

Farah Karim-Cooper. *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment.* London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Pp 309.

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In some ways, Farah Karim-Cooper's second monograph, *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage*, builds on the scholarship of her first, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh, 2006). Once again taking the body as her site of study, Karim-Cooper continues to investigate the Renaissance expectations around physical appearance, with a keen focus on the gendered codes of social norms. This latest monograph offers a vivid and wide-ranging exploration of one particular body part: the hand. Her book's subtitle, '*Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment*', provides an effective summary of the topics covered in this new work. What is worth noting is that her title's term, '*the Shakespearean Stage*' to some extent belies not only the ways in which hands were deployed in early modern theatres, but stretches beyond the scaffold into the society surrounding it. As such, her book draws evidence from an impressive array of sources, including etiquette manuals, medical treatises, anti-theatrical tracts, art, objects, and photographs of actors on the reconstructed stage at Shakespeare's Globe. *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage* furthers work such as Jonathan Sawday's 1995 *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, David Hillman and Carla Mazzio's 1997 collection *The Body in Parts*, and David Bevington's 1984 *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture*. This last study is closest to Karim-Cooper's in terms of subject matter; however, Karim-Cooper's work takes a more phenomenological approach, moving beyond Shakespeare's language of the hand to consider its wider sensory affects. While noting how our preoccupation with our own hands continues to this day, she makes a persuasive case for a historically specific approach rather than a universal one. In asking, '[h]ow much is written there that we have forgotten how to read?' (3), she recalls that Shakespeare is *not* our contemporary, and asks us to consider how a Glover's son 'viewed the hand and its accessories as crucial symbols of identity' specific to his own time (10), and the impact this had on his body of work.

The first two chapters establish a cultural context of the hand in Shakespeare's world and work. Chapter 1, 'The Idea of the Hand in Shakespeare's World', focuses on the anatomical structure of the hand, its capacity to be 'read' through

its gestures, its use as a symbol of God's agency, and its role in the act of learning. Using treatises such as John Bulwer's *Chirologia* and *Chironomia* (1644), the ideas of physicians such as Galen and Vesalius, and William Sherman's work on the manicule (*Used Books*, 2008), the chapter provides a broad survey of how the hand operates physically in addition to how it negotiates the world around us. Continuing chapter 1's contextualisation of the hand, chapter 2 ('Manners and Beauty: The Social Hand') considers the role of the hand in early modern social conventions. Its focus is on etiquette, drawing on Erasmus' *De Civilitate* and Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, in addition to modern theorists such as Norbert Elias, and also considers how early modern cosmetic practices extended to the beautification of the hand, given the period's belief in how external attractiveness was thought to represent inner virtue.

The next two chapters apply these contextual ideals to the hands in Shakespeare's work. Chapter 3, "'Lively action": Gesture in Early Modern Performance', contends that 'the hand was an expressive and versatile agent of performance in early modern playhouses, indoors and outdoors' (6). Through a consideration of the rhetorical gestures espoused by Cicero and Quintilian, Karim-Cooper unpicks the distinctions between the actions of stage actors and orators, noting the troubling fact that if 'gestures can be performed [then] emotions can be performed' (76). This chapter blends her literary research with practical discussion of the stages at Shakespeare's Globe and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, offering a much-needed consideration of how gestures may be performed in both outdoor and indoor theatres. The next chapter, 'Gesture in Shakespeare's Narrative Art', continues Karim-Cooper's discussion of gesture in Shakespeare's work, focusing on its inclusion in his narratives. Case studies come from two long poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, arguing that in these works 'Shakespeare presents the hand of female protagonists as an instrument of desire' (120–1). She notes that Venus's hands are 'ultimately ... powerless in their pursuit' (121), leading to a consideration of empty gestures grasping for the agency they wish was within their grasp. Turning to *The Rape of Lucrece*, Karim-Cooper focuses on the trope of the sleeping woman being observed, comparing the poem with paintings such as Vittore Carpaccio's *The Dream of St Ursula* (1495), where posture seemingly reflects virtue (132). She argues that Lucrece's suicide uses the hand that enticed Tarquin to violate her to take back control of her own narrative; I would question, though, if this example transcends the definition of gesture into action itself. More compelling is her reading of what she calls 'gestural *narratio*' in plays such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet*, which explores the effect of gestures which are reported (such as Hamlet's grabbing Ophelia by the wrist).

Chapter 5 (“Let lips do what hands do”: Shakespeare’s Sense of Touch’) considers the tactility of the hand as ‘a primary medium of human connection’ (9). Analysing the hand’s haptic qualities, she explores the danger of touch, noting how Eve was warned neither to eat the fruit, nor *touch* it. A discussion on the intimacy of touching a woman’s palm sets up a reading of *Romeo and Juliet* and the idea of ‘love at first touch’ (178), and a reading of *Othello* where Cassio is spotted ‘paddling’ with Desdemona’s palm and construed as evidence of infidelity. Despite the obvious dangers of the hand, Karim-Cooper also asserts its capacity for peaceful resolution: she perceptively notes that the tragic conclusion of the play involves the ending of enmity between the Montagues and Capulets, with a handshake symbolising the new sense of unity.

The more-grisly focus of chapter 6 (‘Amputation: The Spectacle of Dismemberment in Shakespeare’s Theatres’) explores the process of staging severed hands upon the early modern stage. Conceiving of a severed hand as ‘a different kind of actor’s part’ (199), she moves into a more performance-based approach by analysing the plethora of severed hands in Shakespeare and Peele’s *Titus Andronicus* and Lucy Bailey’s 2014 production of it at Shakespeare’s Globe. Also present is a fascinating discussion of fake hands in *The Duchess of Malfi*, and a section on *Macbeth*, although I am not wholly convinced of the latter’s relevance; Karim-Cooper argues that Macbeth performs ‘figurative self-amputation’ (210) once Duncan has been murdered, in an attempt to detach ‘his mind/conscience from his hands and, by extension, the actions he has performed with them’ (209–10). While it is true that Macbeth does not specifically murder anyone *himself* after this point, he has others killed *for* him; as such, his guilt (such as over the death of Banquo) remains: hands, once again, have taken violent control. The reading of *Titus Andronicus* is far more effective, however, and she argues that once the amputations have taken place, the play’s language becomes ‘metaphorically prosthetic’ (226) through its use of punning on ‘hands’, reminding the audience of what has been dismembered during the play.

This book augments Arden’s reputation for producing monographs which are not only accessible to the reader, but academically rigorous and centred around fascinating subjects. At times, Karim-Cooper’s book seems occasionally dominated by lists of examples, but this listing is a necessity. With simply so much material on Renaissance hands, one author could not possibly include it all; yet Karim-Cooper weathers this difficulty by offering readers a variety of directions for further research. Her epilogue recapitulates her opening argument that ‘Shakespeare represented the hand as a powerful instrument of human exchange, emotional expression, self-scrutiny, character and identity’ (241). In fact, Karim-Cooper uses

Shakespeare as a lens through which she can view early modern ideas about the hand more closely. Above all, she offers a provocative invitation to read the body in new ways, and to learn forgotten languages in the process. This book serves as a vital new contribution, offering a comprehensive survey of the hand in Shakespeare's day which will be of use to students and scholars interested in conceptions of the early modern body.