

2017 SAA Seminar: Early Modern Performance Beyond Drama Abstracts
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Devin Byker, Boston University

Scaffolds, Stages, and Dramas of Dying: Performing Death in Early Modern England

In this paper, I wish to discuss performances of dying that commanded significant attention in early modern England—the dying moments of martyrs, heretics, and criminals, as well as family members, neighbors, and social notables. Whether taking place in a crowded public square or among a gathering of deathbed attendants at home, these performances were insistently public. Furthermore, they were often deliberately cultivated in consultation with instructional guides such as the *ars moriendi* (manuals that explain how to die well), martyrologies, and pamphlets that described the deaths of criminals and well-known persons. By considering these diverse scenes of dying, I am interested in proposing an alternative theory of performance than that provided by Foucault or the historian J. A. Sharpe, who have understood public execution scenes primarily as theatrical demonstrations of state authority. While their approach to performance—in which power is constructed through artificial, illusory, and deceptive acts of theater—has endured as a powerfully explanatory tool for early modern theater studies more broadly, it does not, however, provide a satisfying account of the aims and aspirations of those who themselves die. In general, early modern *morientes* seem concerned less with negotiating power relations and or upholding a carefully crafted illusion than with earnestly endeavoring to maintain a flourishing form of life that enables them to disclose themselves, appearing authentically before a community of witnesses. As I will argue, this understanding of performance both differs from Protestant Reformers' characterization of theater and shares much in common with James Simpson's description of the decentralized, non-professional theater cultures of late medieval England. By drawing on Simpson's work as well as the writings of Hannah Arendt, my essay will sketch out the stakes of this understanding of performance as it relates to an early modern fascination with the drama of dying.

Matthew Charles Carter, UNC Greensboro

The Duel and the Stage

In "The Duel and the Stage," I wish to examine the parallels between performance and performativity in early modern London's dueling scene. George Silver, an English swordsman who chaffed at the successful fencing schools run by Italian swordsmen such as his rival, Vincentio Saviolo, attempted to challenge Saviolo to a public duel in the hope that he might prove the superiority of the English sword over the "strange vices" of Italian fencers. Saviolo's

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temperate leanings led him to refute the practice of public sparring, insisting that a man must only draw a sword when he means to kill his opponent. Meanwhile, Silver maintained that sparring was a sign of men's moral rectitude, and sought to prove that rectitude at Saviolo's expense. Because the duel could never happen, given the two men's incompatible views on the morality of fencing, both were able to save face. Silver could maintain that Saviolo was a coward for refusing to fight, while Saviolo was able to exercise a moralistic restraint by staying in his *salle* (despite the fact that a crowd had surrounded the building at Silver's behest). This paper will explore the tension between these two notions of proper masculine comportment. I hope to demonstrate the ways in which recreational violence, such as fencing, became a central concern for early modern thinkers, particularly the authors of combat manuals, as competing notions of Christian pacifism clashed with the still-relevant belief in chivalry. By examining the performative negotiations that surrounded this line, we can start to understand the point at which various definitions of masculinity were abraded between the rise of recreational violence and the prevalence of humanist pacifism at the turn of the seventeenth century. I hope to show that the difference between brave single combat and discretionary mercy simultaneously highlights and challenges our understandings of how early modern writings conceived of masculine behavior and "proper" comportment.

Jane Clay, St. John's University

Re-presenting Queenship in the Reign of Mary Tudor: Pageantry and Processions

Representation—the way the monarch constructs his or her public and private image and the way it is perceived and transmitted—is the most important factor in determining how his or her reign is viewed by contemporaries and interpreted by subsequent generations. This includes symbolic representation of power and sacrality and the way in which the monarch performs his or her gender. As King James I memorably puts it in the *Basilikon Doron* (1599), the crux of monarchical power is in its performance. Queen Elizabeth I, as well, is famous for her skill as a performer and the great care she took both in creating and regulating her public image. "We princes, I tell you," she once said, "are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed." Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong have shown in their work that early modern kings and queens routinely demonstrated their power in a theatrical way. Likewise, drama was one way the common people in early modern England were able to participate in the political arena. It was a way for them to offer discreet advice and allowed them to make their voices heard in a relatively safe way. Pageants in particular, such as the ones put on by the cities for royal entries, were as close as most people would ever get to a personal audience with the monarch, and presented a unique opportunity to flatter and petition. Written accounts of these pageants give us an invaluable approach for deciphering popular contemporary views on queenship, along with the prevailing sentiment toward specific individual monarchs. My paper examines the pageants put on for Queen Mary I's accession, along with those performed for her joint royal entry with Philip of Spain after their marriage, highlighting the differences between expectations for a reigning queen as opposed to a reigning king.

Katherine Hunt, University of Oxford

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Ringling the Changes: Church Bells and the Archive of Performed Sound

How might a corporeal activity become encoded in notation? And how might one learn the activity from this notation? This paper takes the practice of change-ringing as a case study to examine how early modern people learned how to do things from written notation—and how such practices were turned back into text.

Change-ringing is an intricate and demanding way of ringing existing, unwieldy church bells. Though it began as a boisterous racket, over the course of the seventeenth century change-ringing coalesced into a precise and exacting activity in which the bells had to be carefully rung in specific pre-determined orders. This was a practice that was mostly taught and learned in person, in the belfry. But, in printed books designed to introduce and teach change-ringing, writers created a notation for the practice. This notation, which was made up of unwieldy rows of numbers, was an attempt to solidify the rules of this new practice as well as to allow it to be disseminated further.

The novelty of change-ringing—it was a practice which was invented and very quickly spread in the seventeenth century—offers an opportunity to test out the relationship between a new practice (or performance) and its written notation. In a time in which many physical activities and crafts were being described in print for the first time, books on change-ringing jostled with how-to books aiming to teach all kinds of activities. This paper analyses the poetics of these manuals, as well as the ways in which the sound of change-ringing made its way into contemporary writing as metaphor. Using Michel Serres's philosophy of bodies, and in conversation with theories of distributed cognition, this paper aims to read a noisy practice that remains largely silent in the archive.

Siobhan Keenan, De Montford University

Negotiating and Representing Court, Country and Self in Caroline Royal Progress Entertainments: The example of King Charles I's entertainment at Welbeck Abbey, 1633

In 1633 Charles I went on a royal progress to Scotland for his belated coronation as Scottish king. On route he was welcomed at many towns, cities, and private houses. This included an invitation to Welbeck Abbey, home of William Cavendish, earl of Newcastle, where Charles and his followers were hosted with a lavish banquet and a newly-commissioned show from Ben Jonson (21 May 1633): *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck*. It was not unusual for progress hosts to welcome early modern English monarchs with entertainments but this is the only show known to have been staged during the 1633 progress. The entertainment, which borrows from Robert Laneham's account of the festivities during Elizabeth I's famous 1575 progress visit to Kenilworth Castle, features a musical dialogue between the Passions, Doubt and Love, a comic country bride-ale and the traditional sport of riding at quintain. Fascinating in itself as an example of a less studied form of early modern performance, Jonson's progress show is interesting in cultural and political terms, too, having been seen as part of a bid for court preferment by Cavendish and as 'a demonstration' to the king of 'how ceremonial and local politics could and should work' (James Knowles, 2007). In this paper I will be considering this unique example of early modern performance and 'embodied' cultural activity (to quote Diana Taylor), reflecting on how Cavendish used the royal visit and Jonson's entertainment to negotiate

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between himself, the court and his local community. This will include paying particular attention to how Jonson's show served to combine celebration of the host and the local region and community with courtly compliment, petition and advice.

Erin E. Kelly, University of Victoria

Catechism and Play

A catechism, even one structured as a dialogic text, is not a play. That being said, the interrelationships between early modern catechisms and drama are more complex than has been previously recognized. My paper will explore the intersections of catechism and play, in the process considering an important way in which the reformation called upon believers to perform their religious identities.

Catechizing – offering oral instruction in foundational tenets of the Christian faith, usually as a condition for participating in sacraments – predates Augustine, and was often said by Protestant reformers to have biblical origins. Yet the presentation of catechism in the form of a dialogue is a relatively late development, in England becoming a fixed part of church practice only in the 1549 Edwardian *Book of Common Prayer* and widespread in official, competing, and supplementary devotional works during the reign of Elizabeth. These late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century catechisms imaginatively expanded the question-and-answer formula by putting exchanges not just into the mouths of “Q” and “A” or even “Minister” and “Answer” but also into the voices of schoolmaster and pupil, father and son, mother and child. Catechisms generated scenes (actual or idealized) of a knowledgeable authority asking questions to which he or she already knew the answers while an inferior performed his or her religious conviction by playing a part, reciting verbatim declarations of faith.

Scholars have long noted the presence of catechistic scenes (not to mention allusions to the *Book of Common Prayer* catechism text) in early modern plays, especially those by Shakespeare. The catechism clearly was a widespread, recognizable form that playwrights could invoke and parody. But how can looking at drama teach us to understand the performances outlined by catechisms? What do catechistic scenes on theatre stages teach us about performances of religious faith? And what happens when we read catechisms as scripts? By putting plays and catechisms into conversation with one another, I hope to show how the performances of religious identity catechisms structure express desire to stabilize ineffable experiences of devotion and anxiety about all of the ways in which faith could be misunderstood, misdirected, and feigned.

Laura Levine, New York University

Newes from Scotland and the Theaters of Evidence

Twice during the anonymous pamphlet *Newes from Scotland*, King James has a defendant accused of witchcraft re-enact for him the actions the accused is alleged to have committed. Early in the pamphlet Geillis Duncane, a maidservant to the deputy bailiff of the town of Trenent is sent for to play “upon a small Trump, called a Iewes Trump” the reel 200 witches who sailed to sea on Allhollon were supposed to have danced to. Later in the

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pamphlet, John Cunningham, a notorious conjuror also known as Dr. Fian, throws into a demonic possession a gentleman from the town of Saltpans, a rival of his for a local village girl, and in this way re-enacts before the king the actions he has confessed to. At both of these moments, theatrical re-enactments serve to authenticate the existence of the invisible world of witchcraft. But there are numerous other moments both in *Newes from Scotland* and in other demonological material of the time which are not susceptible to being acted out or performed, where the invisible world of witchcraft cannot be re-enacted in this way. What happens when such re-enactments are not possible? My paper will examine such moments in demonological treatises and pamphlets during the period and the related questions they generate.

Matthew D. Lillo, Fordham University

“Trolle in or els trolle out”: Ballad Performances, Politics, and Henry VIII’s Court

Recent years have seen a revived interest in the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ballads, with the work of people like Patricia Fumerton, Bruce R. Smith, and Tessa Watt offering new ways of discussing and accessing the thousands of surviving ballads from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While such work has been instrumental in dispelling enduring Folkloric and Romantic myths about balladry, our current understanding of early modern ballad performances remains, to a large extent, Shakespeare-centric. As a result, more than a few critics continue to assume that early modern ballads are a “low” or “sub-literary” form, lacking the *cachet* of other theatrical song genres. But do the views of Shakespeare and his characters really represent broader historical responses to early modern English balladry? After all, the larger appearances of ballads and ballad performances, both within and without the period’s drama, should shape our understanding of how they appear in Shakespeare’s plays, not the other way around. To begin placing Shakespeare’s representations of balladry within a broader tradition, this paper examines ballad performances during the reign of Henry VIII. During this key, but underreported, period in ballad history, the genre first emerges as a common feature of English society, crossing all manner of boundaries – generically, socially, theologically, and geographically – and taking on an unsettling political import in Henry’s court. Letters, royal payment records, and depositions chart the court’s close contact with balladry, with ballads composed by figures like Henry VIII and John Skelton presenting serious challenges to ongoing suppositions that early modern ballads emerge primarily out of low or folk poetic traditions. The early sixteenth-century is a period of radical transformation in English ballad culture that would necessarily require ballad performers, whether wittingly or not, to navigate a shifting political landscape.

Sarah Mayo, University of Georgia

‘Performing in ‘Printed Follyes’: Repetition and Ritualization of Medical Practice in Mountebanks’ Documentary Traces

A swarme of *Vipers*, of so vile desert,
So empty of experience, wit, and Art,
That all their learn'd and over-boasted skills,

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Th'affore said posts doe weare in Printed Bills.
– John Taylor, *A Most Horrible, Terrible,*
Tollerable, Termagant Satyre (1639)

After the formal institution of the London College of Physicians by royal charter in 1518, a class of ‘irregular practitioners’ emerge with new vibrancy in the historical record—empirics, cunning folk, and other unlicensed medicos targeted by the College’s jurisdictional power. Among these ‘irregulars’ was the mountebank, distinguished by the implication of public performance within its very name.

Authors like Walter Harris, in his *Pharmacologica Anti-empirica* (1683), describe in wonderful detail the performance practices of mountebanks, which included not only elements of entertainment (singing, acrobatics, animal shows, and the like), but also sleight of hand used to demonstrate medical and medicinal efficacy: one John Pontaeus, Harris tells, staged a cure by his own poison antidote by requiring his assistant to swallow *aqua fortis* on stage before returning, miraculously cured, the next day.

The performance of cure thus takes on a ceremonial nature, as described by M. A. Katritzky, in which the mountebank stages both disorder and resolution: the embodiment of illness and the illusion of perfect health. Such performances were supplemented by the use of print materials, including advertisements for services that might appear on posts or in almanacs as well as the mountebank’s famed receipts detailing their medicine’s directed uses; the question remains, however, what relationship existed between these texts and the physically staged performances of the mountebanks who wrote them. This paper will therefore explore the ways in which the printed advertisements and handbills of mountebanks *extended* their staged performances: advertisements for mountebanks’ remedies and services, I will argue, invoked the beginning of a ritual of healing that would expand to its fullest breadth in the mountebank’s live pitch, instigating the idea of illness and the desire for health before the receipts accompanying the mountebank’s medicines concretized the imagined cure, enacting through the text itself the role of a placebo.

Maria Teresa Prendergast, College of Wooster

Performing Catherine of Aragon

In section five of her book *Performance*, Diana Taylor emphasizes how contemporary performance artists depend on shared ideas of what the dominant cultural conventions are, so that audiences can recognize when performance artists are parodying, disrupting, or otherwise subverting conventions (118). I want to consider here how a much earlier figure, Catherine of Aragon, deployed quite similar performative strategies of disruption and subversion of the hetero-patriarchal machine of male serial monogamy—particularly those embodied by her husband’s policies during her crisis period of 1525-1535; however, Catherine did so for an antipodal effect. Her intent was to disrupt her husband’s desire to portray her as a treacherous foreigner and as a disloyal, illegitimate wife. Catherine disrupted such negative stereotypes of women by performing herself—repeatedly and successfully--as a highly conventional and positive stereotype of a woman, mother, and Queen Consort, a performance by which she actively resisted Henry’s attempts to annul his marriage to her. So successful was Catherine in

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this strategy that Henry himself was never able to speak publicly against her; at best, he could only bemoan how unfortunate it was that he and Catherine (he believed) had never legally been married. This paper considers how Catherine actively and aggressively performed herself as Henry's pious, modest wife via three key media: a letter, a portrait commissioned by her, and an account of one of her public self-presentations.

Paul J. Stapleton, University of North Carolina

The Cross as Elizabethan Stage

For Elizabethans, no matter how they regarded themselves in matters of faith, no matter where along the spectrum of confessional allegiance, and no matter how they viewed sacred objects, as iconodules or iconoclasts, or somewhere in between, the cross was a phenomenon saturated with meaning.

Yet the cross was also the most hotly contested image of the age, and as a result, in a culture undergoing radical social and cultural change, the cross became fractured with paradox. For example, it was considered to be an object of devotion for some, but an idol of superstition for others; the triumphal standard of Christ, but also the reviled instrument of his torture; a symbol of the Roman church, but also the device of the English patron Saint George and the knights of the Order of the Garter; the marching flag of northern Catholic rebels, but also the banner of the Tudor armies; the ensign of the Spanish Armada, but also the naval jack of the fleet of Charles Howard, Lord high Admiral, and Sir Francis Drake; an abstract spiritual ideal, but also a synonym for somatic suffering.

For Elizabethans, in other words, the cross proved to be what some Elizabethan scholars have called "a site of conflict and contest," that is, an unstable boundary along which beliefs—about religion, politics, and identity—appear to be constituted and reconstituted.

In my paper, I examine the cross as we find it represented in early modern publications directly inflected by religious culture like ecclesiastical historiography. In particular, I will demonstrate how the cross is depicted not only as a sacred object but also as a locus of performance where Elizabethans are guided, via written text and illustrations, to "act out" their politico-religious identities. Personages like the Anglo-Saxon king Oswald and the Jesuit Edmund Campion become models for such performance.

Simone Waller, Northwestern University

Framing Reading as Performance: *Salem and Bizance's* Dialogue Frame

In 1532, two influential lawyers engaged in a bitter print controversy over proposed reform of canon law. Although both Christopher St. German and Thomas More had published dialogues about similar topics in the past, they initially conducted this dispute in monologic prose treatises. When More accused St. German of fabricating the disgruntled, popular talk that he cites in his first treatise as evidence of church abuses, however, St. German responded by experimenting with a different expository form. St. German introduced a dialogue to frame his next treatise, titling the composite work *Salem and Bizance* after the dialogue's speakers. This paper argues that the unconventional relationship between the dialogue frame and monologic

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treatise in this work frames the act of reading *Salem and Bizance* as a performance of belonging to the adjudicating public that the work represents in its two imaginary speakers. Salem and Bizance flout generic conventions by which dialogue characters commonly present their conversations as oral and private, instead insisting that they are simultaneously readers of and speakers in a written text that they publish collaboratively with the monologic treatise's author. Bizance announces that St. German's new treatise will be "written" after the dialogue for Salem to read, on the condition that Salem ends the work by sharing his judgment of the treatise's argument. Salem's imaginary act of reading and favorably judging the treatise before his internal audience, Bizance, anticipates the external audience of readers' reiteration of this process. The dialogue frame transforms reading the treatise from a potentially solitary and private act to one imaginatively repeated and performed before others who anticipate the sharing of a favorable judgment as the ideal conclusion to the reading process.