

Abstracts for “Performing Disability in Early Modern England”  
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**Susan Anderson:** ‘ “Lame” verse in *As You Like It* and *A Winter’s Tale*’

When Rosalind describes Orlando’s poetry as having “more feet than the verses would bear”, she prepares the ground for a pair of puns on lameness. In response to Celia’s quip that “the feet might bear the verses”, she replies:

Ay, but the feet were lame, and could not bear  
 themselves without the verse, and therefore stood  
 lamely in the verse. (3.2.159-65).

Clearly lameness is a negative value here, and “lame” poetry is an object for gentle patronising scorn. This essay explores this connection between poetic feet and walking feet, developing both literal and broadly metaphorical readings to establish a range of categories of lameness in *As You Like It* and *A Winter’s Tale*. These include expectations and signifiers of both physical and intellectual capacity which manifest in textual representation and embodied performance. The essay examines the legibility of lameness on stage through Tobin Siebers’s notion of “complex embodiment”, that is, by understanding it as a combination of performativity and corporeality since, even when we are reading dramatic verse, the genre necessitates that we also think about the ways in which it might be enacted by real bodies, in real space, across time. By also invoking Chris Mounsey’s concept of Variability, the essay tests how far the plays can be said to encompass, without assimilating, variation in ability, and to what extent our readings of comedic closure as applied to disability can go beyond an inclusion/exclusion binary.

**Joyce Boro:** “Disability and Hispanophobia in Fletcher and Beaumont’s *Love’s Pilgrimage*”

As negotiations for the Spanish Match intensified during the period 1614-23, documented Hispanophobia increased in England and playwrights such as Fletcher and Beaumont capitalised on public opposition to the proposed Anglo-Spanish dynastic union by crafting plays that presented Spain as a country of corruption, debauchery, lasciviousness, and military impuissance. Strangely, many of these anti-Spanish plays were adaptations of Spanish sources, evidencing a paradoxical state of combined Hispanophilia and Hispanophobia that characterises early modern Anglo-Spanish relations more generally: while English people increasingly sought to learn Spanish and Spanish literature was avidly read (in the original, in translation, and in adaptations), anti-Spanish prejudice was rampant. This paper explores *Love’s Pilgrimage* (c. 1615-16), co-written by Fletcher and Beaumont, as a reaction to the Spanish Match in the context of this dual, contradictory response of fascination and aversion. The play adapts “Las dos doncellas” from Miguel de Cervantes’s *Novelas ejemplares* (1613), transforming it into a sustained critique of James’s proposed Spanish Match and of Spain more generally. *Love’s Pilgrimage* divests “Las dos doncellas” of moral exemplarity by adding

farical, low humour and by debasing many of Cervantes's characters, all the while delivering constant reminders of the Spanish setting and of the characters' Spanish-ness. As a result, the characters' depravity becomes a symptomatic function of their nationality. Moreover, through the character of Don Sanchio, a disabled war veteran who is, I argue, a figure for the late King Philip I, Spanish degeneracy is yoked to disability. Sanchio's nonstandard body is a potent site of ridicule, of "lame humour," and of topical critique as it symbolises Spanish sinfulness as well as the impuissance of Spanish political and military power.

**Matt Carter:** "Healing Poultices and Normative Embodiment in *The Little French Lawyer*"

In this project, I shall examine Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Little French Lawyer*, in which the character Champernell is told to use his rapier as a crutch. I shall demonstrate that the relationship between the sword and early modern constructions of the normative body preclude the possibility that Champernell can use his weapon as a prosthetic limb. Borrowing terminology from Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the grotesque body, I shall argue that the sword is actually a "fecund" arm, rather than a prosthetic leg, and that the relationship between the sword and the body is tied to the line that divides the physical body from the social self. Rather than making up for a missing piece of the normative body (the illusion that a prosthetic attempts to enact), the sword engages with both the physical body and the social self to *extend*, rather than to restore, the capabilities of the constructed normative body. Using what we know about rapiers in the period, I shall then demonstrate that the assertion that Champernell should "turn it to a crutch" is actually a recommendation that he invert the sword and fall on it in an act of stoical suicide. Finally, I shall assert that contexts such as the one we see here at the beginning of *The Little French Lawyer* insist that those experiencing disabilities must locate their honor internally, rather than externally, precluding any chance that they may locate the effects of honor in bodies that do not conform to normative constructions.

**Simone Chess:** "Performing Infertility and Queer Reproductive Practice in Early Modern Drama"

This paper is interested in disability and queerness as they are represented in early modern dramatic texts, especially in the plays *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (Thomas Middleton, c.1613, published 1630), *Mandragola* (Niccolò Machiavelli, c.1518, published 1524), and *A Cure for a Cuckold* (John Webster and William Rowley, c. 1620, published 1661); each of these plays features a married couple dealing with infertility, and a "cure" that involves the wife sleeping with a more fertile man, with the husband's implicit or explicit consent. Though infertility has been at the margins of contemporary disability studies, and most mainstream contemporary discussions of infertility avoid discourses of disability, there is a long relationship between disability rights and theory and movements for reproductive rights and justice. These play demonstrate that early modern authors saw a connection between infertility and disability by explicitly medicalizing infertile bodies and barren couples in ways that mark them as disabled. But early modern representations of infertility also do queer work: they go beyond the

cuckold/bastard narrative and undermine normative heterosexual monogamy, offering models of consensual polyamory, generative extra-marital desire, nonreproductive heterosexual sex, and non-genetic kinship and inheritance systems. Presented superficially as a problem, infertile/disabled bodies actually open up new textual possibilities for queering marriage, sex, reproductive practice, and family structures.

**Wes Folkerth:** “Shakespeare after Neurodiversity”

The purpose of this essay is to consider the effects that current reconfigurations of disability as diversity might have on future readings of Shakespeare’s works, as well as the effects that readings of Shakespeare’s works might have on current reconfigurations of disability as diversity. This topic flows out of my interest in Shakespeare’s fools and early modern representations of intellectual disability and related conditions. *Neurodiversity* is a term that has come into use in the past decade to argue for increased awareness of, and greatly reduced pathologizing of, people who exhibit nontypical cognitive styles. While I think this development is immensely positive, one reservation I have with the term as I have come across it deployed is that, as much as it calls to mind an ecological inclusivity, it also seems to invest heavily in a Darwinian evolutionary framework which implies that an individual’s worth as a person is primarily a function of their social and evolutionary utility. In light of this concern I will train my focus not on one of Shakespeare’s recognized fools, but on another character who exhibits what in the world of his play might be considered a nontypical cognitive style: Shylock. Read through the lens of a neurodiverse-awareness, Shylock’s particular cognitive style can come into greater focus, and I plan to highlight this. That said, his example also suggests that when social integration is achieved it can potentially come at an unanticipated price if the fuller consequences of recognition are not considered.

**Melissa Hull Geil:** “Textual Prosthesis and the Performance of Authorship in Sidney’s *Arcadia*.”

Sidney’s dedication to The Countess of Pembroke in *Arcadia* employs a longstanding trope of reproduction to his authorship. Sidney’s metaphorical representation, however, employs the language of intellectual disability to describe his mental offspring, which would have grown to become a “monster” in his mind. My paper examines how the print history of Sidney’s *Arcadia* relies on the transmutation of Sidney’s metaphor from intellectual disability to physical disability in the print history of the work. Sidney’s monster of the mind manifests as an incomplete and “unpolished Embrio” in need of textual prostheses in the form of paratextual apparatuses, supplements, and continuations in order to be presentable for the reading public. Tracking the metaphor through Fulke Greville’s 1590 edition, The Countess of Pembroke’s 1593 edition, and continuations by William Alexander, James Johnstoun, Richard Beling, Gervase Markham, and Anna Weamys, I consider how text’s noted imperfections serve as the impetus for publication and further writing. The story of Sidney’s *Arcadia* narrates how the language of disability serves as a lexicon for the emergence of print culture in Early Modern England; the “otherness” inherent in the

metaphor enables a connection to the materiality of print in a form that is both familiar and abstract.

**Rebecca Lemon:** “Teaching Richard III through Disability Studies”

This paper will be a thought piece on how to teach Shakespeare’s *Richard III* through the lens of disability studies. I’m writing a volume on *Richard III* for the Arden Shakespeare Language and Writing series, a series that introduces Shakespeare to undergraduate students through a discussion of a particular play’s language. Each chapter of the volume focuses on an aspect of Shakespeare’s language and ends with a writing assignment. My paper for our seminar will be a draft of the chapter on Richard and disability, and will include the writing assignment I’m proposing. My goal in writing the chapter is to frame its discussion of language in a way that allows students to pursue assignments on the representation and complexity of disabilities in the early modern period. The chapter will discuss both the language and performance of disability within the play, as well as the sizable bibliography on *Richard III* in relation to disability. My hope, in circulating a draft of the chapter to our seminar group, is not only to hear to the valuable feedback and critique that an SAA seminar might offer, but also to contribute to a discussion of how we teach early modern texts through disability studies and performance.

**Naomi C. Liebler:** “‘With Age and Envy Grown Into a Hoop’: Shakespeare responds to ageism in *The Tempest*”

Following a critical trend linking old age and disability (without agreeing that old age *is* a disability), my paper focuses on *Tempest*, inspired by Prospero’s harsh reminder to Caliban of his momma, “The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy / Was grown into a hoop” (1.2.258), an image that combines the separate cultures of old age and disability in one discomfiting and disagreeable bias.

**Genevieve Love: Disability | Metaphor | Early Modern Theatricality**

This paper begins by outlining critiques of disability as metaphor, first in nonliterary language, where disability tropes are problematic both because disability almost always figures negativity and because of the disembodying nature of figuration itself. I then delineate approaches to the problem of disability as metaphor in literary language, where Mitchell and Snyder’s notion of “narrative prosthesis,” or the reliance of stories on disability representations, has been influential. In early modern literary disability studies, the metaphorization of disability continues to be a challenge: indeed, disability as metaphor is sometimes figured as having a kind of physical force that it takes a certain intellectual or ethical muscle to resist. Perhaps we can thank the critical tradition of metaphorical readings of Richard III (anomalous physicality stands for interior depravity) for the sense that metaphorical approaches to disability representations in early modern drama might best be resisted—but there are other characters who might yank us in to different, new disability metaphors. Mitchell and Snyder’s metaphorization of disability-as-metaphor as “crutch” suggests the degree to

which disability representations are fundamental to basic representational problems, concepts, and structures: to narrative, to aesthetics, to poetics. The troping of disability in literature and art, I suggest, has led to a kind of meta-troping of disability as a figure for mimetic structures themselves. How then, I ask, might we read disability as a metarepresentational metaphor in early modern theatrical texts, especially given that the embodied medium of theatre—as against literary texts and visual arts where the body is not literally present—adds complexity to the relationship between disability and metaphor? The problem specific to theatrical mimesis for which we might read disabled characters as “standing” is the problem of embodied standing-for itself: the need for the body of the actor to figure the diegetic character. Disabled characters with prosthetics might trope the “prosthetic” body demanded of any actor; the paper concludes with a look at *A Larum for London*’s character Stump, whose complex physical and figural relationship to his eponymous stump offers a provocative figure for the relationship between actor and character.

**Cameron Hunt McNabb:** “Dramatic Prosthesis? Staging Early Modern Disability”

David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder’s oft-quoted term ‘narrative prosthesis’ describes the narrative exploitation of disability as “the difference [that] demands display” and the “display [that] demands difference” (22); it initiates narrative but then is often discarded after its role as a plot catalyst ceases. In the same vein, Mitchell’s concept of ‘the materiality of metaphor’ describes literature’s tendency to use disability as a metaphor “for things gone awry” (24) and thus overlook disability in its own right. I suggest that additional consideration is needed for staging disability--and staging early modern disability specifically. Certainly many early modern theatrical examples follow Mitchell’s observations on ‘narrative prosthesis’ and ‘the materiality of metaphor,’ wherein disability is only marginally present in the text in order to serve a narratological or thematic purpose. However, the necessity of staging even marginally present disability often leads instead to a complete erasure--what may be textually present becomes dramatically absent, excised for the sake of audience comfort or production value. This methodological project seeks to extend the frameworks for disability discussed above to the specific concerns of 1) the early modern construction of self through historically contextualized ontologies and 2) the specific medium of early modern performance, relying on original practices and performance theory. Through such investigations, it seeks to explore ways in which Mitchell’s approaches can be adapted and possibly even revised to examine the staging of early modern disability.

**Avi Mendelson:** “Enabling Rabies in King Lear”

In this essay about mad dogs, I argue that *King Lear* (one of Shakespeare’s most caninecentric plays) is less about a mad king than it is about the difficulty both of distinguishing between madness and sanity and of isolating madness to any single body. Not only does the first scene end with Goneril and Regan’s frustrated and failed attempt to diagnose Lear’s madness the two sisters leave the audience with a question about madness’ etiology rather than an explanation for it but the play also gives several descriptions for what it means to be mad: madness is simultaneously the inability to detect flattering language, the emasculation of relinquishing political authority, and the violation of an ancient moral principle “*nosce teipsum*” or “know yourself”; however, in

the interest of time, I focus on one rarely discussed form of contagious madness mentioned a couple times in *Lear* that was spread through tainted spittle.

By analyzing this madness that travels between bodies, I hope to complicate trends in historicist accounts of madness that perhaps under the influence of previous psychological discussions and contemporary biomedical science distinguish between the mad and the sane. Additionally, this essay reflects on the potential kinship between Shakespearean representations of madness and those described in recent psychiatrically oriented disability studies. These studies either reactivate the term “madness” in order to combat medical pathologization and promote neurodiversity, or prefer hybrid terms such as “embodied irrationality” that stress the need for a dialogue between medical and sociological descriptions of mental unrest.