

**2018 SAA Seminar: Shakespeare and Gesture 1**  
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**Evelyn Tribble, University of Otago, [evelyn\\_tribble@mac.com](mailto:evelyn_tribble@mac.com)**

**Jill Bradbury, Gallaudet University**

**What worlds will the languages of gesture create and re-create? And how will those worlds matter to the speaking and hearing community?**

My paper examines the use of gesture in two performances of *Hamlet* Act I scene 5, one in American Sign Language (ASL) and one non-verbal. I apply concepts from ASL linguistics and the study of gesture by cognitive linguists to analyze how space and movement are used to create meaning. In the first production, which took place at Gallaudet University in 2012, the ghost of Hamlet's father was played by well-known Deaf actor Manny Hernandez. Director Ethan Sinnott made a startling decision to project a film of Hernandez signing, with only his hands visible, onto the backdrop of a darkened stage. While hands are foundational to ASL, other parts of the body also play critical roles in communication. Shutting down the non-manual markers, as they are called in ASL linguistics, focuses our attention to the visual-gestural elements of Hernandez's performance. My second example is from Synetic Theatre's production, first staged in 2002 and revived in 2014. Synetic uses music, dance, pantomime, projects, and props to narrate Shakespeare's plays without language. This analysis is part of a larger project examining how the visual is used in various ways within the semiotic space of theater performance.

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Darren Turnstall. *Shakespeare and Gesture in Practice*, introduction and chpts. 1-2. Palgrave, 2016.

**Emily Coyle, Rutgers University**

**Gesture, Character, Identification**

For readers of Shakespeare, "thus" serves as an important reminder of the actor's embodiment. But this paper focuses on "thus" as a disembodying force. Tracing its use in *Hamlet*, it argues that "thus" denaturalizes the illusion of character by allowing the tripartite division between actor, character, and person to remain a palpable part of the play's representational system. To support this argument, the paper focuses extensively on act two, scene one, where Ophelia's vivid production of Hamlet in the absence of his body functions as a kind of personation that simultaneously "does" his character while "undoing" hers.

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Alan C. Dessen, University of North Carolina

### A ghostly gestural puzzle: 'It spreads its arms'

My point of departure will be a stage direction that continues to puzzle me: "*It spreads his arms*" (Q2 Hamlet, 1.1, not in the Folio). If "*his*" in the early 1600s can mean "*its*" and the action is therefore linked to the Ghost, not Horatio, why this gesture? Is it relevant that later in this play's dialogue and in two others in the canon to *ope one's arms* is to welcome someone (and there is ample evidence of that interpretation in non-Shakespeare texts)? Is there somehow a pay-off for this moment later in this scene (e.g., in terms of invisibility or invulnerability if the Ghost *unspreads* its arms)? Does this distinctive gesture somehow prefigure a moment later in this play? I am not suggesting that this anomalous signal is a key to unlocking Hamlet's or *Hamlet's* mystery, but my goal is to explore this gestural puzzle.

Pierre Hecker, Carleton College

### "Lay thy finger thus:" Shakespeare, Harpocrates, and the Emblematic Gesture of Silence

This essay will offer an account of the evolution and significance of the finger-on-the-lips gesture of silence in view of the four appearances it makes in Shakespeare, and will suggest how much more resonant and meaningful those moments are than has previously been recognized. (The four moments are: in *Hamlet*, Hamlet tells Horatio and Marcellus, "And still your fingers on your lips, I pray" (I.v.188); in *Troilus and Cressida*, Aeneas says to himself, "Peace, Trojan; lay thy finger on thy lips" (I.iii.238); in *Othello*, Iago tells Roderigo, "Lay thy finger thus, and let thy soul be instructed" (II.i.222); and in *Macbeth*, Banquo addresses the Witches by saying, "You seem to understand me/ By each at once her choppy finger laying/ Upon her skinny lips" (I.iii.41-43).)

When Shakespeare deploys the gesture on stage he is both evoking and contributing to a history of ideas involving fidelity, love, loyalty, and discretion; warnings against the dangers of gossip and betrayal; admonitions about secrecy, concealment, and conspiracy; and explorations of the supernatural and the ineffable. I argue that each instance of this deceptively minor stage action contains a rich and complicated nexus of intellectual history, an understanding of which will have important implications for editors, readers, and directors alike. The essay will also examine the gesture's prominent role in emblematic literature. Shakespeare, in deploying emblem book images on his stage, connected emblem art with stage production, and in doing so generated meanings for his audience that went far beyond what the literal words of his characters were saying.

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**Adam Hembree, University of Melbourne**

**“All her martyred signs” Signified Suffering and Embodied Metaphor**

A sign is a long-suffering thing, ripped from body to body, the bearer of tortured meaning. Titus’s metaphor for Lavinia’s efforts to communicate suffer such a fate in the title above, ripped from its context and made to serve as guiding metaphor for this paper. A martyr suffers for a cause. The word μάρτυς (mártus) in ancient Greek translates to both “martyr” and “witness,” and, consequently, “witness of one’s faith.” Witness, like suffering, is what a body bears. To carry, or bear, is also the provenance of metaphor, from the Greek metapherein, to transfer or carry across. Traditional accounts of metaphor assume meaning to be abstract and, consequently, necessarily understood in physical or concrete terms. Even Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which grounds linguistic metaphors within embodied cognitive concepts, often struggles to fully physicalize the abstract, the ‘take-away’ (Latin abstrahere, to drag away). Taking recent cognitive scientific and linguistic theory into account, I analyze the staged body as a metaphor, as an actor’s body bearing a strange passion. Shakespeare’s characters struggle to grasp other bodies, longing to fully conceive their experience, which is precisely the fantasy of a perfect performance: the transfer of a conceit.

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**Farah Karim-Cooper, Shakespeare’s Globe**

**Embodying Satan:  
Gestures in *Paradise Lost* Books I and II**

Drawing on a theory of gesture that maintains a variety of gestural modes were available to early modern actors—such as instinctive, or everyday gestures and iconic gestures—this paper will consider the performance physiology of Milton’s Satan in Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*. Less focused on the hands, I will argue that gestural variety extends itself across the performing body. Eyes are imagined to gesture with almost as much flexibility as hands, for example. What correlations can be made between Milton’s somatic exploration of Satan’s fallen condition and the performance of the body? This paper anticipates a staged/workshop performance of PL in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in May, in which considerations of the physiology of performance form a

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central part of the research question that queries the relationship between poetic orality and theatrical embodiment.

**Andy Kesson, Roehampton University**

**Thus and thus:  
between language and action**

The description for our seminar asks how 'Shakespeare's work engage[s] with us beyond words, using the language of the body'. This paper attends to a deictic (that is, context-specific) word that seems to unite spoken and embodied communication: thus. It asks how moments of thusness work(ed) onstage, prompting, prescribing or responding to an actor's performance, and tries to think through the paradox of using textual evidence to think 'beyond words'.

The paper will acknowledge and briefly explore non-deictic or performative thuses. But where 'thus' does appear to point deictically to live, staged, embodied movement, it becomes a linguistic unit that takes meaning only as it is enacted in performance, whether rooted in gesture, action, stance, costume, voice, movement or stillness, and raises questions about the relationships between text, performance and evidence.

The paper will concentrate on *The Spanish Tragedy*, which has by far the greatest numbers of thuses in an early play, repeatedly accumulating around moments of sexual or violent contact. The paper then looks wider to ask whether early plays (c. 1581-95) forged distinctive uses for the word 'thus': some plays seem to use it to define kinds of character or scene, for example, or to introduce audience address. Perhaps most strikingly, uses of the word 'thus' vary widely across the early period, increasing with time but ranging from the 63 uses in *The Spanish Tragedy* to the zero uses in *Love's Metamorphosis*. Discrepancies occur, too, in variant versions of the 'same' play: thus is used six times in the A-text of *Dr Faustus* but 19 times in the B-text. This paper aims to historicise these uses, reflect on their implications for performance and to offer a linguistic focus and deictic lens by which to consider the seminar's focus on plays 'beyond words, using the language of the body'.

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Tribble, Evelyn, *Early Modern Actors and Shakespeare's Theatre: Thinking with the Body* (London: Arden, 2016)

Genevieve Love, Colorado College

### Richard's 'giddy footing'

This paper proposes considering Richard III's unique locomotion as gesture. We don't learn much in *Richard III*, unlike in *3 Henry 6*, about exactly what Richard looks like, but we do learn a certain amount about how he *moves*. From his opening soliloquy, the play evinces an emphasis on dynamic kinetic scenarios, as Richard deploys a range of intriguing locomotive terms: strut, amble, halt, pass, and perhaps most importantly, bustle. As Darren Tunstall notes, 'gesture' has carried a number of meanings through time; 'from the late Middle Ages up to the early nineteenth century, it carried the meaning of "deportment"—the carriage, or manner of bearing, of the body'. Taking off from this definition, as well as from Evelyn Tribble's point that on stage, 'the mere act of walking becomes an artful practice', this paper outlines, first, how disabled movement exposes the richness and complexity of 'simply' moving across the stage. In addition to unpacking locomotion as a dynamic system, the play links Richard's movement—his halting, his stumbling, his bustling—to the larger structural dynamism of Shakespeare's history plays. Thus, the locomotive 'gesture' (if we may consider it that) of Richard's particular movement, rather than linking word to body or actor to spectator, offers a link to the cyclical energy of Shakespeare's two tetralogies.

Alex MacConcochie, Boston University

### "This warm kiss on thy cold lips": Kissing Dead Men (and Dead Men Kissing) in Shakespeare's Early Drama

In the closing moments of *Titus Andronicus*, when Titus's son Lucius accepts the crown of Rome, he pauses to lay a "Warm kiss on [his father's] cold lips," and his uncle Martius and his young son follow suit. Why kisses? What would this gesture signify to early modern audiences? How do these gestures of familial piety resonate against offstage practices such as the Christian kiss of peace? Taking the end of *Titus* as my starting point, I explore the affective and social resonances of kisses between living, dead, and dying male characters in the early modern theater, focusing on a cluster of moments in Shakespeare's early plays: *3 Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus*, in which such kisses embody the emotional connections between aristocratic men, and Jack Cade's mockery of kisses of fellowship in *2 Henry VI*, when he has the heads of Lord Say and his brother-in-law brought in on poles to kiss each other. This essay explores the thin lines between erotic and sociable touch, life and death, and the different, competing stories characters tell through and about such kisses.

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Amina Tajbhai, Fordham University

**Head in Hand:  
Cognitive Gestures in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy**

Hamlet holding Yorick's skull is one of Shakespeare's most enduring images; however, Hamlet is not the only character who handles a head. Shakespeare's oeuvre is filled with the holding, cradling, and discarding of dismembered heads. Frequently, these heads are familiar to the audience: a scene or two prior, they were active characters speaking on stage. What does it mean, then, to gesture with a scarce-cold body? How does it differ from gestures with other objects? This essay examines the first tetralogy and its many heads in order to posit that gesturing with heads is a unique act, different than engaging with objects. Holding a head shifts the gesture from a simply physical act to a cognitive one, and it has the ability to induce memories in those participating onstage and viewing offstage. Holding a head, it may be said, not only blurs the lines between the living and the dead, between people and object, but also between the outer and inner worlds of the self.

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Leslie Thomson, University of Toronto

**Uncued Gestures**

The early modern player's "part" consisted of his speeches and short cue-lines from the ends of the speeches of the player(s) with whom he was interacting. These parts were memorized by each player on his own and opportunities for rehearsal were minimal. Moreover, the players typically performed a different play each day with sometimes long periods between performances of any one play. These circumstances raise questions about many aspects of early modern performance; my focus in this paper is the treatment of gestures that are signalled only as after-the-fact dialogue references by one figure to an action by another. For example, in the first balcony scene Romeo says "See how she leans her cheek upon her hand"; but in the absence of any actual cue, how likely was it that the Juliet-player performed the action before the Romeo-player's reference to it? This kind of after-the-fact signalling of gestures is not uncommon in early modern plays, as I will show in considering what it might tell us about how players prepared and performed their parts.

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**Jessica Tooker, Indiana University**

**"It is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs":  
Signifying Desire in *Antony and Cleopatra***

The love of Antony and his queen Cleopatra is vexed by argument, disagreement, and profoundly theatrical rows. Of course, the pair's love is also famous in Shakespeare's corpus as exemplar of violent desire, passion, and sex. Some of the magnificent, emotional fighting between the duo appears conscious. They vehemently cross each other so they can then, in the moment (and later), feel more deeply and sexually about each other. For generations, readers and audiences have appreciated Antony and Cleopatra's magnetic verbal sparring and powerful gestural performatives that signify their desires and showcase that they are "in love." Highlighting key gestural and aesthetic "set pieces" within the play, and focusing upon the person of Cleopatra, this paper will analyze how actions stirred by impactful words—and the audience's affective response to Antony and Cleopatra—breed the qualities of the couple's performance of their love. Which is also, evidently, the real thing.

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**Darren Tunstall, University of Surrey**

**Signalling in 'Richard II' and the great crested grebe**

In this paper I mean to pick up a thread from Julian Huxley's celebrated article on the great crested grebe, in which he suggests that the ritualized signals apparent in the bird's courtship display resemble human gestures. From there, I will show how Amotz Zahavi's theory of costly signalling can shed light on the topic of gesture in dramatic performance. To do this, I'll use illustrations from productions of *Richard II* to discuss how actors package up messages - about their role and about their personal qualities - in embodied non-verbal signals. These signals are designed to communicate information that will benefit the audience. Thus, signalling theory can help us understand the process by which actors learn what 'works'. To help us further make sense of the actor's designs on the Shakespearean text, I will also explore how scholars in cognitive humanities such as Lisa

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Zunshine have applied Theory of Mind to fiction. My paper is part of an ongoing book project which aims to explore what evolutionary behavioural sciences can tell us about why people produce and enjoy drama.

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**Seth Stewart Williams, Barnard College**

**Gestural Excess and the Hypergesture of Satire**

What happens when gestures are delivered in such swift succession as to become unintelligible? This paper examines gestural frenzy on early modern stages and the resultant dilemma of semantic superabundance, arguing that plays often use dance as an accelerant for the gestural vocabulary of players, a means for repurposing and speeding up gestures elsewhere paired with words. It argues more specifically that early modern plays reinvent classical satyr dance as a form of gestural satire, one that removes gestures from their rhetorical context, strings them together in a hysterical series, and so produces what might be termed a "hypergesture": the supposed "bite" of satire. After briefly examining the satyr dance in Ben Jonson's *Oberon* (one "full of gesture, and swift motion") and the satyr dance in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (a "gallimaufry of gambols"), it studies in greater detail satyr dances from plays staged at the English College in Rome, which contrast the violent satire of satyr dance with the sincerity of gesture in pulpit oratory.