

SAA 2015 'Play Openings': Abstracts

1. Bret Gamboa
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“Shakespeare’s Art of Misdirection”

Though prologues or exposition scenes at the outset of Shakespeare’s plays ostensibly exist to help introduce characters, genre, and events, they often ultimately do more to misguide than guide their audiences, or they set priorities or emphasize details that the plays go on to undermine or contradict. Some well known examples occur when Kent opens *King Lear* by revealing the outcome of Lear’s division of his kingdom, shortly before Lear enters to divy it up; when *The Merchant of Venice* initially makes much of, then marginalizes, Antonio’s sadness; when Hamlet begins with a challenge from the intruder and not the sentry; when the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* assures the audience that the play will focus on a feud that, after 1.1, nobody takes seriously but Tybalt and Mercutio, the latter belonging to neither house. This paper looks at examples from these plays and a few others wherein Shakespeare seems to mislead the audience by design, exploring the role of opening scenes in creating illusions of stability that, once dispelled, may enhance or deepen effects occasioned by each play’s generic resolution.

2. Anne Gossage
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“Digging in to the Opening of *Romeo and Juliet*”

My paper traces references to both the language and music of the burial liturgy from the *Book of Common Prayer* in *Romeo and Juliet*, with an emphasis on how the prologue and opening scenes alert the audience to this aural connection, especially when original pronunciation is taken into account. The paper first presents a possibility for a modern staging that would make the play’s verbal and thematic connections to burial and death obvious for an audience not used to hearing the sixteenth-century burial service. The paper then goes on to trace how the early scenes begin the process of echoing the language and theology of the burial service. The early portions of the play prepare the audience to hear the musical echoes of the liturgy in the emotionally climactic lamentation scene in 4.4, which matches both verbally and musically the burial of the body in the liturgy.

3. Jacob Heil
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“Elizabethan Prologics: Silence and the Prehistory of Possessive Authorship”

This paper suggests that the trope of prologic silencing – the moments in prologues where the speaker asks or requires the audience's attentive silence – provides a glimpse of early modern playwrights as they begin to construct authorial identities. With special attention to a handful of early Elizabethan plays, I argue that the prologues' invocations of silence are less about the actual soundscape of the theater and more a way for them to, at once, rhetorically shape their audiences' engagement with the plays and to establish a cultural value for playgoing that is pointedly differentiated from other entertainments. Prologic silencing, then, is one of the ways in which these playwrights negotiated the shifting claims to dramatic authority and attempted to assert their position in an economy that threatened to exclude them. I explore, in brief, the furrows from which Marlowe and Jonson would emerge.

4. James Hirsh
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“Intellectual Challenges Posed by the Opening Speech of *Richard III*”

The commonsensical function of the opening moments of a play is exposition. At the beginning of a play, playgoers want to know basic information about the initial situation: who, what, when, and where. A sensible dramatist supplies such information as efficiently and clearly as possible. At the very beginning of *Richard III*, however, Shakespeare went out of his way to violate this basic tenet of competent exposition. One does not become Shakespeare simply by being very, very competent. Some of Shakespeare's artistic goals and techniques were not merely supplemental to conventional goals and techniques but in conflict with them. Instead of giving playgoers their bearings at the very beginning of *Richard III*, Shakespeare challenged their intellectual capacities and fostered initial impressions that playgoers have to revise retroactively.

5. Arthur Kinney
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“Framed Openings”

Cognitive science teaches us that playgoers pocket the openings of plays to determine key elements in what follows and are less satisfied if plays' endings do not directly respond to them. By knowledge or instinct, Kyd does this in his highly influential *Spanish Tragedy*. *The Ghost of Don Andrea* in dialectic with *Revenge* opens the play and they

return at the end reconciling ideas and motifs in the body of the work I wish to argue that principle is also Shakespeare's. /The Comedy of Errors/ opens with Egeon's sentencing and, while he may continue to wander on stage in search of ransom, he achieves freedom at the close. Antonio's relationship with Bassanio is defined at the start of /Merchant/ and determined at the end. We can tell Maynard Mack "Who's there?" at the start of /Hamlet; /the guards fear an invading Fortinbras. He will appear above in Act 4, nibbling at Denmark, before sweeping on stage to conclude his conquest Properties can do this, too. The bed of Othello and Desdemona is imagined by Iago and Brabantio (and the audience) at the start of /Ot//hello,/ returns in our minds in the brothel scene, and then comes fully on stage at the end with both lovers together on it. I plan to discuss the relative strengths of these and perhaps other instances and talk about what it contributes to dramatic structure and audience response.

6. Cass Morris

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“Hence, Home”: Shaping Audience Engagement in Opening Scenes

This paper examines how Shakespeare sets expectations for audience engagement in the first scenes of his plays. Shakespeare frequently uses the first few minutes of a play to construct a relationship between actor and audience that will have critical repercussions in subsequent scenes. Shakespeare crafts the mode of engagement in different modes depending upon the needs of each play. For example, the opening scene of *Julius Caesar* casts the audience as unruly vagrants, a mode that has later echoes regarding the role of the plebeian mob. In plays with less public plotlines or with less need for emotional engagement with the characters, however, Shakespeare tends to open with characters in conversation, providing few opportunities for direct audience contact. This paper relies both on textual analysis and on practitioner research from performance at the Blackfriars Playhouse to compare Shakespeare's engagement with the audience across several plays.

7. Barry Nass

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“The Parable of the Good Samaritan and Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*”

The Taming of the Shrew is throughout informed by the allusion, developed in the Induction, to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The Lord who discovers Sly lying senseless outside an alehouse, takes him to his home, and fools him into thinking that he is an aristocrat is a parody of the Samaritan who finds a traveler lying half dead on the road to Jericho, brings him to an inn, and truly ministers to him. The story of the Samaritan and its exegesis constitute a powerful, internal critique of the Lord’s deception of Sly and of Petruchio’s equally theatrical efforts to subdue Katherine. Both these projects embody the

wrongful self-love, wish to dominate, and impulse to reduce others to objects for their own advantage that commentaries on the parable expressly condemn. In the Induction and play-within-a-play, the example of the Samaritan and distortions of the lexicon of *caritas* practiced by the Lord and Petruccio unsettle their claims to power and self-aggrandizement, making them objects not of praise but blame.

8. Kelly Stage
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“Every Man Out of His Humour: the Self-Aware Induction and the Self-Aware Play”

The Induction of Ben Jonson’s early comedy, *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) is an expansive introduction even for Jonson. The play begins with a discussion, supposedly between two critics and the playwright. Of course, this is not Jonson the playwright, but a character (Asper) who has written the action that will take up much of the drama. While this clever introduction does much work to orient the audience to a critical discussion of comedy and the humours mode, the Induction does not ever admit its fictionality. This play opening—marvelously complex—plays with the idea of the play and the assumptions of the audience about what to expect. The *EMO* beginning sets up conventions seemingly to question them immediately. The question I want to explore is whether the Induction is as didactic as it seems to be—trying to instruct its audience in the ways of play watching and playwriting—or whether the chaos of the nested representations blows up all of these apparatuses in service of the inset play’s attempt to confound the humours style. Jonson’s play is nonetheless caught between trying to empower its critical spectators and desperately trying to control their responses: between opening and closing the space of the play (an illusory object) and the place of the stage (a present locality). I explore three interlocking areas of openings: first, Jonson’s development of the critical Induction and its use in *EMO*, second the relationship between the frame structure and the “open” theatricality of the “play proper” that Jonson creates, and finally, the opening of the printed play as a remedy and reversal of the reactions against the initial performance of the play.