to use two Paul's Company plays, *Westward Ho!* and *Northward Ho!* (and possibly the intervening *Eastward Ho!* by the rival Blackfriars Boys). I shall explore what patterns may emerge, and especially the extent to which a display of theatrical skills (independent of the content of the dramatic fiction) may inform the dramaturgy.

I intend to separate the inseparable in three principal domains of the boy actor's skill:

- 'backstage theatre skills': proficiency with costume, makeup, wigs, beards, disguise, personal props, etc;
- 'learned skills': elocution, singing, dancing, musical instruments, languages and dialects, sword fighting, card playing and dice, etc;
- 'stage performance skills': proficiency with the stage 'machine', stage presence, acknowledgement of audience, voice and movement, ability to 'place' (draw attention to) props or moments of speech or action, *representation* of characters male or female of various ages, class, occupation, humour, etc, as well as physical and emotional states appropriate to character and the narrative; and *presentation* of many of the above as on occasion feigned character, physical state, or emotion; and finally 'presentational acting' in terms of achieving audience complicity with the theatrical fiction and illusion that the actor is not only playing a character, but is constantly himself half-seen behind and more knowing than the character.

The principal methodological difficulty may be to determine whether an approach based on a combination of close reading and attention to the material conditions of performance will be able to capture the quicksilver multiplicity of alternative theatrical potentials and interpretation.

Michelle M. Dowd

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Sleep and Skill in Shakespeare

This paper examines the figure of the sleeping worker on the Shakespearean stage. Focusing on Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew*, I consider how the onstage sleep of the lower-order worker gets linked in these plays to theatrical skill. In its very fragility, sleep signifies the uncertainty that lies at the heart of artistic inspiration, an uncertainty compounded (at least in antitheatrical writings) by the dubious social positioning of the early modern theater. Shakespeare deploys this uncertainty for dramatically useful ends, staging the sleep of the low-born worker Sly as a material metaphor for theatrical creativity. In doing so, he illuminates an aesthetics of theatrical work that validates the low-status rather than the elite and the disunified rather than the systematized or the occupational. Suggesting a new strategy for reading the intersection between theater and work, I argue that Shakespeare deploys the unlikely figure of the sleeping worker to

justify theatrical enterprise and the skill that it requires in terms that depend upon rather than eschew the instability of lower-order labor.

Methodological issue:

Studies of work or skill in Shakespeare can often run up against the problem of embodiment and representation that attends analyzes of drama; that is, our scholarship on these topics may appear to be limited to what can be directly represented on stage. Many forms of labor and displays of skill, however, elude direct theatrical representation. To expand our conversations about work or skill in Shakespeare, then, we might look beyond the obvious subjects—plays explicitly about labor or scenes that depict labor directly—to the more ephemeral and subtle ways in which work is enacted in dramatic texts. Reading theatrical labor not solely through mimetic representations but through the more idiosyncratic ways in which it is figuratively constructed in the drama enables us to understand more fully how such work was discursively imagined in the period.

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SAA Seminar 2013: Skill

Tentative Title:

“Music to hear”: Shakespeare’s Ear Training for the Young

Abstract:

My “Skill” seminar contribution will focus on the ear training and skills that young people and young dramatic characters were expected to have in order to listen to and be instructed by their elders in early modern England. I’m particularly interested in literary and dramatic moments where the speaker strikes a didactic pose, delivering a lecture intended to admonish and educate, while simultaneously reflecting deliberately about the difficulty of opening, or more precisely, entering into the ear of a younger person. In such a situation, the speaker may ruminate about and or even delineate the aural skills necessary in order for the lecture to have its desired effect, and there is also often present an insistence the embodiment of sound whereby the sound carrying the lecture actually enters the body.

In the introduction to their recent collection of essays *Who Hears in Shakespeare? Auditory Worlds on Stage and Screen*, Laury Magnus and Walter W. Cannon discuss the prevalence of “metatheatrical resonances of hearing in Shakespearean play texts.” I see my paper augmenting the discussion of metahearing in the collection with an examination of particular aural skills that lend Shakespeare’s metatheatrical stagecraft a material edge and specificity when it comes to the representation of young ears. My working hypothesis is that metahearing in these moments is grounded in the specific musical training and skills young people were expected to master. I will discuss Sonnet 8, where the young man is admonished to listen musically, and *The Tempest*, where the metatheatrical staging of musical hearing forms an important context for intergenerational communication and instruction.

Methodological issue:

I'd like to focus on intergenerational musical hearing, but the gendering of the ear is obviously also significant. The period's fascination with music's supposed power to effeminize men and embolden women as well as civilize emotion meant that ear training had many different facets. Is the embodiment of sound fundamentally different for differently gendered ears, or is it useful to look at commonalities among the skills young people were expected to have in terms of musical hearing?

Matthew Harrison
Shakespeare and the Stage Poets

During the last decades of the sixteenth century, the bad poet emerges as a stock figure, developing attributes and behaviors so familiar as to be easily subverted, riffed off, and otherwise transformed. By positioning Shakespeare's bad poet figures—particularly Orlando of *As You Like It* and the would-be scholars of Navarre in *Love's Labors Lost*—within this larger stage history, I argue that the theater serves as a massive engine for the consolidation of Elizabethan poetics, by providing a shared and communal set of experiments and best practices. What is most useful about the bad poet, I will suggest, is that he lets playwrights have it both ways, combining the sonic pleasures of out-dated verse effects (doggerel, alliteration, Latinate puns) with a developing sense of poesis as a sort of craftsmanship with words, perhaps nonchalantly tossed off, but always precisely made.

On methodological concerns:

The moments that most interest me--when various forms of "bad" poetry are performed or described on stage--serve a variety of dramatic purposes. Not only must they serve a purpose in the action of the play, they're intended to be funny, even if their references have been lost to time. How can these moments best be read responsibly in their contexts, while still advancing our understanding of early modern poetics?

Farah Karim Cooper
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The hand as skill on Shakespeare's Stage

This paper will consider the ways in which the hand signified not purely agency or action in early modern drama but rather skill. Drawing on the epistemological and ontological meanings the hand acquired in early modern England, this paper will examine hand moments and metaphors in Shakespeare in which the hand stands in for skill. Focusing on Hamlet, I will argue that the hand metaphors suggest the prince's anxieties lie not in his perceived inability to act, but in his perceived inability to act with precision.

Matthew Kendrick
William Paterson University

Skill, Labor, Drama: Valuing the Theater in *The Tempest*

With a focus on *The Tempest*, this paper will explore the tension between the craftwork of theatrical production and the commodification of drama. I take as my starting point the Boatswain's complaint that his passengers "mar" the labor of the boat's crew, and suggest that the play as a whole articulates this dynamic as it pertains to the relationship between the performers on stage and the paying audience. Drawing on early modern discourses on the value and purpose of skilled labor and craftwork, I will contend that the play attempts to negotiate an emerging capitalist system that disavows and devalues labor in order to justify exploitation and the pursuit of profit. By looking at the play's representation of labor and skill, my paper will attempt to think through the implications of early modern drama's ambiguous location between a declining artisanal mode of production and an emerging system of commodity production. My critical methodology pushes against trends in new economic criticism, suggesting that a careful consideration of labor and production, centered on contested understandings of skill, is just as important as the study of exchange and circulation if we want to understand the aesthetic dimensions of the period's changing economy. To this extent, my paper will consider some of the ways in which Marxist theory, with its focus on labor and production, can provide fresh readings of Shakespeare's drama and cultural context.

Genevieve Love
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Skill and the Performance of Disability

This paper explores the relationship between skill and disability in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* through the unusual figure of Cripple, who has a shop in the pawn, the second-floor shopping arcade in the Royal Exchange. Cripple, equipped with crutches due to an unexplained affliction to his legs, is a central and powerful, though somewhat mysterious, figure in the play. The specific nature of Cripple's artisanal skill—he is a pattern-drawer—not only figures his dramaturgical function in the play, but suggests his status as a model or even exemplar. If Cripple's skill at pattern-drawing underwrites his powers as a dramatic arranger and sequencer, his artisanal skill at providing patterns also suggests his status as a template of sorts—he does not just shape patterns, but serves as one. The play's erotic outcomes not only require the patterning (arranging, sequencing) efforts of Cripple; they also require the imitation of Cripple's disabled body, the use of his body *as* a pattern. The play's linkage of disability and prosthesis to artisanal skill, and further its intimation that prosthetic embodiment and locomotion is itself a skill (requiring nimbleness and facility with tools), suggests, in the context of Cripple's particular skill at patterning, that disabled embodiment is not only a skill but a kind of model, an exemplar that the able-bodied need to copy to achieve their ends. Indeed the performance of disability in this play may become a figure for theatrical performance more generally.

I suppose a methodological question is whether and how discourses of embodiment that relate to the acquisition and display of skill overlap with discourses of embodiment that relate to disability—particularly amputation and prosthesis.

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***Actio* and Invention: Training the Boy Company Actor in the Song and Grammar Schools**

Judging by the popularity of the children's companies with Elizabeth I and, subsequently, audiences in London, the traditional acting training the boys received within the grammar and song schools differed sufficiently enough from that provided by the apprentice system in the professional companies to make the so-called "novelty" of a children's company "carry the day" for decades. The boy actors performing literary plays written by boy company playwrights like Lyly received training in action or *actio*, "invention," and identification with a character's situation within a humanist curriculum based chiefly on Quintilian, who advised using dramatic performance as part of the art of rhetoric. However, while Quintilian advocated the use of performance "borrow[ed] from the [Roman] stage" to develop a student's oratory skills, prior to the last decades of the sixteenth century, something comparable to that text-centered Roman professional stage was as yet unavailable for imitation. This absence resulted in the repeated emphasis upon "invention" over imitation one finds in Humanist texts, so that the scholar was encouraged to imagine what he had not yet personally experienced or witnessed. Significantly, the child actor's skill in interpreting a text enabled the exploitation of the gap between text and performer, a technique later imitated by professional performers. "Invention" thus paved the way for the fusion of the popular and schoolroom acting practices that evidently occurred between the 1570s and the 1590s. Prior to professionalization, however, differing notions of skill—and also different skills—were coexistent.

My approach involves a social and historical analysis of the training in acting received in the children's playing company in comparison to the apprentice model in the adult company, the use of classical texts on acting within the schoolroom, records of performance, and evidence of literate, text-centered drama within the period. This methodology challenges the sense that skills developed in the children's companies can be understood by reference to the apprentice model or that the child actor had little influence on adult company actors.

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It's All in the Timing

So far, I have two questions.

1.) I've always been fascinated by Hamlet's comment that the actors in the boys' companies "cry out on top of question, and are most tyrannously clapped for it." Does it refer to some aspect of children's acting that was different from that of the adult companies? Did the children, for instance, pick up their cues very quickly, or did their masters (initially, musicians or teachers) teach them a more stylized kind of repartee?

2.) The main skill that actors are expected to display is mimesis. For the most part, however, actors of the early modern period imitate only a small range of actions, most of them representing a higher class than their own: dancing, fencing, speaking elegantly and sometimes in foreign languages. It is left to the clowns to imitate lower class behavior. But the situation of boy actors in an adult company is somewhat different. Their most important skill is the imitation of characters of lower status: women, or boy servants. So how well would they perform, for instance, the scene in *Coriolanus* where Virgilia and Volumnia are sewing?
Methodology: looking at examples of patterned dialogue, at stage directions in Dessen and Thomson, and at the lists of props in the first two volumes of Martin Wiggins' British Drama Catalogue. This project is likely to become smaller as I get further on with it, but I thought I'd throw out these ideas in case they are useful to anyone else.

Amity Reading

Skill as Spectacle and Spectacle as Skill in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*

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Though it once enjoyed some prominence in the canon, in the last century, Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* has fallen somewhat in the estimation of both literary scholars and theatre critics. While it may exhibit uneven language and a problematic storyline, what the play certainly presents is the opportunity for theatrical *spectacle*. It includes multiple extended songs, several fight scenes, ghosts, Jupiter descending on an eagle throwing lightning bolts, and a headless body lying onstage for the entire second half of a scene (the head having been onstage for part of the first half). And in performance, this spectacle must have been as striking in Shakespeare's time as it still can be today, perhaps even more so. Simon Forman in his *Booke of Plaies* describes a performance of *Cymbeline* which must have taken place ca. 1611, and the first part of his description focuses on the conflict between Rome and Britain and the valiant roles played in the fighting by Cymbeline's sons and Posthumus Leonatus. Forman eventually goes on to describe other parts of the plot, but trails off and relays very little about the play's conclusion, finishing somewhat half-heartedly with a description of Innogen in the woods: "the body of Cloten by her, in her love's apparel that he left behind him. And how she was found by Lucius, etc." This is somewhat unusual, as Forman's descriptions generally relate plot points as they unfold in chronological order. Clearly, the martial spectacles in *Cymbeline* caught Forman's eye and stuck in his memory, as they are described first by him and he gives less attention to the play's actual plot (the test of Innogen's fidelity and its consequences—though oddly enough he does seem interested in describing Giacomo's chest-trick).

This paper will examine *Cymbeline* as a vehicle of spectacle, perhaps more accurately as a vehicle of multiple, unrelated spectacles that were meant to entertain audiences *as such*. Using a combination of basic close reading, performance studies, and some material historicism, I intend to investigate the techniques of execution and the goals of such spectacles in the plays of Shakespeare's later career, using *Cymbeline* as a test case.

Suparna Roychoudhury

SAA 2013, Toronto

Panel: “Skill” (Evelyn Tribble)

On Foils and Failure in *Twelfth Night*

Machiavelli said that the prudent man ought to emulate very great men, men so highly endowed that “if his ability does not reach theirs, at least it may offer some suggestion of it.” Castiglione conceded likewise that it is not necessary to attain perfection—but that, if a courtier were invited to demonstrate a talent that he knew himself not to possess, “he ought to avoid it.” A subtle but recurring theme in early modern accounts of courtesy and competence has to do with failure—the special set of skills needed to deal with the absence of skill, as it were. When the idealized standard is impossibly high, what kinds of tactics might be needed to disguise imperfection? Is there such a thing as graceful ineptitude? In considering this question, this essay focuses on the abortive fencing match between Viola and Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, in which the duelists’ failure-to-evade-failure is arguably as comical as their poor swordsmanship. Their foiled encounter dramatizes, in a way that the conduct manuals cannot, the conscious calculations—swift evaluations of self and situation—through which the difficult decision to compete is momentarily made. As a choreographed representation of maladroitness, this scene is in some sense already deeply ironic; in this way too it is suggestive of how failure might be seen to constitute performance of a kind.

Methodological issue: in my work with historical contexts (here, early modern conduct literature) I look for inconsistencies that point to a “problem” or ambiguity universally recognized yet hard to resolve—e.g. “how to be skillful without skill?” I’m interested in how the “problem” is integrated with representational convention—in this case, dramatic convention—and so rendered “artistic,” and how, conversely, the artistic representation approaches a kind of problem-solving.

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“Bull, Bear, and Horse: Boy Players and Tom Otter’s Parallel Identities in Jonson’s *Epicoene*.”

There is much good recent commentary on the various ways Ben Jonson exposes the early modern construction of masculinity by exploiting the disparity between the genders of boy players and the female characters they play in *Epicoene*, but there is less on Jonson’s exploitation of the disparity in age. My paper will explore the ways that Jonson treats adulthood as a skill to be exhibited by the boy actors who would have originally performed *Epicoene*. In general, Jonson exploits the manifest age differential between the boy players and the characters they play to generate a particular comic effect, but he also invests a particular character, Captain Tom Otter, with age-ambiguous traits. Captain Otter occupies an interesting place between innocence and experience in his marriage to an overbearing (motherly?) wife, his drinking habits and paraphernalia (with his bull, bear, and horse), and his aptitude for Latin. Other characters in the play more consistently exhibit adult attitudes, desires, and behaviors, but the adult situations that Captain Otter finds himself in correlate with childhood situations in a unique way. Captain Otter’s essential childishness calls attention to the skill in acting “adult” required of the boy players.

The main methodological challenge I face is that I simply have not had and probably will not have the chance to see an all-boy production of *Epicoene*. This particular aspect of early modern English theater is not currently fashionable. The closest analogue I can think of is Wes Anderson's movie *Rushmore*, in which Max Fischer enlists children to put on *Serpico*. There are some firsthand accounts of plays put on by the children's companies, but they are not enlightening on this particular topic. I am left to imagine what an all-boy production of *Epicoene* would have looked like.

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Abstract for Skills Seminar

Audience Skill: An exploration of the habitus of being audience in the early modern theatre

PW: How did you know how to behave at the reconstructed Elizabethan theatre?

Sarah: The guide book...

Tim: Rick Steve's London, 2009; he says you should stand in the yard.

PW: So do you behave like an Elizabethan audience member?

Sarah: Like a Pagan [roars]

PW: Really?

Tim: I have no idea

Sarah: I don't know, I think you kind of get into the. . .you know. . .

PW: Did you shout at them? Did you join in at all?

Tim: A little bit.

Sarah: A little bit, sure.

PW: Would you normally in the theatre?

— unison — No

PW: That's interesting.

Tim: Well, I mean, they encouraged you to . .

Research with audiences at the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London has thrown up a number of avenues for further exploration. Scholarly claims and assumptions have been made about audience behavior in the early modern amphitheatres sometimes suggesting a rather narrow spectrum of behaviours typified by rowdiness, interjection and a lack of discipline or sensitivity. The reconstructed Globe has created a practical site to revisit the ways in which theatre space governs and produces situated skill and practice. Evelyn B. Tribble's work on distributed cognition amongst performers in these early modern spaces and 'enskillment' generated through this scaffolded training regime, had permitted a new understanding of the significance of the intersection of theatre space and practice. I suggest that this distributed cognition applies also to audiences and an emerging audience 'skill' in these new performance sites (both now and then).

The above conversation with two audience members following a performance of *Troilus and Cressida* from the 2009 Young Lovers Season at Shakespeare's Globe prompted further thought about the implicit and explicit knowledge that audiences bring to bear on their practice of 'audiencing'. It also makes further thought about how early modern audiences 'knew' how to behave in the earliest custom-built theatres a new scholarly imperative. In addressing the issue of 'Skill' from the perspective of the audience I am making some claims about 'audience practice' that need further consideration. I draw on Bourdieu and Practice Theory to propose that the everyday practice of audience behavior is a 'skilled' response to a particular sociocultural and built environment. This audience 'skill' adapted and habituated itself as the practice and skill of theatre architects, playwrights and players altered. Changes in the nature of the performance space, circular or rectangular, indoor or outdoor, perspectival or non-perspectival intersected with developing modes of audience response and attention. Different performance practices, Alleyn's 'stalking', for instance, Kemp's notable physiognomic virtuosity, or the static or tableau moments of later indoor performance, drew upon different kinds of attention and emotional response. The practice and skill of the audience in attending and responding was imbricated in the material and performative demands made on them by space and player.

The material conditions of the theatre space dictate patterns of physical, and physiological, attention and engagement by audiences, whether they are standing, or in boxes, on stools or benches; whether they are looking down onto the action, up at the action or positioned to look at each other, or the King with the play side-on. I am interested in this paper in the ways in which these physical conditions of audiencing intersect with the emotional regimes of the performance and the kind of emotional response elicited from the audience. The skilled behavioural and emotional response of audience is shaped by cultural practice and space.

I take the terminology of 'skill' from the Extended Mind Theory and work in Psychology and Cognitive Science on emotion and 'grounded' and 'situated' embodied response. The concept of 'skill' has been employed in these fields in identifying what happens in emotional response and behavior. Paul E. Griffiths and Andrea Scarantino had suggested that emotions are:

1. Designed to function in a social context . . .
2. Forms of skilfull engagement with world that need not be mediated by conceptual thought;
3. Scaffolded by the environment, both synchronically, in the unfolding of a particular emotional performance, and diachronically, in the acquisition of an emotional repertoire;
4. Dynamically coupled to an environment which both influences and is influenced by the unfolding of the emotion.

("Emotions in the Wild: The Situated Perspective on Emotion" in Robbins and Aydede, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition*, p. 438).

In this paper I take the case study of 'pity' as a particular habituated and skilled emotional response that early modern audiences engaged in. The production and expression of pity was shaped and determined by the performance conditions of the amphitheatre or private theatre space, and heavily influenced by pre-reformation regimes of pity in theological settings. This work develops Mullaney's argument from 'Affective Technologies: Toward an Emotional Logic of the Elizabethan Stage' (in Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr (eds) *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* pp. 71-89) identifying 'pity' as a particular skilled

response (amongst others) sought from audiences in their interaction with stage, narrative and player.