

"O, let me see thee walk": Roundtable on early modern embodiment & mobility 27 May 2022 hosted by BSA

– Susan Anderson's opening remarks (susan.anderson@shu.ac.uk)

1) Lord Mayor's Shows

So I have three things that I want to speak to. The first thing that I'd like to bring into this conversation is a set of texts that I've been working on quite intensively recently and that is the London Lord Mayor shows, particularly those of Thomas Heyward which I'm editing yes all seven of them I'm editing at the moment. The most obvious reason for that is that they are a processional form that depends on movement the entire event is structured around the movement of the Lord Mayor across various parts of the city and Andrew has written brilliantly on this in the past and I think we can extend that conversation by paying attention to the way that these texts depend on both movement and stopping so the whole day is about a procession and yet the dramatic elements of that day happened you know the speeches or the little dramatic vignettes are delivered when the procession stops at various key points. And that links with a particular word that I'm kind of interested in at the moment which is the word halt which obviously means to stop but it also means to move in a halting way so it's a contronym and it contains both of those meanings so I'm interested in the way that movement and not movement are kinda dependant on each other classic binary way. So that brings me to what I think for me is the most sort of intriguing part of it which is how can we productively define the relationship between the textual traces of and the performances or events that they describe. 1:46

2) Lame texts

And that interest in the word, the very smallest unit of the text brings me to a very specific example from one of Heywood's texts which is quite unusual. So frustratingly for performance scholars, show writers very often say I'm not going to describe this display for you coz you were there and know what happened and it was all a bit embarrassingly frivolous anyway, which is the a kind of get out clause that pageant writers often use. But in *Londini Speculum* the 1637 show, Heywood does the opposite and says I'm going to supplement the text I'm going to write something here that is in addition to what was performed on the day. We do get this from time to time in occasional literature but like I said is much more usual the to explicitly leave things out and the thing that really intrigues me about this moment is the metaphor that Heywood chooses:

These few following lines may (and not impertinently) be added unto Jupiter's message delivered by Mercury, which, though too long for the barge, may perhaps not show lame in the book, as being less troublesome to the reader than the rower (145-7)

And I'd like to link this rhetorical strategy to some of the things that Genevieve Love identifies in her recent book about the ways in which texts themselves are often described as deformed, deficient and in this case lame which is of course a metaphor that is explicitly linked to movement and mobility. What would it mean for a book to be lame?

3) Larum For London

So we have texts that are explicitly about movement but they don't seem to want to mention it; we have a specific moment where a metaphor about movement styles was applied to a textual representation of a singular occasional performance, and now finally I'd like to turn to the play *Alarum for London* which is completely the opposite in that it has a proliferation of descriptions and ascriptions of movement in stage directions, implied stage directions and metaphors in characters' speech. This play is of course particularly intriguing to anybody interested in disability studies and early modern drama because the central character of the play is a soldier who uses a prosthetic leg whose name appears to be stump or stumpy. *ALARVM FOR LONDON, OR THE SIEDGE OF ANTWERPE. With the ventrous actes and valorous deeds of the lame Soldier.* So clearly witnessing these acts of this explicitly disabled character was one of the main attractions of this play.

Send so in this play we have many types of movement. We have dancing we have crawling we fighting we have strolling. It's a very clear demonstration of the rich and complex semiotics of movement on stage. Because I'm running out of time I'm going to finish with any one example and it's from very early on in the play where the Spanish military are plotting to surprise the the city and overrun it. Because the element of surprise is very important in their plan they need to leave in a way that doesn't attract suspicion. So Sancto Danila advises his co-conspirators:

Walke thou into the towne as if thou hadft

But only come abroad to take the ayre.

And so what I love about this is the direction to the performers to not only move in such a way as to look like they are just taking the air, but to show metatheatrically that that is the impression that their character is trying to create. That walking to take the air is an innocent type of movement but one which can be used to conceal more nefarious intentions, not only do these references to movement create an assumed norm by default, – the plausibility of just taking a walk – but also that theatrical performance itself is always intervening in the ways that the meanings of movement can be interpreted.