

**2019 Seminar Abstracts: Early Modern Disability Methodologies**  
**Genevieve Love, Colorado College**  
**Katherine Schaap Williams, University of Toronto**

**Susan Anderson**  
**Sheffield Hallam University**

**Dysfluency and disability in Shakespearean drama**

This paper investigates the place of dysfluency in our understanding of early modern disability. The work of Chris Eagle and others has elucidated the ways in which dysfluent speech is central to modernist poetics, showing that, in modernist fiction, speech disorders operate consistently as pathologising metaphors. This paper demonstrates that dysfluency works differently in the context of early modern drama, not merely because of its differing historical context, but also because of the features of drama as a genre. The paper focuses on a selection of plays by John Marston, which present characters who have difficulty speaking for a variety of reasons, not all of which would ordinarily fall within our current understanding of disability. The paper considers both who can and can't speak on stage (the performed manifestation of forms of dysfluency) and the way in which this is presented (the content of what is said about speech, speaking and speakers). The paper begins by considering the place of textual evidence in thinking about dysfluent speech, before analysing a series of examples from Marston's plays in which dysfluent speech is used to signify in relation to gender and ethnicity, wit and foolishness, emotional states, and obscenity. By exploring ways in which speech fails in early modern staged drama, the paper establishes some of the ways in which fluency and dysfluency signify on stage, and draws out some of their ableist implications.

**Andrew Bozio**  
**Skidmore College**

**Timur the Lame: Marlowe, Disability, and 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. And yet, Marlowe's plays offer no suggestion that *Tamburlaine* is impaired, reveling, instead, in his physical prowess. Similarly, accounts of *Tamburlaine* on the early modern stage 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 a limp. If *Tamburlaine* is derived from the historical figure of Timur, why, then, do we not see his impairment 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

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shapes the way that bodies are imagined and described within literary texts, at the same time that it determines the tropes that make bodies legible upon the early modern stage. Drawing upon David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's concept of narrative prosthesis as well as recent formalist criticism, then, I aim to advance a theory of dramatic form that brings together history, performance, and disability. 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.

**Christine Gottlieb**  
**California State University, East Bay**

**Raising Awareness about Disability Studies Pedagogies and Methods in Shakespeare Studies**

My seminar paper will explore how disability studies pedagogical methods can transform Shakespeare studies. I'll review pedagogical methods I've explored when teaching disability studies courses, including: personal reflection, “claiming” vs. diagnosing characters with disabilities, adaptations of Shakespeare by Deaf and disabled scholars and artists, decreasing mental health stigma, intersectionality and connecting early modern disability studies to early modern queer studies, postcolonial studies, and critical race studies, exploring how Shakespeare can be aligned with disability justice, and increasing the accessibility of Shakespeare resources. It is crucial to raise awareness about disability studies methods and pedagogies among educators who teach Shakespeare but do not specialize in disability studies. I'll explore how digital environments can promote awareness of the intersection of disability studies and Shakespeare studies. The internet has vastly expanded access to Shakespearean resources: digitization allows people to peruse archives, recordings of plays are freely available on YouTube, and web resources offer scholarly and non-scholarly guides to Shakespeare's poems and plays. However, these resources are often not fully accessible, preventing people with disabilities—scholars and non-scholars alike—from accessing these archives. Moreover, these resources may reinforce stereotypes and stigma by discussing Shakespeare's representation of physical difference and “madness” without the critical awareness that disability studies provides. Incorporating disability studies perspectives and methodologies into the wide-ranging and freely-available digital archive will ensure that more educators, directors, actors, and students gain this critical awareness. In the future, I would like to create digital resources for teaching Shakespeare and Disability Studies.

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**Musa Gurnis**  
**Washington University in St. Louis**

**Neutral Not Able: Disability in Classical Actor Training**

In her influential essay, "The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training," Carrie Sandahl demonstrates how actor training programs marginalize disabled students, not only in their biased admissions processes and inaccessible facilities but within the curriculum itself, which often insists on the able body as a necessary baseline for expressivity and the illusion of character. As Sandahl writes, "Unless training programs' very foundations are rehabilitated, current curriculum will dissuade disabled performers from pursuing training." Here, I hope to contribute to Sandahl's project of reform. I suggest that the continual reinforcement of the idea that an actor's neutral state is only possible for able bodies, which Sandahl powerfully describes, is in part a product of her program's emphasis on American method acting and psychological realism. However, in classical training, creative work begins with an actor freely inhabiting the idiosyncrasies of their own body. Through interviews with practitioners I show how the foundational systems of classical training—including the Alexander Technique for movement, and voice work grounded in the practices of Kristen Linklater as well as RSC voice coaches Patsy Rodenburg and Cecily Berry—are in themselves intrinsically available as training practices for disabled students. The "mat level" accommodations that classical teachers make in their daily practice to help students expand and control their expressivity within their particular physical range, can also offer conservatory programs models for institutional accessibility.

**Robert W. Jones**  
**University of Texas, Austin**

**"Maim'd forever" or "Whole as the marble"?: Prosthetics on the Modern Shakespearean Stage**

As Heminge and Condell remind us, early modern society indelibly linked text to the body, especially through metaphors of physical disability. Characterizing spurious texts as "maimed, and deformed," the actors nevertheless paradoxically assert that the Folio's "true original copies" are now "cur'd, and perfect of their limbes." This language implies a kind of prosthetic addition to the texts, and not simply a recovery of an older, "original" copy. A desire for "wholeness" and "perfection" with an accompanying fear of "maiming" pervades the plays, but if a text may be appended, why not a body? Wooden prosthetics existed in the period and while the plays often focus on loss, they are also replete with desires, both metaphorical and literal, for reconstitution. In this presentation, I would like to explore the impact of casting actors with visible prosthetics in roles not typically viewed as "disabled." For instance, would an audience see Macbeth with a prosthetic as an amputee veteran? Could a production complicate our responses to figures like Iago and Edmund by casting their rivals (Cassio, Edgar) as men with prosthetics?

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How might Williams' commentary on war and the responsibility of authority read in *Henry V* if the soldier was already an amputee? Prosthetic usage is often disguised, virtuosically overcome, or faked on-stage, and I hope to research existing documentation on productions that have featured actors with visible prosthetics, and envision how the active presence of prosthetics might not only emphasize or reconfigure thematic and aesthetic concerns, but challenge, subvert, or productively augment both the text's and our own circulating assumptions of social and bodily "normalcy."

**L. Bellee Jones-Pierce**  
**Middle Tennessee State University**

**Toward a Lyric/Poetic Prosthesis**

Due in large part to David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's *narrative prosthesis*, literary disability studies often focuses on characters, plot, subjectivity, and so on, even when poetic works are involved. While plot, characterization, and narrative are not solely the domain of the novel—or even of prose—it is fair to say that these devices and structures are not typical of lyric poetry. Still, the notion of the narrative prosthesis is striking, and I find myself wondering if those of us who work on the lyric—who deal more in form than in character, more in lines and stanzas than in plots—might be able to build on the work of Mitchell and Snyder, Ato Quayson, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Michael Bérubé, Lennard J. Davis, and others *outside* of a narrative context. How might the idea of textual prosthesis jibe with formal poetry, specifically with regard to the received forms that came to popularity in early modern England? To put it another way, I wonder: is there a poetic or lyric prosthesis? In an attempt to both identify a possible poetic or lyric prosthesis and understand its behavior, this paper looks to early modern poetic paratexts written by Edmund Spenser, Richard Tottel, Thomas Watson, Arthur Golding, Matthew Parker, Thomas Churchyard, and others.

**Sawyer Kemp**  
**University of California, Davis**

**Accessing Disability in Contemporary Shakespearean Performance**

Promoting "accessible" Shakespeare performance has come not only to signal the availability of resources to support patrons with disabilities, but also to describe a range of theatrical initiatives and behaviors like lower-cost ticketing programs, altered or updated language, informational history lectures, youth programming, socio-politically informed production design, curated lobby displays, digital presence, bathroom availability, and other institutional projects. "Accessibility" has become a rhetorical touchstone that mediates Shakespeare's ability to function as an object of cultural value, rendered through the rhetoric of empathy for disability, perhaps with an eye toward a sort of theatrical universal design. However, I argue that appropriating the rhetoric of disability constructs some audience and viewer experience as disabled, and therefore an

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affective Other. I have previously explored the way that theatrical models of ‘access’ typically describe systems that allow the theatre to access specific minority group experiences (rather than, as presented, facilitating minority group connection to and understanding of Shakespeare). In this paper, I trace the connections and departures between the resources targeted toward physical and affective disability in the contemporary Shakespeare playhouse. I ask, what is the value of rhetorically linking these different audience experiences under the same rubric, and who is served by the framework of disability which permeates and circumscribes the rhetorics of “access.”

**Eileen Sperry**  
**The College of Saint Rose**

**‘I engraft you new’—The Prosthetic Lyric of Shakespeare’s Sonnets**

Shakespeare’s 1609 Sonnets hinge on the crisis of the fair youth’s mortality. As the young man at the center of the sequence grows old, the poet grapples with the potential of lyric to preserve his lover’s life. But while other Petrarchan sequences of the period focus on poetic memorialization to preserve their beloveds, citing lyric’s ability to keep the memory of the subject perpetually present, Shakespeare instead develops a strategy of lyric prostheticization focused on the physical body. As this paper will demonstrate, Shakespeare locates vitality in the mobile material body; to be alive, in the Sonnets, is to be able to move in and through the world. In contrast, memorialization, as defined by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, is necessarily fixed in space and time, and therefore cannot replicate kinesthetic existence. Shakespeare turns to a prosthetic model of preservation, framing lyric as a physical extension of the body that can prolong life through perpetual movement. This paper will explore this response on two registers. First, what does that prostheticization look like in the Sonnets? That is, how does Shakespeare respond to the contingency of the beloved’s body? And secondly, and more broadly, how does lyric as a genre engage with disability? As a nonnarrative form, how does the lyric open up new ways of thinking about and representing disability? By presenting the lyric as a prosthetic device, Shakespeare raises—and this presentation will explore—crucial questions about early modern lyric immortality and the intersection of disability and form.