

**Andrew Bozio, Skidmore College**

**Timur the Lame:  
Marlowe, Disability, and the Politics of Form**

As scholars and editors frequently note, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is based upon the historical Timur the Lame (Timur-i-lang in Persian, or Timur Lank in Turkic). Timur's name derives from an injury that left him physically impaired on his right side, an impairment that, in turn, made disability partially constitutive of his identity. Marlowe's plays, however, offer no suggestion that *Tamburlaine* is impaired and instead revel in his physical prowess. Similarly, accounts of *Tamburlaine* on the early modern stage repeatedly foreground the strident movement of Edward Alleyn in the title role. Ben Jonson famously deplores *Tamburlaine*'s "scenical strutting and furious vociferation," while Thomas Dekker compares Death to "stalking *Tamburlaine*," neither of which suggest that Alleyn performed *Tamburlaine* with an impairment.<sup>1</sup> If *Tamburlaine* is derived from the historical figure of Timur, why, then, do we not see Timur's disability onstage?

In this paper, I argue that the discrepancy between Timur's disability and *Tamburlaine*'s hyperability alters our understanding of early modern dramatic form. Here, I approach dramatic form not strictly as a literary phenomenon but as a question of the relationship between literary texts and the bodies that such texts manipulate through the medium of performance. Dramatic form thereby constitutes a technology for making bodies legible upon the early modern stage, one that betrays a set of philosophical assumptions about the nature of ability. Drawing upon David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's concept of narrative prosthesis as well as recent formalist criticism, I aim to suggest how the movement of bodies in performance mediates larger historical and cultural ideas about physical form. First, I examine early modern accounts of the historical Timur – most notably, Pedro Mexía's *Silva de Varia Leci6n* (1542), Petrus Perondinus's *Magni Tamerlanis Scytharum Imperatoris Vita* (1553), and John Bishop's *Beautiful Blossoms* (1577) – to suggest the likelihood that Marlowe knew of Timur's disability and chose to elide it. Second, I consider what this elision reveals about the formal strategies that govern the representation of bodies in *Tamburlaine*. As impairment is displaced from *Tamburlaine* onto his victims – such as "those blind geographers" whom *Tamburlaine* promises to "confute" – Marlowe's treatment of disability sheds light upon the logic of embodiment that gives form to early modern drama.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, ed. Ralph S. Walker (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 24. Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful Yeaere, 1603* (London: The Bodley Head Quartos, 1924), 44, quoted in Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., "Space, Measurement, and Stalking *Tamburlaine*," *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1997): 3-27, esp. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *1 Tamburlaine the Great in English Renaissance Drama*, eds. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 4.4.79.

**Laura E. Levine, New York University**

**A Tale of Two Winter's Tales**

In I.ii. of *The Winter's Tale*, as Hermione takes Polixenes out to the garden, Shakespeare has Leontes tell her to show how much she loves him in her treatment of Polixenes. The instruction is Leontes' second expression of the assumption that Hermione can show or demonstrate to him what is unquantifiable and therefore unknowable. In presenting Leontes' insistence on ocular evidence early in the play, Shakespeare introduces one of the play's central philosophical problems: Is knowledge possible? What counts as evidence? 400 years later, Christopher Wheeldon reprises this problem in his treatment of the same scene in his ballet of *The Winter's Tale*. In Wheeldon's ballet, Hermione and Polixenes actually enter a sculpture garden. But the sculptures that appear on stage rotate, offering one appearance to Hermione and Polixenes and another to Leontes himself. In this paper, I want to ask the following pair of questions: 1) How does Wheeldon revise the positions that Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* comes to? 2) In what ways does he use "technology," construed in the broadest possible sense, to do so?

**Manuel Antonio Jacquez, Ohio State University**

***Dido, Queen of Carthage* and Philosophies of Suicide on the Early Modern English Stage**

In their adaptation of Dido and Aeneas's ill-fated romance, Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe depart significantly from Virgil's account, depicting the Queen of Carthage not only killing herself after Aeneas' departure, but choosing to end her life by throwing herself into flames. Following the queen's demise, her servant Iarbus, who loved her, slays himself. Following both of their deaths, Anna, Dido's sister and who loved Iarbus, also slays herself. In early modern England, attitudes toward suicide were reflected in common law, which actively punished convicted cases of suicide. These laws were underpinned by Christian doctrine that regarded suicide as an unequivocal sin which violated God's commandment: "thou shall not kill." However, early modern English thinkers and playwrights were evidently curious about whether suicide could ever be morally or rationally justifiable. Stoic philosophers had argued that suicide could be a reasonable course of action if prompted by dire conditions and/or could be regarded as a rational decision to preserve one's honor or agency. William Shakespeare, for example, stages a number of suicides in his plays set in ancient Rome, exploring the Stoic conception of an honorable suicide and further explores the motivations for suicide with non-Roman characters such as Othello and Ophelia.

Critics of Marlowe and Nashe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* have tended to suggest the play is more like a parody of Virgil's account of Dido and Aeneas, sometimes citing its performance by boy actors or specifically targeting its conclusion. How did Marlowe and Nashe expect their original spectators to react? Were Dido's, Iarbus's, and Anna's sequential suicides perceived to be melodramatic or were they meant to be taken seriously? In my full paper, I tackle these questions by analyzing the dramatic style and practical stagecraft involved in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and weigh it against the style, stagecraft, and philosophical outlook of its dramatic successor Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Overall, I argue how the two plays utilize

differing mimetic styles of dramatic presentation, but that like *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Dido, Queen of Carthage* solemnly voices a Stoic perspective on suicide.

**David Foley McCandless, Southern Oregon University**

**The Director's Interpretive Technology: A Rehearsal**

My paper aims to wrestle with the perpetually vexed relation between text and performance—and to describe and deconstruct the “technology” of textual interpretation as it pertains to actual directorial practice. Current Shakespearean performance theory resolutely estranges text from performance, asserting that performance does not transmit a meaning embedded in the text, nor even materialize an interpretation enabled by it. Yet, the testimony of professional directors contradicts this proposition. For directors, the text is not an evanescent incitement to creativity, but a tantalizing book of secrets that, once decoded, is dematerialized into the meaning that it yields, which then becomes the production’s polestar. Of course “the meaning that it yields” is, to a large extent, an enabling construct. Directors make meaning out of a text as much as they find meaning in it. As Charles Ney’s book, *Directing Shakespeare in America: Current Practices*, makes clear, the most prominent American directors, while describing themselves as scrupulous textual exegetes, admit that their exegesis is colored by all sorts of non-textual artistic compulsions—rendering the text urgently relevant to contemporary experience, pursuing meanings most expressive of their own passions and values, shaping productions in accordance with larger aesthetic ideals, and practicing a showmanship aimed at imparting pure affective pleasure. In their minds, the text survives all such subjective use, apprehensible as the trace of the interpretation that gives dramatic weight and shape to the story with which the audience engages. Text, expediently misrecognized as animating idea, is always the touchstone. Time and again, directors accused of textual pillage defend themselves as textually faithful, explaining how their most outré inventions are actually rooted in the text—and we should not necessarily disbelieve them.

My essay has two goals. The first is to anatomize the director’s interpretive process, and to assess the notion—inimical to current theory—that text is indeed animate in performance. I will rely not only on the commentaries of prominent directors canvassed in Ney’s book, but on my own experience as a director, focusing on an aggressively presentist production of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which Julia and Silvia reject Proteus and Valentine at the end of the play.

The second goal is to try to theorize a textual presence both in performance and in its assessment. Indeed, one wonders how assessment can proceed if text is utterly jettisoned from performance, if a Shakespearean production cannot be judged as the putative rendering of a play that Shakespeare wrote, cannot be measured against the multitudinous performable options coalescent and availing in or at least through it. Certainly one can respond to it as an “event,” and pronounce oneself pleased or displeased as the case may be, or perhaps use it as fodder for a theoretical disquisition into the nature of performance itself. But foregoing considerations of how the play has been reconfigured in performance, and to what extent the reconfiguring reduces or enlarges, obscures or illuminates the play—to what extent it provides not only affective

**2018 Seminar: Technology, Philosophy, Performance 4**  
**Leader: Lisa S. Starks, University of South Florida St. Petersburg [starks@mail.usf.edu](mailto:starks@mail.usf.edu)**  
**Respondent: Sujata Iyengar, University of Georgia**

pleasure but new knowledge, will satisfy no one who actually cares about the plays—a rather massive collective of scholars, critics, aficionados, spectators, and practitioners.

Of course, to predicate the text/performance dyad as indispensable to criticism, is to raise some rather thorny—and uncomfortably enough, possibly unanswerable—questions: by what standard or test or set of principles might we reliably gauge a production’s success in vivifying Shakespeare’s play? How do we parse the legitimacy of a production’s inventions? On what basis do we separate the valid from the fraudulent? Where does interpretation end and adaptation begin? How do we avoid conflating the text with our own pet interpretation, deploring or lauding a production based on the extent to which it gratifies it?

So much for technology. What about philosophy? By way of illuminating the text-director encounter, I will make some use of Winnicott’s description of the subject’s use of objects in the “transitional” space of creative play: the text exists in its ineluctable otherness but submits, in the context of “play,” to becoming the image of the director’s need, an alien entity assimilable to the director’s wish for self-representation. The other philosophy I’m likely to access is Romanticism. One is struck, reading Ney’s book, by how many celebrated directors regard theatrical art as a revelation of timeless, universal truths about the human experience. For feminist director/actor Lisa Wolpe, Shakespeare’s plays “are so richly knit into the human experience of being alive on the planet, in relationship with the cosmos and all life—and the tender, aching questions of mortality and Spirit” (Ney, 25).

Of course postmodern theorists long ago exposed “universal human experience” as a signifier for “white heterosexual male experience,” a fraud perpetrated by the dominant sociopolitical order to perpetuate itself. Still, some of the directors affirming a romantic view of theater are politically committed artists like Wolpe, Bill Rauch (Artistic Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, which leads the way among regional theaters in embracing cross-cultural casting), and African-American theatre director Timothy Bond, who asserts, “I see the profound humanity and accessibility of these plays to touch and reflect a much more diverse global society” (Ney, 80). The romantic outlook overlaps, for some directors, with a utopian political perspective that sees the audience as a temporary migratory community uncoupled from the Symbolic Order, capable of being mobilized as agents of change, or at least as citizens primed to pursue the political implications of Shelley’s dictum that reason (read the Symbolic Order) imposes estranging binaries that the imagination refashions as unifying similitudes.

Works Cited

Ney, Charles. *Directing Shakespeare in America: Current Practices*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.