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# 'Presume Not That I am the Thing I Was': Altering Perceptions of the Disabled via the Staging of Disability in Early Modern England

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‘PRESUME NOT THAT I AM THE THING I WAS’: ALTERING PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
DISABLED VIA THE STAGING OF DISABILITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

By

William C. Nyfeler

THESIS

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'Presume Not That I am the Thing I Was': Altering Perceptions of the Disabled via the Staging of Disability in Early Modern England

This thesis by William Nyfeler is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the Department of English and by the Interim Dean of Graduate Education and Research.

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## ABSTRACT

### ‘PRESUME NOT THAT I AM THE THING I WAS’: ALTERING PERCEPTIONS OF THE DISABLED VIA THE STAGING OF DISABILITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

By

William C. Nyfeler

Attitudes toward people with physical or mental disabilities have varied throughout history. Each society collectively defines what is considered normal and abnormal, and those values change over time. Many cultural factors impact how much these views change, including the dominant social philosophies and religions of an era. In Early Modern England, the rise of large public theaters and an increasingly permissive society contributed to the development of plays becoming a powerful tool for swaying public opinion.

Using this new pulpit, Shakespeare and his contemporaries staged plays that often depicted disability and deformity in negative ways, including the implications that a character's outward physical differences, like Richard III's deformities, signaled an inner monstrosity. By touching the emotions of the audience with passionate and sometimes despicable characters, these playwrights were able to transform the generally positive views of the disabled, held by many playgoers of the era, into disgust and intolerance. Because these plays, primarily by Shakespeare, continue to be staged, the animus against the disabled, presented via the stage, continues to this day.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my amazing companion and wife, Suzette Nyfeler, whose unending support and encouragement is the foundation of all my success and enables everything I accomplish.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An accurate acknowledgment page for such a large undertaking would exceed the margins in every way, so I am only able to mention a few select individuals. I apologize for leaving out many others who have taught me so much during this project.

First, I must note the exceeding debt I owe Dr. David Houston Wood, my instructor, thesis advisor, and greatest academic supporter. He introduced me to the field of Disability Studies, illuminated for me its connection to Renaissance literature, and convinced me that I might have something meaningful to say about it. It is a daunting task to undertake a project like this in a field where one's advisor is an accomplished author, but David's inspiration and tireless efforts to help me understand the field, its language, and ways to interact with its major voices provided me with the confidence and ability to complete this ambitious project.

I am also grateful to Dr. Caroline Zoe Krzakowski, who taught my first graduate course and introduced me to critical literary theory. From the beginning, she has been an exemplary model of intellectual rigor in writing as well as an essential academic mentor. She has had a transformational impact on my understanding of scholarly writing, and her assistance in this project has been tremendously valuable in aiding my growth as a writer. As my thesis reader, she provided vital suggestions and encouragement that helped me see past authorial blind spots and improve the essay's clarity and impact.

This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tell them that God bids us do good for evil;  
And thus I clothe my naked villainy  
With old odd ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ,  
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.  
*Richard III* 1.3.333-36

### NORMAL VS ABNORMAL

Societies make their own rules defining what is normal. Anyone who has spent sufficient time in a country other than their own recognizes differences in acceptable conduct in the new culture. This absence of any universally acceptable comportment or conduct creates a need for each culture to define standards of behavior. Each society chooses, or has chosen for them, the definitions of what is appropriate or normal for that culture. Anything outside these norms becomes, by definition, abnormal. However, these norms are culturally variable. In her essay "Stigma: An Enigma Demystified," Lerita Coleman writes, "Because stigmas mirror culture and society, they are in constant flux" and are "a view of life; a set of personal and social constructs; a form of social reality" (141). The marginalization of any group in a particular culture is often a reaction to a potential or perceived risk of losing power by those in the favored class as it is a reaction to mythological taboos. Societies and individuals, especially those in power, fear those who threaten the power structure and the status quo, and they take active steps to protect themselves. One of the easiest forms of power for common audiences to understand is that of a monarchy, and one of the chief activities of kings has always been to maintain that power. In *Hamlet*, King Claudius' sycophantic courtier, Polonius, counsels him regarding Prince Hamlet's apparent mental instability: "...confine him where / Your wisdom best shall think," to which the King, fearful of losing his power, confirms: "It shall be so. Madness in great ones must not



unwatched go” (3.1.186-88). Unaware Hamlet knows of his murderous ascent to the throne, the King considers him a threat simply because he is behaving strangely. Anyone acting outside of socially acceptable behavioral norms creates discomfort in a society, and most cultures spend much of their time attempting to resolve such dissonance through segregation and othering. By establishing the criteria of what is normal, societies divide their people into two groups – normal and abnormal. To be clear—I am not debating the legitimacy of a basic framework of laws a society adopts in order to protect its citizens (although these have the potential for significant abuse).<sup>1</sup> This thesis investigates the sources of the cultural othering and discrimination that is enforced against the natural deviations from societal norms, with a focus on English Renaissance drama.

Until quite recently, the commonly accepted view in the field of Disability Studies held that the social and medical division between so-called normal and abnormal is a relatively recent distinction. Michel Foucault, Lennard Davis, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson all identify the nineteenth century as the earliest point where socially defined norms are established. Davis claims in *Enforcing Normalcy* that the “word ‘norm’ has only been in use since 1855, and ‘normality’ and ‘normalcy’ appeared in 1849 and 1857, respectively” (24). He proceeds to observe that “...people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others” (24).<sup>2</sup> While I agree with Davis that disability is viewed differently today than it was in antiquity, the “inherent desire,” which he insightfully recognizes exists in most of us, appears to be the foundation upon which the othering of disabled people has been based for thousands of years. Henri Jacques Stiker, for example, observes in his book, *A History of Disability*, that in the *Old Testament*, “disability was an everyday reality” (24). Indeed, a review of *Leviticus* reveals several occasions where people were divided between ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’, where social and

religious exclusions applied to those othered as ‘unclean’ (Authorized King James Version 12:16-24).<sup>3</sup>

While the Enlightenment Science of the 18th Century seems to offer a dividing line for Disability Studies, with its new focus on normalcy and deviancy, the Early Modern period offers similar concepts, but with different vocabulary. In “Before Normal There was Natural,” Elizabeth Bearden notes that during the Classical Period, the Greeks and Romans divided physical difference into the simpler categories of “natural” and “unnatural.” My thesis will show that this recent scholarly push to examine the conceptual representations of various forms of bodily and psychological difference on the English Renaissance stage helps clarify our understanding of the original conditions in which these plays were staged, and how they continue to color our views on disability today.

## STIGMA

Societies have been marginalizing people, including the disabled, for millennia. However, scholarly analysis of this phenomenon is much more recent. Many readers will instinctively assume Michel Foucault to be the first major standard bearer in this field, due to his distinguished work on the use and misuse of power, and the field of Disability Studies can certainly trace some of its views on the disempowerment that results from othering back to Foucault. However, his offers a more general view on disability. According to Shelley Tremain, in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*:

In the long run, Foucault's work will provide few resources that could improve the lives of disabled people. Furthermore, any important insights that Foucault might offer disability studies could be arrived at without him.... Foucault's assumptions

are actually counterproductive for disability theorists. In particular...are the shortcomings of Foucault's notions of agency and the body. (15)

For all the assistance Foucault provides, Disability Studies interrogates a broader view of people's bodies and their self-determination regarding classification and medicalization. A better source to begin with is Erving Goffman and his landmark 1963 book, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, which laid the modern foundation for Disability Studies from which practically all scholarly work in the field springs. The language of disability criticism begins with the concept of stigma, which is predicated on anticipations: "Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural" (2). He goes on to note, "The routines of social intercourse in established settings allow us to deal with anticipated others without special attention or thought" (2). Before meeting someone for the first time, we have already developed preconceived notions about them, based on appearance, which are either confirmed or refuted when we interact. If confirmed as "normal," they meet our anticipations; if not, their identity creates a discomfort, an ill-fitting status. This condition places them outside the established category of normal, a stigma they bear in our minds. As a member of the society, we are largely unaware of this automatic othering that occurs. Goffman continues: "We lean on these anticipations that we have, transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands" (2). We demand normative compliance from each other, and the price paid for failure to meet these expectations is to be stigmatized by society.

Our anticipation of certain social traits in others drives our individual and collective categorization. Those in possession of discrediting attributes (or the absence of critical ones) are

marginalized. Some characteristics, such as missing limbs or blindness, are unambiguous and instantly stigmatizing. Others are not immediately visually identifiable, allowing the individual possessing these traits to pass, at least temporarily, as normal within the society's definition.

Goffman categorizes the stigma into three major types:

First there are the abandonment of the body – the various physical deformities.<sup>4</sup>

Next there are blemishes of individual character, perceived as weak

will...unnatural passions...mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction,

alcoholism...<sup>5</sup> Finally there are the tribal signs of race, nation, and religion, these

being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all

members of a family.<sup>6</sup> (4)

Goffman's division of stigma types illuminates the many different ways people can be (and have been) stigmatized by societies. He further reveals that among all the variety of differences inherent in humanity, any of them are potentially stigmatizable.

Responding to Goffman's arguments, Lerita Coleman expands on his assertions about stigma. Initially, Goffman asserts, "stigma is equivalent to an undesired differentness... a relationship between attribute and stereotype" (2, 5). Coleman expands this definition, and given our innate differences, she insists "any 'nonstigmatized' person can easily become 'stigmatized'. Nearly everyone at some point in life will experience stigma either temporarily or permanently" (142). Tobin Siebers takes Coleman's ideas a step further in *Disability Theory*: "Able-bodiedness is a temporary identity at best, while being human guarantees that all other identities will eventually come into contact with some form of disability identity" (5). This concept is perhaps most concisely described by Sujata Iyengar in *Disability, Health, and Happiness in the*

*Shakespearean Body* in a way many of us probably do not wish to acknowledge: “The so-called able-bodied teeter only one injury, one illness away from disability; moreover, at the beginnings and the ends of our lives, every single one of us lacks physical autonomy....Most of us are the not-yet-sick, one job loss, one collapsed hedge-fund away from having our abilities constrained, our lives controlled by medical conditions rather than by ourselves” (5). In these statements, Goffman, Coleman, Siebers, and Iyengar reveal the core of what guides this cultural othering of those with disabilities – the rejection by people who consider themselves normal. It is this ongoing (yet always temporary) illusion of any lack of physical or mental difference which allows people who fit into society’s ‘normal’ category to fantasize they are not disabled and never will be. Siebers goes on to redefine the parameters of what it means to be disabled. He does so in a way that challenges able-bodied conventions and exposes their folly: “Disability is not a physical or mental defect but a cultural and minority identity. To call disability an identity is to recognize that it is not a biological or natural property but an elastic social category” (*Disability Theory* 4). The stubborn refusal to accept this truth is the arrogant impetus behind stigmatization.

As the othering of any group centers upon a perceived risk of loss by people in the socially determined majority group, that potential risk is based in the idea of social or physical deviation. The easier this deviation is to see, and the greater the deviation from the norm, the more likely a society will organize the difference into a stigma. “The fully and visibly stigmatized, in turn, must suffer the special indignity of knowing that they wear their situation on their sleeve, that almost anyone will be able to see into the heart of their predicament” (Goffman 127). This statement, read today, produces few surprises. However, Goffman continues, revealing an even uglier nature of social deviations: “The question of social norms is certainly

central, but the concern might be less for uncommon deviations from the ordinary than for ordinary deviations from the common” (127). People reside for years in the ‘normal’ category, only to be suddenly categorized ‘abnormal’ and stigmatized. The subsequent ostracization by former friends of the newly stigmatized is the gas that ignites the fear and drives the system of social identity. To varying degrees, we all live in fear of being ‘discovered’ to be abnormal, because every human is abnormal in certain ways, any of which can be used to stigmatize them.

## IDENTITY NORMS

Thus far, we see social identity controlling stigmatization. In *Claiming Disability*, Simi Linton describes how the separation occurs: “It is in the formal and informal, the explicit and the tacit, the overt and covert that society works to divide up the human community and oppress some of its members” (34). The division between cultural constructs of normality vs abnormality is a moving target. In his book, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, Ato Quayson maintains “The central reason for this instability is that though different kinds of disability can be shown to have historically followed different rhythms and patterns of institutional evolution...disability has always been the object of a negative comparison to what is typically construed as corporeal normality” (4). Cultural identities are defined by being forced into a social category that can be othered by those who cling to their classification of normal. Several models have developed in Disability Studies to address some of these divisions.

## MEDICAL MODEL VS SOCIAL MODEL

Although there are a number of different “models” used in disability theory, two of the most discussed are the medical and the social models. Each intersects with the culture in different ways. The medical model of disability views non-normative bodies as flawed,

incomplete, in need of repair. “The medical model emphasizes the ways in which people with disabilities are dependent and divided, rather than empowered and united...and seeks to [medically] correct a biological error” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). The downsides to this perspective include the risk of viewing the person and the corporeal body as one; if the body is broken, so must the person also be incomplete. This view naturally springs from the medical community, from whom many of us seek treatment – to be fixed.<sup>7</sup> This is a perspective many disabled people abhor. According to Simi Linton:

The present examination of disability has no need for the medical language of symptoms and diagnostic categories. Disability studies looks to different kinds of signifiers and the identification of different kinds of syndromes for its material....The medical meaning-making was negotiated among interested parties who packaged their version of disability in ways that increased the ideas’ potency and marketability. The disability community has attempted to wrest control of that language from the previous owners, and reassign meaning to the terminology used to describe disability and disabled people. (8-9)

This wholesale rejection of the medical model is a common view in the field of disability studies because it reduces people down to a set of symptoms, completely ignoring their agency and individual desires, further focusing in physical difference to separated normal from abnormal.

Beyond the medical model is the social model, one of stigmatization based on comparative difference, that has existed for as long as there have been bodies with differences, which is to say forever, or at least as long as humanity has been keeping reliable written records. It is a methodological approach to othering that is embraced by cultures and taught to their

descendants. It often has more to do with the society than it does about the actual difference in corporeality. Tom Shakespeare describes this in his essay, “The Social Model of Disability.” In it, he asserts:

The social model so strongly disowns individual and medical approaches, that it risks implying that impairment is not a problem. Whereas other socio-political accounts of disability have developed the important insight that people with impairments are disabled by society as well as by their bodies, the social model suggests that people are disabled by society not by their bodies.

This model has shifted more than any other due to the nature of its controlling force – social attitudes. Cultural views regarding the disabled ebb and flow along with the changes in the dominant philosophical views of societies. Looking back to Classical Antiquity, Aristotle is famously quoted as saying, “Let there be a law that no deformed child should live” (Politics). There are other important voices in this ancient historical discussion, and they will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

#### WHY EARLY MODERN ENGLAND?

As Christianity began to spread through Britain as the official state religion, Jesus’ teachings gradually became more canonical. According to Quayson, prior to the Renaissance, Christian policy on the disabled had already become official Church doctrine:

By the later Middle Ages, disability is defined by interlocking subsystems of social attitudes and treatment. On the one hand, charity is the dominant response to disability. Disability is seen as a sign of the variety of God’s creation, the specific impairments being read off as challenges to man’s sense of pride and



self-sufficiency. Thus the non-disabled were encouraged by the church to respond with charity toward people with disabilities. (7)

However, Lindsey Row-Heyveld argues in “‘The Lying’st Knave in Christendom’: The Development of Disability in the False Miracle of St. Alban’s” that attitudes toward disability at this time were more in flux. She cites the varied reaction to the false miracle, claiming: “This incident reflects shifting beliefs and fears about the non-normative body. Examining the evolution of this incident throughout the English Reformation demonstrates how the turbulent religious climate of this period transformed early modern understandings of disability” (*Disability Studies Quarterly*). Playwrights of the era played a large role in the transformation described by Row-Heyveld.

It is against this varying disability backdrop that the Renaissance playwrights find themselves. Many of them make use of disabled or deformed characters as merely a visual or visceral tool of storytelling – a device that disability theorists Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell call a Narrative Prosthesis. For example, Shakespeare’s version of Richard III has a hunched back and withered arm. In such a dramatization, the non-normative body cannot merely exist as an independent corporality – the body is part of the narrative, one whose outward features imply or overtly declare inner character flaws. In other examples like Sir John Falstaff or *Othello*’s Michael Cassio, individuals are written with socially unacceptable (i.e. outside the culturally defined norm – thus abnormal) physical or mental differences like gluttony/obesity and alcoholism, respectively, which are designed to elicit disgust or condescending laughter from the audience. The power of this manipulation of playgoer’s emotions may not seem significant until one realizes that in Shakespeare’s day, between 10-20% of the London population attended a

play each week (Shakespeare's Playhouse). The immersive experience of Renaissance playgoing meant that audiences were susceptible to the suggestions made in these plays, just as modern audiences are likely to be swayed by information learned on social media platforms. Playwrights played the role of unofficial arbiter of acceptable morality, which is why the puritanical English Protestants shut down London's public theaters in 1642.

It is precisely because of this ability to sway audience opinions that playwrights of the era wielded such tremendous social power. The plays created a bond between playwright and playgoer. I agree with Allison Hobgood, who writes in *Passionate Playgoing*, that these plays presume, "A dangerously vibrant affective interplay between theatergoer and the English Renaissance stage" (2). I consider her assertion not just possible, but likely. Affectations were done for both good and evil –the latter being the increased othering of the disabled in the minds of the London theatergoer. I also agree with Hobgood's claim that, "Playgoers were altered by encounters with 'catchable' dramatic affect" (2). By interacting with the passionate emotions of the characters on stage, audience members' views were more susceptible to manipulation.

It should be noted that the essential power of the theater to ignite passions and change the minds of audiences has been recognized for centuries. In 1604, Thomas Wright wrote *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, which described the plays' abilities to "Stir our minds...[to] alter the humours of our bodies," leading to, "corrupting the judgment and seducing the will" (8-9). Through their passionate presentation of negative imagery, Renaissance plays gave the audience permission (and practically instructed them) to laugh at, ridicule, and ultimately other the deformed and disabled. Their current views on disability and the disabled were challenged via conflicting displays of physical and mental difference on the stage – often presented in a

humorous way. This collective socializing experience in the theater allowed people to feel justified in casting aside previous morality. To this end, I assert the Renaissance Stage is the birthplace of widespread socially acceptable prejudice against the disabled. Plays of the time granted audience members moral permission to stigmatize and to other those the playwright desired to show as different or abnormal. The repeated staging of many of these plays maintains and spreads a prejudice that continues today.

My thesis aims to draw on Renaissance concepts of otherness, stigma, social identity, and disability, read through a methodology constructed through contemporary disability theory, in order to show the work that Renaissance plays are doing to create a negative view of the disabled for the audience. I will engage this topic through three sections. Chapter 1 will analyze the most commonly recognized Shakespearean character identified with disability studies—Richard III—with his congenital hunchback, limp, and withered arm. In addition, I will analyze the character of Deflores from Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s play, *The Changeling*, a man born into aristocracy, but whose physical disfigurement reduced him to servitude. This entire section will review the staging of Renaissance disability as described in Erving Goffman’s first and third categories as described earlier in this introduction. Chapter 2 will focus on Katherine Minola, the protagonist of *The Taming of the Shrew*, including the highly negative reception a recent production received when portraying Kate’s textually defined limp on stage. Chapter 3 will be dedicated to analyzing the subtler othering and ridiculing of mental/emotional disabilities including addiction, gluttony, and madness via the Shakespearean characters of Michael Cassio, Falstaff (from the *Henry IV* plays), and Prince Hamlet. This final section will show the demonization and disabling of these non-physical differences. I will employ theorists already named in this introduction, as well as newer voices in the field of disability studies to show that.

The resulting comparisons of the external, corporeal disabilities staged in *The Changeling* and *Richard III* in Chapter 1, the inability of the critical audience to accept a beloved character's disability in Chapter 2's *The Taming of the Shrew*, along with the subtler othering of Hamlet, Cassio, and Falstaff in Chapter 3, will shed light on the damaging aspects of various types of stigmatization, not only when the plays were originally performed, but also as they continue to be employed today. I will also investigate why audience members continue to flock to plays that stage disability in these ways (*Richard III* continues to be the most frequently staged of all Shakespearean plays).

## CHAPTER ONE: DEFORMITY AND MONSTROSITY AS EVIL

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF DISABILITY

Like most analyses of past cultural norms, the history of disability is not a straight line of progress or destruction. As tempting as it is to believe that views on disability from Antiquity to the Middle Ages to the Renaissance were monolithic, the reality is that the meanings associated with disability were specific to various times, places, and cultures. Indeed, opinions pertaining even to what exactly constitutes a disability vary across times and cultures. For example, the Greeks often conflated morality with disability, believing physical differences were “designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status” of a person (Goffman 1). They also had no specific words for either deformity or disability in their language. According to Nicole Kelley’s essay, “Deformity and Disability in Greece and Rome,” the Greeks did have words for specific conditions they recognized as unnatural, such as clubfoot, weakness, or ugliness, the latter two falling outside what modern readers might consider disabilities, but would be obvious to the Greeks who valued physical beauty and symmetry quite highly (33). Elizabeth Bearden reflects a similar idea in her essay analyzing the Classical period, “Before Normal, There was Natural.” Writers in Antiquity did not have the vocabulary to describe the various disabilities and deformities that are recognized in the Modern period, including Early Modern (33-34). The idea of deformities being natural would be even more anticipated the further back in history we travel, as medical knowledge was more rudimentary and life at times more violent and dangerous. In such circumstances, people would likely encounter those with physical difference on a more regular basis. It is our modern world, with medical advances (including knowledge of how to avoid problems of gestational development through nutrition and avoidance of drugs and

alcohol) reducing dramatically the number of deformed members of our societies, which present us with far fewer opportunities to encounter the disabled.

Western television and movie casting have historically skewed the images seen by the masses toward only those possessing culturally defined beauty, which has, until very recently, excluded virtually all deformity or disability. As western individuals become more isolated, and their interaction with society in general declines, the tendency to see the disabled as outliers and Others increases. However, there are some significant beliefs that appear to have been fairly widely held within cultures, even though none were universal at any time. It is the results of these slow changes in cultural norms that are of most interest, and my thesis focuses on the rather sharp change in popular opinion regarding the disabled that occurred in the English Renaissance, due primarily to the mass cultural media of the time – playgoing. Those will be discussed in detail, but it is valuable to review how Renaissance culture inherits its views of the disabled.

Although many of our ancient historical references nod to Rome or Greece, human history does not begin there, and neither do attitudes about disability and deformity. However, since so much of the culture that forms Renaissance playwrights' views originate from Classical Antiquity, this seems to be a sensible place to begin our discussion. In his comprehensive investigation of the subject, *A History of Disability*, Henri Stiker says, "Greek thought saw in disease a sign of the ill will of the gods" (42). From this assertion, we can trace the changing views of western society. The Romans, never bashful at absorbing the beliefs of groups they conquered, appear to have embraced this same view, expanding on it by establishing laws detailing the proper disposition of children born with deformities. But even this is not as clear as it might seem. Cultural views regarding the disabled ebb and flow along with the changes in the dominant philosophical views of societies. In pre-Christian, Jewish Talmudic culture, people

were segregated depending on their status as clean or unclean. “Sin and defect deny the disabled a religious role” (Stiker 27). This was the norm in Hebrew societies for centuries, and Christ reverses this attitude for those Jews who follow his philosophy. In the Book of Luke, Jesus commands, “when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (12:13). He teaches the disabled should be included and integrated into society. His example usurps the existing norm, but widespread adoption of this policy, even among Christians, was likely delayed. Ato Quayson asserts, “The Greeks...saw disability and disease as punishment from the gods” (5). Mary Beard agrees, and she argues in *SPQR* that Romans typically killed children born with deformities (315). Lois Bragg disagrees in *Oedipus Borealis*, suggesting that, instead of infanticide, Roman parents simply abandoned their unwanted, disabled or deformed children, “in some safe, public place, making them available for rearing in other families as supposititious children, or, as would have been more common, as slaves” (45). Living in a pluralistic society with such conflicting views, any change in perspective toward the disabled likely took centuries and moved unevenly as varying socio-cultural groups stigmatized physical aberration in different ways.

Stiker emphasizes humanity’s powerful attraction toward sameness. Our various needs to imitate “are just so many secular, archaic barriers to accepting what appears as monstrosity” (9-10). Stiker also discusses the development of the concept of disability as a social creation: “There is no disability, no disabled, outside precise social and cultural constructions; there is no attitude toward disability outside a series of societal references and constructs” (14). To a pre-Christian Jew, the disabled or unclean were situated socially and morally beneath the able-bodied.

Under the Old Covenant impurity afflicted the disabled, and, as a consequence, requirements and restrictions were generated. Under the New Covenant all responsibility devolved on mankind. In other words, ethics became primary.... There is no distinction of sacred and profane....With the Gospels, a completely different system begins for the disabled. Their dignity, their right to partake fully of religious and social life, are recognized. (34-35)

Christ's teachings empower the disabled, especially with his mortal focus on healing the physically afflicted. His example and the written record that remains instruct faithful followers to embrace each other, regardless of difference, as part of the same larger human family. While his healing of the disabled does seem superficially to approach the Medical Model, his acceptance of all individuals, regardless of their social, economic, or physical status, belies that model's inherent othering of the individual. Eventually, Christ's ideas received a wider acceptance in Christendom, but it was a slow, uneven process, complicated initially by the Protestant break from the Catholic Church and then more significantly with the Church of England becoming the official state religion. While these served to further interrupt attitudes toward the disabled, the first few centuries CE were challenging a more specific philosophical attitude in a long-standing Jewish tradition. As the initial core of Christians were primarily converted Jews, it is not surprising these attitudes did not change universally or immediately. When we consider that the Jews were living under Roman occupation at the time of Christ, as well as the prevailing Roman social attitudes, we can appreciate the myriad social forces at play in forming and changing cultural norms toward the disabled.



## THE RELIGIOUS (OR CHARITY) MODEL OF DISABILITY

As Rome entered the 4th Century CE, the Christian faith spread so quickly that Emperor Constantine famously converted to the new religion. Not long thereafter, Christianity becomes the dominant religion in the Empire, and it is named Rome's official religion in 380 CE. Politics and religion are always an interesting mix, and the degree to which Constantine is actually converted is debatable, as he prefers to refer to himself as "the Emperor of the Christians," according to Peter Brown's *The Rise of Christendom* (61). This also would explain his hesitance to accept the new Christian philosophy regarding the disabled, preferring instead to allow the policy of throwing lepers into the sea to continue (Stiker 74). The shift in official Roman policy occurred only after the defiance of Roman citizen Zotikos, who transgressed Roman law and cared for lepers instead of removing them from society (74). Even though Constantine converted to Christianity, he was firmly established in the social traditions of Antiquity, of allowing deformed children to die of exposure, etc. Zotikos, and his martyrdom, is the turning point politically and socially for the official view of the disabled and deformed. Constantine's successor, Constans, had a daughter with leprosy, and he founded a leprosarium/hospice for her and others with physical difference, embracing the Christian tenets Zotikos had championed (74). I do not suggest that the entire Western world turned on this same fulcrum, but this act ushered in the biggest shift in attitudes toward the disabled since Christ's ministry. It also allowed the actions of Saint Augustine to have the impact they did. Augustine, born 354 CE, moved the Religious Model forward, advancing the plight of the disabled as he worked to eliminate the fear associated with the physically different. Dissimilarity, to him, was "neither a chance event nor a punishment but the sign of the inscrutable grandeur of the Creator" (Stiker 76). One of the ways he accomplished this was by "decisively integrating anomaly into the

normal, and difference into the order of things,” which pointed to Augustine’s embodiment of the early Christian philosophy of viewing one another as members of a larger human family and embraced the responsibility to care for one another (76). His teachings and influence, especially in the area of views toward the disabled, maintained a long influence during the late Classical period.

As we move into the Middle Ages, we can see change in the social attitudes toward normal/abnormal and on disability Stiker says, “Normality was a hodge-podge, and no one was concerned with segregation, for it was only natural that there should be malformations” (65). Saint Augustine confirms this with his assessment that the existence of human deformity “was a simply occasion to do good and to praise God for the infinite diversity of his creation and the mysterious harmony of his design” (66). Tory Vandeventer Pearman summarizes the newly developing medieval social system in *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature*: “The Middle Ages was a time in which the body was an important site of spiritual, scientific, philosophical, and epistemological questioning” (1). However, Stiker notes a merging certain othering: “A history of the disabled is mixed in with and partly obscured by a history of the poor” (Stiker 66). Bodily difference was a primary focal point of charity and perceived salvation by the church faithful. But due to a mix of a fear of the unknown and the general othering that occurs as most cultures decide what is normal, we see many people had grown anxious of the disabled as the Medieval period draws to a close. “The phenomenon of fear, fundamental to the end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, encompassed the disabled and ended in their sequestration in the almshouse” (Stiker 67). Yet these fears were not universal. Other communities in continental Europe saw the deformed in a similar light with other social groups in need. In *Les Miserables dans l’Occident Medieval*, Jean-Louis Goglin states, “The sick and

the disabled are caught in the infernal machinery of pauperization” (149). This perspective is complicated in part by Goglin’s competing historical view regarding hospices in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries: “All kinds of the sick are taken in there, with the exception of lepers, the lame, one-armed, and blind, who by virtue of their incurable disabilities cannot be considered truly sick. On the other hand, pregnant women without means are given shelter, because three categories of persons are admitted to the hospices: the poor, pilgrims, and especially the sick” (158). We see that institutions can shift views on the disabled much faster, when wanted, than groups of people. My thesis examines, in part, the clash of these, and how they were resolved on the Early Modern British stage with virtually all social pretense removed.

Even allowing for the variety of specific opinions and anecdotal conditions, Stiker concludes that the disabled were as indistinguishable from the economically indigent at the end of the Middle Ages as they were at the beginning (67). Attitudes toward each marginalized group improved from Antiquity, but they both moved upwardly at relatively the same way and in each other’s company. Aside from religious moral codes instructing societies to honor those with physical difference, Stiker claims fear is at the heart of prejudice against disability. It is not a fear of the disabled, but a fear of becoming disabled and what that fear would convey socially to others. Stiker observes:

People have never felt comfortable with what appears deformed, spoiled, broken. Is it because they never knew whose fault it was? Yet there is no lack of explanations for misfortune and suffering! But all the philosophers and theologians in the world have never exorcised this special treatment except by underlining it with their very explanations. If it is consequence of sin, then I am

more of a victim than others and doubtless more guilty in one sense or the other. If it is fate, then I am even more rejected, and the object of some mystifying condemnation. If it is society, I am even more of a pariah, since I know that society is ruthless.... I am entirely to blame. (4)

Here we see an instance of the overwhelming power of social conditioning surpassing religious conditioning. In this essay I will ignore the question of whether faith should overcome societal pressure, but Stiker implies there is no contest, even in medieval England, which was, by law and general practice, an officially Catholic Christian nation.

Outside of its use as a narrative prosthesis, the disabled body remains almost invisible in literature prior to the Reformation. Irina Metzler notes in *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages* that the lack of a historical record of disability and disabled people's perspectives through the Middle Ages is likely due simply to the lack of disabled people writing about their condition (2). There was also likely a strong desire to keep the history of the human body separate from literature, as Jacques le Goff states in *Medieval Civilization*, due to the perception that the body belongs to the natural world, and not to our cultural experience (240). The othering which humans tend to do, organizing one another into social groups with similar attributes, likely had an impact on it as well. The term 'organizing' is a euphemism for dividing people into what we perceive is the normal and the abnormal as determined by cultural forces. Those in the socially defined group of 'normal' in a given culture are the ones who have the opportunity to become educated and rise to the top of the social hierarchies. Among this group of normals are the select few who learn to write. A subset of this group are the people who decide which stories merit telling. Le Goff tells us (and common sense also seems to indicate) "the Middle Ages were

full of the maimed, hunchbacks, people with goiters, the lame, and the paralysed” (240). This “paradoxically absent presence of disability in history” (240), at least official history, gives us insight into our own proclivity to other and ignore the different. Metzler indicates:

Medieval concepts of health and illness in relation to physical impairment have shown that the impaired body was neither sick nor healthy, since according to medical thinking the course of an illness was to either improve, in which case the patient was deemed healthy, or to take a turn for the worse, resulting in the death of the patient. The disabled person fits neither model, since the functional loss renders a body not truly ‘healthy’, yet the disabled never recovers that loss. They are forever stuck in-between the two states proposed by the Hippocratic model.

(7)

During the Middle Ages, in other words, the disabled become increasingly othered in new and harmful ways. In *The Body Silent: The Different World of the Disabled*, Robert Murphy agrees with Metzler about the sort of purgatory status in which people with extended periods of physical difference find themselves:

The long term physically impaired are neither sick nor well, neither dead nor alive, neither out of society nor wholly in it. They are human beings but their bodies are warped and malfunctioning, leaving their full humanity in doubt....

The sick person lives in a state of social suspension until he or she gets better. The disabled spend a lifetime in a similar suspended state. They are neither fit nor foul; they exist in a partial isolation from society as undefined, ambiguous people.

(112)

This liminal status complicates the disabled and society's reaction to them during the Middle Ages. The social ambiguity of the disabled comes from several sources, including the Church and Royal decrees. Metzler tells us of legal codes in 14th Century Norway:

The Old Christian law of the *Borgarthing*, section I.1, mentions the severity of deformities which would cause a mother not to give food to the child but instead to take the child to a *forve* [the boundary between land and water] and there place it in a cairn.... In the *Borgarthing* law the *forve* where such a monstrous child is to be placed is also described as 'the *forve* of the evil one'. (9)

These competing cultural perspectives further complicate any attempt to identify any common social practices regarding the deformed across Europe, and these competing views enter the English Renaissance, only to be drastically and negatively molded by playwrights.

#### RICHARD III AND PHYSICAL DISABILITY

In our modern world, we are largely oblivious to the impact of English Renaissance playwrights on our views of disability. This ignorance is, in large part, due to the socialization we receive from our own culture, which has been fueled by the impact of these writers. We have a preconceived notion of what we consider normal. It might not be exactly the same as our neighbor, but our commonly homogeneous social norms mean it is likely within the same general boundaries. Without even thinking, we commonly other any physical body that exists outside that expectation. According to Goffman: "The routines of social intercourse in established settings allow us to deal with anticipated others without special attention or thought.... We lean on these anticipations that we have, transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands" (2). In other words, as members of a society

possessing its own culturally established expectations of normalcy, acts of othering the disabled appear transparent to normals. This is why it is so insidious. While unaware it is happening, even the most well-intentioned people will unlikely recognize and correct it without outside prompting. Regarding the relationship to Renaissance plays, the audience is mostly unaware of the influence these playwrights have on them as their works solidify and expand the expectations of normal bodies and discrimination against those that fall outside the realm of the normal.

Before delving into an analysis of Richard Gloucester's disabilities in the play, it is important first to determine, at least in part, why Shakespeare wrote this play the way he did. Richard is presented to us as a monster because he represents a political disease, an attack on the monarchy. Shakespeare's own society is governed by a royal family, so he was in some ways playing to that regal audience. But Gloucester, as a character, serves as a hyperbole of royalism. His ultimate destruction is the price that needs to be paid in order to restore 'normalcy' to British society. Of course, this ignores the fact that a monarchy is itself an exploitive system designed to extract wealth and power from the majority of a nation's people, but I will set that discussion aside. Most members brought up in a society desire a restoration to the best of what they can be – the perceived 'glory days of old'. Phrases like "God Save the King/Queen" and "Make America Great Again," stripped of their nationalistic, racist, or xenophobic roots are a nostalgic yearning to return to perceived better days, a supposed healthy society. Richard's monstrosity is a response to the Yorkist threat to the 'rightful' Lancastrian rule that precedes it.

Modern audience members viewing *Richard III* for the first time usually understand the broad themes Shakespeare is trying to convey about deformity and its social othering. Having seen this play staged several times with audiences ranging all over the age, social, and economic

spectrum, I have observed their reactions, and they are surprisingly uniform. The audience simultaneously recoils as Richard spits his hateful soliloquies into the empty air and cheers as he charismatically, inappropriately, and successfully woos Lady Anne. The play indicates the source of his rage is his deformed body and the world's reaction to it. Removing any equivocation, Shakespeare provides Richard with some very explicit lines, leaving little room for varying interpretations of why Richard is angry or what motivates his vile actions. In subsequent plays involving disability (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Taming of the Shrew*, et al.), the playwright adopts a subtler presentation of a wider variety of disabilities, but in *Richard III*, he presents the audience with blunt dialog designed to unambiguously instruct the audience.

With his aristocratic birth, lust for power, and obvious character flaws, Richard is, in many ways, the quintessential Shakespearean dramatic character. Superficially, he begins as a nobleman fighting in a royal quest to assert his family's right to the throne and to rule Britain. In the *Henry VI* plays, his family achieves this power, and in *Richard III*, Gloucester maneuvers to ascend to the throne himself. Below the surface, however, lies the real intrigue of this character. In his essay, "*Richard III: 'And Descant on Mine Own Deformity'*," Tobin Siebers identifies some of Gloucester's motivations: "Richard diagnoses the bad luck and adverse feelings poised against him by his disability. Disability proves that nature itself sets against him and guarantees his unlovability" (436). His awareness of his own detractions allows him to play off the pity of others while bettering them in their hatred. He is a highly flawed individual with a lust for power and unrivaled ambition, driven by a single guiding principle: revenge for his deformed body. His opening soliloquy in *Richard III* is a primer for his view of himself, his disabilities and the world in which he lives. It also functions as an instruction manual for changing views on disability in the Renaissance.



*Richard III* is one of the most popular and most often staged of Shakespeare's plays, and Richard is one of his most enduring characters, because the significant themes of the play are so easily grasped by audiences. It is often easy to forget that Shakespeare spent two previous plays introducing this malevolent character to his British countrymen. Shakespeare's first tetralogy (*1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*), loosely describes the history of the British monarchy during the War of the Roses in the 15th Century. The weak King Henry VI often seems a background character in these plays, either to the challenger Richard of York or, later, Richard, Duke of Gloucester. In the second play of this series, Richard has only a minor role. However, it is enough for Shakespeare to introduce the audience to what appears to be his first major character with physical deformity. He has Richard's enemy, Clifford, refer to him as a "Heap of wrath, foul indigested lump, / As crooked in thy manners as thy shape!" (5.1.155-56). Compared to the language that will be used in *Richard III*, this is a mild description of a character's physical deformities. The insult also hints at Richard's low character with a play on words - crooked manners reflect his crooked body. In the following play, the third in this series, Richard's role becomes central. Shakespeare describes his character's deformities in great detail, including just a touch of self-pity on Richard's part as he complains:

Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb...

She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe

To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub,

To make an envious mountain on my back—

Where sits deformity to mock my body—

To shape my legs of an unequal size,

To disproportion me in every part.... (3 *Henry VI* 3.2.153, 155-160)

Richard is angry at his physical deformities, and according to E. Pearlman, “3 *Henry VI* itself veers in the direction of revenge tragedy, and Richard is consequently transformed into a revenger-hero” (415). After describing his physical differences, Richard explains his ambition to take the place of his brother, Edward IV, on the throne. It should be noted that Shakespeare takes some liberties with historical accuracy here (and in several other plays). Continuing in 3 *Henry VI*, Shakespeare’s version of history has Richard describing his powerful ambition:

Then, since this earth affords no joy to me

But to command, to check, to o’erbear such

As better person than myself,

I’ll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,

And whiles I live, t’account this world but hell,

Until my misshaped trunk that bears this head

Be round impaled with a glorious crown. (3.2.165-171)

Ambition is certainly not a rare quality, especially in members of Houses warring for the throne. Pearlman again notes that “Richard commits himself to seek private justice” (415). However, it is Richard’s motives that are important to distinguish. His claim that, “This earth affords no joy to me” is his justification for the pursuit of naked power. The righteous indignation that he feels

because of his misshapen body fuels his ambition to obtain the throne and justifies in his mind all of the evil actions he will commit in this pursuit.

Later in the same scene, Richard is even more descriptive of his deformities. He tells the audience he has “an enormous mountain on my back, / Where sits deformity to mock my body; / To shape my legs of an unequal size, / To disproportion me in every part” (3.2.173-76). Siebers suggests that Richard has “the capacity to develop a self-conscious attitude about disability itself...one that allows [him] to assume a critical attitude about his unequal” lot in life (435). In keeping with Siebers’ claim, Richard makes a significant shift later in the speech, where Gloucester’s attitude reveals a connection between his physical differences and his villainy. Joel Slotkin, in his essay, “Honeyed Truths,” bolsters this sentiment: “Richard epitomizes the union of outer appearances and inner truths.” His self-pity conveys both bitterness and contempt, yet he also asserts a moral justification to the audience – if he must suffer the ignominies of disability, he will enjoy the benefits of immoral, deceitful and murderous behavior. His ambition knows no bounds, as he makes clear to the audience:

For many lives stand between me and home.

And I—like one lost in a thorny wood...

Torment myself to catch the English crown.

And from that torment I will free myself,

Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile...

I’ll slay more gazers than a basilisk.... (3.2.173-74, 179-182, 186)

It would be difficult to find a more wicked character in Shakespeare's 37 plays than Richard. Iago from *Othello* is often described as pure evil, and Aaron the Moor from *Titus Andronicus* is completely self-serving, but the terse phrase, "I can smile, and murder whiles I smile" from Richard is difficult to surpass. This kind of language is also a powerful tool to convince the audience to hate a character. In this play, Shakespeare uses it to elicit hatred for a disabled character, and by extension all disabled people.

In the final act of *3 Henry VI*, Shakespeare allows Richard one final speech to show the audience his physically deformed body is commingled with his treacherous mind. Gloucester has killed Henry VI, and, after he is dead, stabs him again with his sword, revealing his callous disregard for everything that is not named Richard:

I, that have neither pity, love, nor fear.

Indeed, 'tis true that Henry told me of;

For I have often heard my mother say

I came into the world with my legs forward...

The midwife wonder'd and the women cried

'O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!'

And so I was; which plainly signified

That I should snarl and bite and play the dog.

Then, since the heavens have shaped my body so,

Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it. (5.6.69-72, 75-80)

Richard blames God for his deformities. Shakespeare tells the audience that Richard's deformities "plainly signified" his subhuman status. He justifies his evil actions as repayment for his lot in life, and he brings the audience along with him. Siebers remarks that, "The distinguishing feature of Richard is his self-consciousness of his own status of 'disabled', and this gift of self-consciousness contributes" to his ability to control his surroundings (436). He even stoops to self-othering: Richard declares he cannot take part in the fellowship of mankind because he is a monster, and he tries to persuade the audience that his monstrosity sets him irrevocably apart from everyone else:

I have no brother, I am like no brother;

And this word 'love,' which graybeards call divine,

Be resident in men like one another

And not in me: I am myself alone. (*3 Henry VI* 5.6.81-84)

Self-pity is at the heart of Richard's defense of his actions. It is also how, later in the same scene, he justifies his murderous plots, even against his own family:

Clarence, beware; thou keep'st me from the light:

But I will sort a pitchy day for thee;

For I will buz abroad such prophecies

That Edward shall be fearful of his life,

And then, to purge his fear, I'll be thy death.

King Henry and the prince his son are gone:

Clarence, thy turn is next, and then the rest,

Counting myself but bad till I be best. (5.6.85-92)

Richard has literally set the stage for the next play, which will bear his name. He has told the audience that he is going to kill both of his brothers, the King and Clarence, and the responsibility for all of it is due to his deformed body.

In this final play of the series, Richard connects his physical difference to mental difference. The audience, having been properly conditioned over the past two plays about Richard's deformities and his evil nature, is now ready to make the connection that the disabled are evil simply because of their physical differences. In the play, Richard's deformed body is the source of his deformed mind. The first words of *Richard III* echo those spoken by Gloucester at the end of *3 Henry VI*, and the audience spends the next five acts watching Richard fulfill his own disgusting plans. He begins with a statement of how he feels about his current condition:

Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by this son of York;

And all the clouds that loured upon our house

In the deep bosom of the ocean buried. (*Richard III* 1.1.1-4)

With all the accomplishments accumulated by Richard and his family, one would expect he might be satisfied. His brother now rules England and he is a powerful Duke. His family has retaken the monarchy and has enough support among the noble houses to maintain it. But he is unsatisfied. His discontent surrounds his own deformed body, which he laments in detail:

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks  
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass,  
I that am rudely stamped and want love's majesty  
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph,  
I that am curtailed of this fair proportion,  
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time  
Into this breathing world scarce half made up —  
And that some lamely and unfashionable  
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them — (1.1.14-23)

This is no mere list of common complaints. Siebers observes that “Richard dominates his adversaries by turning their false ideas about disability against them” (436). Katherine Schaap Williams writes in “Enabling Richard: The Rhetoric of Disability in *Richard III*” that “Richard’s ascent to power depends upon the manipulation of the body he marks....[His] use of his physical frame—a body he initially decries—challenges the conceptual binary between able/disabled bodies” (4). Neither the audience nor the other characters in the play are prepared for this skillful manipulation, as both have been socially conditioned to underestimate him because he is disabled. In addition, because of the Medieval Catholic Christian tradition of caring for the disabled, many, if not most, of the Elizabethan audience members might tend to feel compassion for Richard, even after they learn he has committed evil acts. In this way, Shakespeare further

manipulates the emotions of the playgoer to hate Richard—and by extension, all disabled people—and to feel justified in doing so. This exhaustive list of his physical difference and the subsequent ignominies he suffers are a prelude for him to connect his deformed body and his evil character for the audience, as he began in *3 Henry VI*.

Shakespeare is taking his audience (both Renaissance and today) by the hand through three plays as he conditions us to hate Richard as a representation of the disabled community. Now that we have been properly prepared, he has Richard declare an ultimatum:

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,  
Have no delight to pass away the time,  
Unless to see my shadow in the sun  
And descant on mine own deformity.  
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover  
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,  
I am determined to prove a villain. (1.1.24-30)

Richard readily justifies his evil, claiming its source to be his physical abnormalities. He speaks with clarity about his motives as he “descant[s] on [his] own deformity,” revealing the evil inside him. Shakespeare’s Richard employs the plain, unambiguous phrase, “I am determined to prove a villain.” He shamelessly announces to the crowd his dastardly plans:

Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,  
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,



To set my brother Clarence and the King

In deadly hate, the one against the other;

And if King Edward be as true and just

As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,

This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up. (1.1.32-38)

Richard continues his decidedly plain language in the same soliloquy. When he tells the audience, “I am subtle, false, and treacherous,” they know they are supposed to hate him. I have seen this play performed live four times, and I can testify to the palpable disgust in the faces of the audience members (myself included) by the end of this soliloquy. The audience knows Richard is deformed. He tells the playgoer about his deformities, and other characters do, as well. Through Richard, Shakespeare figuratively bludgeons the Renaissance audience with the message that the disabled are evil. Pearlman observes, “He began [in *2 Henry VI*] with a figure who was little more than ugly and audacious,” and by *Richard III*, had developed him into one “marked by an uncomplicated ferocity” and duplicity (417). Worse, because Richard’s crimes are so reprehensible, the audience is led to believe their hatred for Richard is justified – acceptable for sure, and possibly even morally correct.

Another reason audiences are comfortable in developing a hatred for Richard and his disabilities is because he also disables characters around him. Siebers postulates “Richard dominates his adversaries by turning their false ideas about disability against them” (436). When he is insulted, he draws on self-pity, but when it suits him, he uses what power he does possess to disable anyone he can—and that includes the audience. Many of his lines are spoken in

soliloquy, and Richard is no less ruthless with us. In *Richard III*, when he is justifying Clarence's fate to the Tower, he blames it not on their brother, the King, but his wife, Lady Gray: "this it is when men are ruled by women" (1.1.66).

Shakespeare is not the lone playwright of his era to use deformity or disability in this way. According to David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, "Disability is used in literature as an opportunistic metaphorical device. This perpetual discursive dependency upon disability is what is referred to as a narrative prosthesis" (47). Playwrights Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's lean on disability as a narrative crutch in their play, *The Changeling*. It provides Renaissance audiences with a deformed character whom they seem encouraged by the playwrights to despise – Deflores. This character provides the audience with another view on disability – one so powerful that it lowers the character's social class:

...no hand can abide the sight of me,

As if danger or ill luck hung in my looks

I must confess my face is bad enough....

Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude,

I tumbled into th'world a gentleman. (2.1.35-37, 48-49).

Deflores identifies himself as stigmatized by his ugly face – often staged as a massive port-wine stain or a serious facial skin condition or disfigurement. He proceeds to explain he was high born, but, due to his deformity, is relegated to the working class.

The characters of both Richard III and Deflores tap into the audiences' familiarity with and fear of prodigiousness and monstrosity - the familiar of the physical disabilities and

deformities they would encounter in daily life in Shakespeare's London, as well as the fear of the underlying evil that threatens their eternal souls. These playwrights manipulate the audience's reactions and free them from moral responsibility to the disabled. They also draw a sharper distinction between normal and abnormal in the audience members minds, making the importance of being 'normal' even more obvious. While othering these characters and their physical differences, these writers are also creating additional fear in the audience – fear of being hated, shunned, or ostracized by being outside their culturally defined definition of normal. The attempt to exclude others outside the normative is like a game of musical chairs. Except in this game, the players, at least those who are able to pass as 'normal' and act like everyone else in the group, control the chairs. Each of them, fueled by the permission from the Renaissance stage, wait for the music to stop and then pull out the chair themselves, right out from under anyone who looks or acts differently than they do.

## CHAPTER 2: REFUSING TO SEE DISABILITY

### KATHERINE – AN EFFORT TO HIDE THE DISABLED

Another powerful example of the pervasiveness of negative feelings toward the disabled is in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Katherine, the protagonist, presents us with a character multifaceted in her disabilities, and audience reaction to her and the choices made by producers and directors of how to stage her disabilities have been commensurate with this added complexity. Even experienced Shakespearean playgoers may be surprised to learn that the character is written with a physical disability, and that is due mostly to the fact that modern adaptations of the play very rarely display her as disabled. There are no detailed records of the original staging of this character in the late 16th Century, so we cannot say definitively if directors chose from the start to stage her with the limp that Petruccio openly discusses in Act 2:

Why does the world report that Katherine doth limp?

O sland'rous world! Katherine like the hazel twig

Is straight and slender...

O let me see thee walk. Thou dost not halt. (2.1.245-48, 49)

After a few more lines, Petruccio addresses her "princely gait" (252). These five lines address a disability that has been virtually ignored in modern productions of this popular play. Why is this? The answer to that question relates directly to our normal level of comfort with seeing the disabled.

One notable exception to this dearth of disability staging was done in 2008, when Peter Hinton directed a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* in Stratford, Canada. As a part of the

staging of Katherine's character, Hinton instructed the actress playing her, Irene Poole, to employ a continual limp in all her movements on stage. The response from critics was practically universal, and it was mostly negative. Apparently, no one was prepared to see Katherine with her disability. In his review of the play, Brad Frenette of *The National Post* called this depiction of disability "a very literal reading of a line of Petruchio's that's probably meant as a joke..." Theater critic Richard Ouzounian, writing for the *Toronto Star*, also perceives the play's text on Katherine's disability as no more than humor. But he goes further, calling into question the legitimacy of Hinton's interpretation:

On the strength of one line in the text ("Why does the world report that Katherine does limp?") which most scholars usually accept as a joke inspired by some physical business (a kicked leg, a broken shoe), Hinton has her hobbling across the festival stage as though she were Richard III instead of Katherine I.

Ouzounian's stigmatization of Katherine, due to seeing her unexpectedly staged disability, is more understandable once we realize it is the natural result of being indoctrinated in a society that divides people into categories of normal and abnormal. The shock from seeing a disability when we otherwise expect to see normality creates an uncomfortable mental shift within these reviewers. In such instances, according to Goffman, we reduce that character "in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (3). Having previously perceived the character as whole or normal, observing her staged as abnormal is apparently disconcerting to some.

Rachel Hile investigates the choices made in staging Katherine Minola's disabilities in "Disability and the Characterization of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*." In this essay,

Hile focuses on Peter Hinton's staging of Katherine's disability. According to Hile, "This nearly unanimous disparagement of Hinton's decision suggests a profound discomfort with the idea that a heroine in a romantic comedy could have a disability" (Disability Studies Quarterly #29.4). Hile proceeds to relate the arguments made by these critics to attempt to justify this negativity: "Many of the statements reviewers make to support their arguments for an able-bodied Katherine are simply wrong: directors often make staging decisions based on a single line, Shakespeare devotes more than one line to the issue of Katherine's limp, and there is no textual evidence for or against reading it as a joke." With all the unique reinterpretations of Shakespeare plays, some based on nothing at all from the text, it seems surprising that such a tidal wave of disgust rose up against seeing Katherine staged with a disability. Hile goes on: "Five lines in the play refer to Katherine's limp either directly or indirectly.... Many theatrical traditions of Shakespearean characterization and stage business (Petruccio's famous whip comes to mind) enjoy considerably less textual support than Katherine's limp." The more important questions are these: First, why did it take until 2008 (as far as we know) before a director staged Katherine's limp so predominantly? Second, why does a disabled Katherine create such a universal and negative response from critics and theatergoers? In our modern era, where scholars and critics alike have widely embraced unique and instructional interpretations of Renaissance plays, it seems odd that the staging of disability would be so broadly rejected. It forces us to ask this pointed question: what is it about disability that makes audiences so uncomfortable seeing it in a theatrical performance?

I do not think we can reasonably conclude laziness as the culprit behind directors and critics ignoring Katherine's disability, at least not due to a lack of general creative effort, because there are so many varying interpretations of Shakespeare's plays, including *The Taming of the*

*Shrew*. Most playgoers can attest to the effort put into the different ways these plays are interpreted and staged. The answer so often given for ignoring this reference to Katherine's disability is that Petruccio is joking about her being disabled. This is a notable claim, and its investigation reveals, in some ways, more about the effect of our own cultural othering of disability and its intersectional overlap with patriarchy. And here we might entertain the notion that a certain type of laziness might factor into this problem after all. The long history of ignoring Katherine's physical difference implies a somewhat vulgar lack of directorial imagination.

Both stage critics mentioned earlier—Ouzounian and Frenette—each echo the assertion that Petruccio's statements about Katherine's limp are uttered in jest. Before investigating that further, I think it is important to note that virtually every critic who addresses Hinton's disabled Katherine repeats the often used (and inaccurate) criticism that its source is derived from only a single line of the text. As I have shown earlier, there are five lines in that quoted scene alone that discuss her physical otherness. Those who dismiss her limp as a single line do so either out of a lack of research or a desire to maintain an ablest status quo. However, since it has been asserted by multiple sources that "most" scholars (whatever that means) believe Petruccio's statements ascribing a disability to his wife are nothing more than jokes, it warrants a close analysis.

In the following few pages, I intend to show a very specific entrenched attitude against the disabled, made clearly manifest in the argument asserted in Jeffrey R. Wilson's essay, "The Trouble with Disability in Shakespeare Studies," published in *Disabled Studies Quarterly*. In it he says:

Hile suggested that Katherine is actually disabled, that her frustration with being disabled contributes to her shrewishness, that she should therefore be played as disabled in performance, and that any resistance to this reading stems from an outdated, oppressive, normative cultural aesthetic that basely values the physical over the mental, moral, and spiritual. Unfortunately, this suggestion mistakes a dubious for a necessary reading, disparages those who do not accept it, and is in fact a selective reading that can only be arrived at by willfully ignoring the evidence against it.

Wilson begins his article by presenting a rather presumptuous argument, stating the only perspective that could be maintained by a disabled reading of the play is one that holds all others in contempt. He provides no evidence to support his claim. This is even more surprising when considering the extreme position that he insists his opposition holds, while proudly stating his position is the “necessary” one. Putting that lack of analytical rigor aside (which I only mention to give context for his later statement), Wilson’s claim is that Petruccio is joking. Let us look even closer at that. He asserts:

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the lines about Katherine's limp come in the context of Petruchio's plainly professed attempt to confound Katherine by contravening the evident sense of things. Even though he has not, Petruchio claims that he has heard that Katherine is coarse, coy, and curt, while he finds her pleasant, playful, sweet, sincere, soft, affable, mild, kind, and courteous, a flattering description of Katherine that clearly contradicts the direct evidence we have of her character from earlier in the play. Then, even though (again) he has not, Petruchio claims he



has heard that Katherine limps when she walks, while he finds her to stand straight and walk with a lovely gait....Obviously, there is no way to confirm what Petruchio has previously heard about Katherine, or the accuracy of his statement about her body, but both are likely fabrications.

Unfortunately for Wilson, the text does provide the answer. We can see Petruccio definitely has previously heard that Katherine is a shrew. Early in the play, prior to Petruccio meeting his future bride, Hortensio warns him about Katherine's purported negative qualities in no uncertain terms:

I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife  
With wealth enough and young and beauteous,  
Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman:  
Her only fault, and that is faults enough,  
Is that she is intolerable curst  
And shrewd and froward, so beyond all measure  
That, were my state far worsen than it is,  
I would not wed her for a mine of gold. (1.2.86-93)

This is not Wilson's only analytical error, but his motivation for pursuing an easily refutable position is noteworthy. This kind of mistake could be due to a cultural blind spot which can be the result of the Western socially inculcated disdain for the disabled. Returning to Henri Stiker: "People have never felt comfortable with what appears deformed, spoiled, broken" (*History*, 4).

Critics and playgoers experience this discomfort with seeing Katherine's physical difference staged, and its powerful effect is often registered without forethought.

The common and negative reviews of Peter Hinton's play reflect the ablest, patriarchal attitudes held by the general public which can be traced back to negative Renaissance depictions of disability which gave the audience permission to hate the disabled. We yield to feelings of superiority as members of the group that has been culturally defined as normal. Our society allows to endure the prejudice against those with physical difference. These attitudes are understandable in those who interact mostly with others inured in this same prejudice. Growing up as a member of the group considered normal in a culture blinds us to the othering of those outside our group (Goffman 2). However, one would reasonably be justified in expecting more from academics. Fortunately, many, if not most, are content, at a minimum, to allow that Katherine might have actually had a limp, and they grant that staging her with her disability is an acceptable option.

Doubling down, Wilson argues vociferously against allowing even the possibility that Katherine might have a physical disability. Wilson blames what he sees as errant analysis and a new and unnecessary interpretation of Katherine on Disability Scholars. He laments what he sees as their tendency to "Project disability on someone who may not necessarily need or want that identity." While it is essential for all scholars to check our biases regularly, Wilson's accusation presumes to malign all in the field of disability studies, when their attempt is merely to consider alternative interpretations of literature which may lead to greater understanding of the condition of the disabled.

Returning to the play's text, we can analyze Petruccio's statements to see another error in Wilson's claims. He says Petruccio is only joking, echoing the claim made by many reviewers of Hinton's 2008 production, described earlier herein. The problem is that the idea of this being a joke has no basis. Wilson suggests Petruccio's comment on the limp is a joke in the same way his comment on hearing about Katherine's coarseness is a joke, which then is resolved by his praise that she is pleasant. The humor exists because Petruccio has heard the former, or at a minimum, the audience has, and the joke is the second comment, because the audience knows he has heard it. But Petruccio's claim that the world says Katherine limps is similarly clear to the audience, and the humor from Petruccio's own coarse behavior is the readily apparent claim that Katherine "dost not halt". Both jibes are intended to insult Katherine.

Reading it backwards, as Wilson does, removes all potential for humor in the comment. If Katherine did not limp, a claim that the world said she did would offer very little sting. However, for one who does have an impairment, claiming the world is talking about it offers a reminder that everyone sees and recognizes her as disabled. The second part of the insult emerges when Petruccio claims to her that she has no impediments to mobility. The real monstrosity follows later when Petruccio forces Katherine to walk to his home while he rides. Even though we understand what Petruccio means when he degrades Katherine for her disability, we don't understand why until he drives her like a beast of burden, forcing her to limp for miles before arriving at his house.

If this play had been originally staged with Katherine limping, as it may have been, there likely would have been little uproar from a patriarchal Elizabethan crowd (for many reasons, including the fact that women's roles were usually played by men). The audience, knowing the

character of Katherine was being played by a man, probably diminished their empathy for her as a prisoner, captive to her domineering husband, but the degree to which this may have happened is impossible to calculate. However, emerging from the Middle Ages, many Renaissance playgoers were still socially empathetic toward the disabled and deformed. It took 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-Century writers and their plays which conflated disability with evil or an undesirable character to instill such widespread, culturally acceptable disdain. Shakespeare's impact on Renaissance audiences, continuing up to modern western societies, helped to create this prejudice against the disabled which causes so many today to recoil at this play's modern disabled staging.

We may think that, as a modern society, we have made significant progress against toxic masculinity. However, when heterosexual men in a Western culture see a female character with (what they perceive to be) disabilities, their general reaction is often to ignore her agency and default to the controlling fixation of the Medical Model, seeking to cure her. In his article, "As Good as it Gets: Queer Theory and Critical Disability," Robert McRuer discusses the othering of those who fall outside the normative physical and sexual guides of society: "Heterosexual bodies are distinguished by their ability....These bodies are often explicitly (and, in the case of film, visually) distinguished from people with disabilities" (82). He notes the disabled body as problematic: "There is no material separation between disability and serious flaws in character" (91). Katherine's shrewishness is viewed by the men of the era (and, sadly, by many men today) as a problem to be fixed. Like any other medical condition, her "serious flaws in character" can be repaired with proper masculine Renaissance guidance and correction, or so goes the thinking of the era. Shifting to modern audiences of men and women, they both already laugh as they see Petruccio drive Katherine like a mule, not imagining the transformation of their own internal attitudes as they watch. It is not difficult to imagine Elizabethan audiences howling as they see

Petruccio riding to his home after their marriage, pushing Katherine on foot, limping as she suffers patriarchal penance for her other disability – disrespect toward male authority, or shrewishness. Social anxieties at witnessing disabled beauty can overwhelm audiences, and their desire for Katherine’s shrewishness to be cured allows them to excuse Petruccio’s monstrous behavior. More than anything, the audience, raised on social and physical cultural norms, desperately wants a return to normalcy. Katherine’s character presents two powerful examples of cultural dissonance, and the stress of these can only be resolved by breaking her.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine is one of two daughters of the wealthy Baptista. Bianca, her sister, is his favorite because she outwardly plays the socially acceptable role as a demure, proper gentlewoman. She appears, to all observers, to be *normal*. She is beautiful and has many suitors, but Baptista refuses to allow anyone to court her until her elder sister, Katherine, is married. Katherine has a sharp mind and a sharp tongue, and her unwillingness to conform to patriarchal society’s defined role for women is why she is labeled a shrew and the source of Baptista’s fear that he will never successfully wed her to a husband. Of the 15 times Katherine is called a shrew in the play, the audience hears Katherine called that 10 times before she and her eventual husband, Petruccio, meet. It is noteworthy that the term, shrew, appears in the title of a play which was written as a comedy. At the time, such a title signaled what must be done to a woman who openly challenges patriarchal cultural norms. Even for modern audiences, the hypermasculine concept is used for comedic effect. The idea is that Katherine must be severely socially disabled by those around her. Shakespeare instructs his audience that such behavior by men goes beyond simple privilege – it is a responsibility in their patriarchal culture, and disabling women was the first step toward bringing them back to normalcy.

The play makes it clear Katherine is an attractive woman. Hortensio describes her as “young and beauteous” (1.2.82). Her directness and unwillingness to suffer fools, otherwise considered positive traits in men, is the reason she is presented to the audience as unattractive as a potential wife. Beyond ugliness is simple discomfort. Seeing the disabled body disturbs those society defines as “normal,” because it represents the Other, the thing they don’t wish to be. Renaissance plays taught their audience not only to other and despise those outside the normate, but also to despise their presence. When Shakespeare presents a disabled Richard III on stage, his text conflates evil with disability. He is a clear villain. The source of Richard’s evil is his deformity, and Renaissance playwrights have socially conditioned audiences to correlate deformity with ugliness. With a villain, it is easy to accept deformity, because we know we are supposed to hold them in contempt. However, according to Hile, “...verbal references to disability as part of a constellation of traits perceived as undesirable in a woman—shrewishness, ugliness, disability—are important to the play’s consideration.”

I want to make it clear that I am not asserting this play must be interpreted with a physically disabled Katherine. Rather, my claim here is that a disabled reading is legitimate, and – more directly related to my thesis – that our prejudices against the disabled, fomented most intensely during Renaissance playgoing, are the direct cause of the nearly universally negative response to Hinton’s staging of Katherine with a limp. This stigmatization of the disabled fuels our perception of them as unnatural and repulsive. Thanks to these influences, passed down from the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century, we view them as contrary to the normal order, and thus reject them autonomously. The modern staging of an otherwise beautiful female character with a physical disability renders her socially intolerable.

Based on watching audience reaction to numerous stagings of *Richard III*, it seems fairly clear that Shakespeare is successful in getting his audience to hate Gloucester. Richard and his enemies each describe him as both physically repugnant and evil. This appears to go beyond just permission to hate—it is explicit direction by the writer to the audience. As a playgoer, this comforts us in our prejudice, allowing us to feel justified in feeling it because he is so evil. Shakespeare no doubt realizes, based on his own cultural familiarity, that he is asking a lot of his audience to contravene long-held (if somewhat unevenly accepted) compassion toward the disabled. This is, perhaps, why he takes three plays to fully develop the audience’s negative feelings toward Richard (*2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*). I do not presume that Shakespeare or other Renaissance writers were on a quest to subvert moral values regarding the disabled. Neither do I assert they wished to increase prejudice against them. However, the effect, over time, was the same. These and other plays cultivated an almost universal othering of disability.

In contrast to the repulsive Richard, Katherine is an attractive young woman. However, she possesses a sharp tongue, which is her invisible disability. As long as she is not speaking, the audience can imagine she fits into the social category of “normal.” As written, it seems the character of Katherine would not care what anyone thought about her—it is we who feel the need for her to be normal—to force it upon her. She is beautiful, and our natural instinct is not to want a beautiful character stigmatized or othered. Stigma is reserved for the ugly.

Franco Zeffirelli’s 1967 film adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew* has had a lasting impact on modern audiences and their opinions on beauty and normalcy. In her essay “Taming Feminism: Tracing Women and Culture Through Adaptation,” Stephanie Springer asserts:

“Zeffirelli’s film tropes on Elizabeth Taylor’s stunning beauty to commodify Kate as an object for use by men. [The] film sets up a patriarchal economy of exchange where women have worth only insofar as they can be circulated between men....Thus, Zeffirelli’s *Taming*, although aesthetically pleasing, serves as a reification of the feminine mystique and implies that women who spoke out against patriarchal ideologies were in some way flawed or unfeminine. (25-26)

Even during her verbally shrewish behavior, Taylor was still portrayed as beautiful. A limp would change that view in many people’s minds. It is a more powerful disability than shrewishness, because, as the play purports to teach us, abnormal female behavior, a disability on its own, can be cured, a la the medical model of disability, by a firm male hand. A physical disability cannot. This difference implies a permanence of ugliness, whereas Katherine’s shrewishness, at the hands of the ‘right man’, could be ‘cured’ and she returned to the status as an attractive, worthy female. The staging of Katherine’s disability forces a discomfort onto the audience which they are not prepared to accept. In our socially conditioned minds, beauty and ugliness cannot coexist on stage.

Katherine’s disabling is accomplished by the play in a much different way than Richard’s, but they are both done in ways that support and exploit societal norms. While Richard only threatens royal stability, Katherine’s non-normal behavior (and appearance, with a limp) threatens the entire patriarchal system. Shakespeare lures his audience into rooting for Petruccio to break Katherine’s spirit, and by the end of the play, we feel justified in doing so because Katherine’s new and improved personality (due to the corrective influence of her patriarchal husband), displays proper obedience and exposes the hypocrisy in Bianca’s outward superficial



personality. It should be noted that Shakespeare only allows Katherine to expose Bianca and the Widow's socially inappropriate behavior after she has been *tamed* and is engaging in acceptable behavior demanded by her husband.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I will turn my focus to consideration of how these issues, such as disability and stigmatization, function in Shakespeare's depiction of non-physical disabilities.

## CHAPTER 3: NON-PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Chapters 1 and 2 of this essay discussed the treatment of physical disability and difference by Renaissance playwrights, as well as analyzing the changing social views on disability from the Classical period through Early Modern England. Chapter 3 will address the less obvious forms of disability—those which involve mental differences of madness/emotional instability, alcoholism, and gluttony. In it, I will explore how and to what effect these were used by Shakespeare via the characters of Hamlet, Michael Cassio of *Othello*, and Falstaff of the 2nd Henriad (*Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, and *Henry V*).

### MADNESS AS DISABILITY

Not all disabilities in Renaissance literature are what they seem. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the titular character feigns madness throughout much of the play in what Tobin Siebers describes in *Disability Theory* as “disability drag” (114). He adopts this only after learning his uncle, Claudius, murdered his father. He is able to put on a convincing masquerade of disability (114) because he has already displayed legitimate melancholy, the extent of which he reveals to his mother when she encourages him to “Cast thy nightly colour off,” and further instructs him: “Do not for ever with thy veiled lids / Seek for thy noble father in the dust” (1.2.68, 70-71). Hamlet defends his feelings and actions to Gertrude as he explains the depth of his extended sadness:

‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, good-mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,

Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief  
That can denote me truly. These indeed 'seem',  
For they are actions that a man might play;  
But I have that within which passeth show—  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.77-86)

Hamlet feels he is correct to remain in mourning, but Claudius cannot tolerate it. Upon hearing this justification, Claudius jumps into fix-it mode, adopting a Medical Model perspective, attempting to repair Hamlet:

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,  
To give these mourning duties to your father;  
But you must know your father lost a father;  
That father lost, lost his; and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persevere  
In obstinate condolement is a course  
Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief,  
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,  
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,  
And understanding simple and unschooled.' (1.2.87-97)

Later in this scene, Hamlet learns of the appearance of his father's ghost and the subsequent revelation which will drive his actions throughout the rest of the play. Hamlet uses the prosthesis of madness as a device to make himself invisible at court as he gathers evidence to corroborate the murderous claims of his father's ghost. However, madness (real or feigned) has another

narrative function as well. In “Antic Dispositions,” Lindsey Row-Heyveld states, “Madness provides an exceptionally convenient dramatic deferral since it facilitates the bloody conclusion it simultaneously puts off. Avengers...adopt disability as a disguise so they might safely observe the villains they hope eventually to punish” (74). Although most of the play’s characters believe him to suffer from mental illness, Hamlet informs the audience that he is only pretending to be disabled. He makes this clear when he commits Horatio and the guard Marcellus (all witnesses of the supernatural appearance of the dead King Hamlet’s ghost) to a solemn oath of silence regarding his madness plan:

Here as before, never, so help you mercy,

How strange or odd soe’er I bear myself –

As I perchance hereafter shall think meet

**To put an antic disposition on –**

That you at such time seeing me never shall,

...note

That you know aught of me – this not to do,

...swear. (1.5.170-175, 180-181) Emphasis added

His admission that his madness is feigned is for the audience’s benefit, as the other characters react to him as disabled. Carol Thomas Neely confirms this in *Distracted Subjects*: “When he assumes his ‘antic disposition,’ as in his dialogue with Polonius, his speech, although witty, savage, and characterized by non-sequiturs and bizarre references, almost never has the quoted, fragmentary, ritualized quality of Ophelia’s” (54). Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes spend the majority of their time attempting to diagnose Hamlet’s malady in a classic Medical Model

attempt at repairing him. Their othering of Hamlet is a signal that his disability is unnatural, anti-social and in need of correction because of the threat it poses to the stability of their society.

During the Renaissance, fear was often the reaction to mental instability, as it represents a lack of balance in a society. Claudius' response to Hamlet's madness reveals his concern. Initially, however, the King is not convinced Hamlet is completely mad. He first diagnoses him to be suffering from mere melancholy—which, in the King's mind, can and should be corrected. Once Claudius realizes Hamlet's 'distemper' goes beyond simple melancholy, his next reaction is to conspire to spy on his nephew. After hatching a plan with Laertes, The King confirms his reasoning: "It shall be so. / Madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (3.1.187-88). Two scenes later, as Claudius is convinced Hamlet is a danger, he states plainly: "I like him not, nor stands it safe with us / To let his madness range...." (3.3.1-2). He is so afraid, he eventually sends Hamlet to England to be murdered. Hamlet thwarts this plot, returns to Elsinore, and finally has his bloody revenge. Here, madness provides additional narrative assistance. Row-Heyveld continues: "Madness and foolishness are more than just vehicles for dramatic delay.... Mental and intellectual disabilities played a critical role in making the morally ambiguous revenge tradition palatable for early modern audiences" (74). She goes on: "In early modern England, [madness] implied 'innocent'...and a lack of responsibility for any potential harm that might occur" (76). Shakespeare cuts the audience both ways, using the narrative prosthesis of madness simultaneously to soften the shock of the play's murderous revenge plot while also strengthening the audience members' fear and distrust of the mentally ill.

#### DRUNKENNESS AS DISABILITY

Alcoholism has been a problem for a subset of humanity for as long as people have had access to sufficient quantities of alcohol. The deleterious side effects of its overuse are readily

apparent to most in Western society. Whether or not people who suffer from alcoholism (or, as it was known in the English Renaissance, drunkenness) are wholly responsible for their condition has been debated for millennia, but the Medieval Church in England set to settle that argument for their people in the late Middle Ages. Whereas the western social views on physical deformity and disability at the end of the Middle Ages were somewhat varied, views on gluttony and drunkenness seem to have been more monolithic. A principle reason for this is due to the standardized Christian teachings, or homilies, developed by Reformation clergy, which were popular sermons used by Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican priests and ministers throughout England during the Middle and Late Medieval era (Gane 182). Because much of the liturgy of church services were conducted in Latin before the Reformation (a language spoken by few outside the educated class) little moral teaching was likely absorbed by parishioners. Thus, the sermons spoken in English were the primary source of cultural guidance and social instruction for the people. These sermons were often based on the published homilies provided directly to the clergy (Gane, 182). One of these in particular, “An Homily Against Gluttony and Drunkenness,” is part of the *Second Book of Homilies*, published in 1571. The full title of the book appears to provide additional direction as to its intended use: *The Second Tome of Homilies: Of Such Matters as Were Promised, and Intituled in the Former Part of Homilies. Set Out by the Auctoritie of the Queenes Maiestie: and to be Read in Euery Parishe Church Agreeably*. These homilies were taught as official doctrine, and because of the plain language used therein, these teachings from the pulpit were more likely to create in the population a more monolithic social morality than scripture, since the sacred texts that would eventually be bound into *The Bible* were written in Hebrew (Old Testament) or Greek (New Testament), languages unknown to most common people of the day. Even after *The Bible* began to be translated into

English, the majority of the British population could not read. Because membership in the Church was mandatory during the Medieval period (heretics could be legitimately killed), the social impact of these homilies was significant (Robinson 137-42). Comprehending this impact is crucial to a fuller understanding of how Shakespeare was able to ridicule characters like Falstaff and *Othello*'s Michael Cassio. By the time Shakespeare's plays were staged, numerous generations of British churchgoers had been indoctrinated with these prejudices against obesity and alcoholism.

As an instructional text, "An Homily Against Gluttony and Drunkenness" is not merely advisory. Its language is specific and threatening, and a brief summary of its main points will prove instructional regarding the social values instilled in the people during this era:

Now ye shall hear how foul a thing gluttony and drunkenness is before God....

We may learn how necessary it is for every Christian to live soberminded in this present world...otherwise he cannot enter with Christ into glory;...he must needs be in continual danger of that cruel adversary.... It shall be expedient for us to declare unto you how much all kind of excess offendeth the Majesty of Almighty God, and how grievously he punisheth the immoderate abuse of...meats, drinks, and apparel. (297)

The Church's directions in this homily are stark. Parishioners are left with little doubt regarding the dire, eternal consequences of indulgence in food or alcohol:

Ye may perceive how detestable and hateful all excess in eating and drinking is before the face of Almighty God.... St. Paul...numbereth gluttony and drunkenness among those horrible crimes with the which (as he saith) no man shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.... God...so much abhorreth all beastly

banqueting, that, by his Son our Saviour Christ in the Gospel, he declareth his terrible indignation against all belly gods...saying, Woe be unto ye that are full... Therefore they are without excuse before God which either filthily feed themselves...or else abuse...drunkenness. (297-98)

This religious instruction is direct, largely avoiding metaphor in favor of simple language designed so every member of the congregation will understand. It continues in its menacing, fear-inducing promises:

They that give themselves therefore to bibbing and banqueting...are suddenly oppressed in the day of vengeance.... Our Saviour Christ warneth his disciples, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcome with surfeiting and drunkenness....' Almighty God crieth, by the Prophet Joel, 'Awake, ye drunkards; weep and howl, all ye drinkers of wine....' For certainly the Lord our God will not only take away his benefits when they are unthankfully abused, but also, in his wrath and heavy displeasure, take vengeance on such as immoderately abuse them. (299)

I have included these repeated threats and warnings, displaying how often they are restated within a short few pages of the homily in order to show plainly the degree to which Renaissance audiences were conditioned to think of gluttony and drunkenness as sins carrying the most severe eternal penalties. The implied question is this: what 'normal' person would risk everlasting damnation? In addition, the texts suggest the obesity and addictions, natural results of these indulgences, are character flaws. Those suffering from these conditions, therefore, had an inability to act within social norms. The apparent assumption is that these individuals must have a significant character flaw to make such choices. From here, it is easy for the people to other



those who choose 'evil' because no 'right' thinking person would choose heavenly condemnation and eternal sorrow. When viewing characters who were drunk or obese, the audience was predisposed to other them.

While there are many memorable characters in Renaissance drama afflicted with alcoholism, perhaps none are as harshly manipulated as a result of their drunkenness as *Othello's* Michael Cassio. While it is the evil Iago who manipulates this naive and unsuspecting character, it is Cassio's alcoholism and resulting negative behavior that serves as the prosthesis for the narrative, a la Mitchell and Snyder. Cassio's disability, self-described as his "poor and unhappy brains for drinking" (2.3.33-34), provides the opportunity for Iago to manipulate Othello into believing his right hand and most trusted adviser had made him a cuckold. Much criticism has been written about the humoral descriptions of Othello's hot blood and cholera leading him to jump to irrational conclusions and into a murderous, jealous rage, but for the purpose of this essay's disability analysis, these ancient medical terms are an adjunct explanation, recognized by the Early Modern English audience, but overkill. As is, many Renaissance British audience members will automatically other a black character simply due to race. Beyond that, Shakespeare gives the audience permission for racial discrimination (for any members who were not already predisposed), by beginning the play with a fear-based, racially charged interchange between Othello's father-in-law, Brabantio, and Iago. Waking Brabantio in the middle of the night, Iago warns him: "Swounds, sir, you're robbed. For shame, put on your gown. / Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul. / Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (1.1.86-89). The black and white imagery is transparent as a negative implication of Brabantio losing half his soul, or the love of his innocent daughter, Desdemona, to a black man. To inflame this father even more, Iago adds more fuel, stating specifically the couple is having

improper intimate relations: “I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the / Moor are now making the beast with two backs” (1.1.117-118). By this point, Brabantio is incensed. In Medieval Italy, Othello’s race is socially disabling. The discrimination he receives merely based on his appearance (otherness) places him socially outside the norm of Venetians. It functions as the second pillar, another prosthesis of disempowerment, if socially disabling, from which Iago will manipulate others for his evil intent.

Othello’s skin color is a physical difference. It is visually obvious, and Othello, like Aaron of *Titus Andronicus*, is othered for no other reason than his race. However, it is his lieutenant, Michael Cassio, who possesses a non-visual disability—an addiction. This disability (more commonly referred to until recently as drunkenness) is a mental illness, and it serves as the fulcrum for Iago’s manipulations. As opposed to physical deformities and disabilities, Cassio’s differences are inward and less obvious. I agree with David Houston Wood, who describes the disability prosthesis, a la Mitchell and Snyder, at work in the play: “Shakespeare’s representation of Michael Cassio’s alcoholic ‘infirmity’ serves as both a characterological and narrative prosthetic model for Othello’s propensity to jealous rage that Iago manipulates and confounds” (“Fluster’d With Flowing Cups”). He notes later in the same essay: “Cassio’s propensity to drunkenness plays a central role in the tragedy of Othello. But to be clear, it is not drunkenness per se that is at issue.... Cassio’s drunkenness, after all, registers uniquely in that it is repeatedly identified as an alcoholic ‘infirmity’.” By referring to alcoholism as an infirmity, Shakespeare is specifically acknowledging its nature as a social difference—one Shakespeare and other playwrights of the era often exploit.

Iago describes his evil plans this way: “If I can fasten but one cup [of alcohol] upon him / With that which he hath drunk to-night already, / He’ll be as full of quarrel and offense / As my

young mistress' dog" (2.3.48-51). Living in a tavern culture, most members of the audience are familiar with the negative behavior of drunkenness, so this proposed manipulation of Cassio's disability needs little more explanation. The audience would recognize the pleadings of someone trying to avoid his demons in drink, as Cassio pleads to Iago, "I have drunk but one cup to-night, and that was / Craftily qualified too, and, behold, what innovation / It makes here: I am unfortunate in the infirmity, / And dare not task my weakness with any more" (2.3.39-42). Iago plays on Cassio's weakness so skillfully that Shakespeare's audience might conceivably root for Iago's villain and against Cassio, who seems weak in comparison. Shakespeare suggests that Cassio is the author of his own manipulation, and this othering makes it easier for the audience to believe he almost deserves to be used by Iago. Even though Cassio technically advances at the end of the play, the destruction left as a result of his addiction (and its exploitation) provide a rather hollow victory.

#### GLUTTONY AS DISABILITY

If drama and tragedy give the audience a bitter look at the disabled, comedies allow for a distinctive, yet still damaging, way of othering of human difference. It is into this category that we find the venerable Falstaff. Ruth Nevo notes in "The Case of Falstaff and the Merry Wives" that "The greatest of the Shakespearean comic characters did not begin his career in a comedy at all, but in what might be classed as a political satire" (142). Nevo refers to the political history plays *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV*. However, most plays where the disabled are defiled or ridiculed are at least, in part, comedies. They are presentations of the socially normal laughing at those designated outside the norm. The pursuit of pleasure stands at the heart of Shakespeare's comedies. Even though the *Henry IV* plays are histories, there can be no doubt that every scene containing Falstaff is comedic. His character's gluttony and drunkenness serve as such central

themes to the plays that a strong case can be made that *Part I* is in fact more of a satirical comedy than a history. In *Part II*, where King Henry IV dies and Prince Hal takes up the mantle and ascends to the throne as Henry V, is sufficiently consumed with major historical events that its status as a history is fairly well established. Still, its pages are filled with ridiculous scenes of Falstaff's foibles and the audience reliably laughs at all the right insults.

An analysis of the presentation of Falstaff's disabilities must, at some point, ask several questions: Why do audiences find it so easy to laugh at Falstaff? Why are we comfortable with plays that, for the most part, present an endless parade of fat shaming and insults about alcoholism? We commonly laugh at the absurd when we recognize a kernel of truth at the center. Falstaff is undoubtedly an absurd character, possessing countless socially offensive traits. Nevo sums him up this way:

Falstaff is above all myriad-minded. Lord of misrule, impersonator, rogue, mimic, jester and wit... He is...lazy, greedy, lecherous, good-for-nothing, feverish and a liar, as cunning as he is unscrupulous, and as unable or unwilling to control his appetite as his expenditure on sack and his girth suggest. Having more flesh than another he has therefore more frailty but, impostor though he be, this he does not disguise. And it is in the unabashedly frankness of his infantile egoism which disarms. Even in the very act of playing the arch hypocrite, he miraculously contrives never to pretend not to be what he is. (147-48)

If Nevo's analysis aids us in coming to know what he is, we must still ask why is that depiction so funny? I pose this question as a way to try to understand why Shakespeare chooses to other Falstaff so harshly and why the practice is so effective with the audience. The answer to this

question will illuminate much of the historical and modern-day hatred and intolerance that Western cultures have toward obesity and alcoholism.

The audience loves Falstaff for several reasons. First, he is brashly quick-witted. He knows how to trade insults with everyone, including royalty, in the form of his friend, Prince Hal, by testing the limits of good taste and regal decorum, insulting Hal while at the same time praising him, in order to stay in the Prince's good graces (and pocketbook). The other main reason we love Falstaff is because he is immune to shame. Nevo continues:

There are rich sources of enjoyment in the vivacity of his abusive and preposterous hyperbole ... whereby he eludes the Prince's ambushes.... He gets out of all scrapes. Hal will never corner him. He is witty intelligence itself in all its agility, speed, versatility, and resourcefulness. He cannot be victimized, and this is what is irresistible.... Falstaff's bedrock vote for survival is irrefutable. (149)

The *Henry IV* plays are full of insults and fat shaming toward Falstaff, especially *Part 1*. These relentless personal attacks could backfire on the author, except that Falstaff refuses to succumb to the insults. In "Falstaff and the Problems of Comedy," David Ellis argues that, "The appeal of Falstaff is that he has such a remarkable variety of methods for making others forget, overlook, or accept his...disadvantages" (97). One could argue Falstaff is too proud to acknowledge the personal attacks, but in fact, he will not accept the shame because doing so would generate immediate sympathy from the audience. Such sympathy would limit the comedic appeal of the plays, and Shakespeare cannot afford for an audience to pity the old knight, or it would paint Prince Hal, and ultimately King Henry V, as petty and cruel. It would likely mark him as a terrible future king. Besides ruining the play, such an attack on a popular historical English monarch could have ended Shakespeare's career (or even his life). In addition, it is this Teflon

nature of Falstaff's personality that allows the audience to suspend the normal empathy they might feel at the terrible way he is treated. Ellis continues: "It is because [Falstaff] is so often able to make those who might be inclined to laugh at him laugh with him that he can persuade them to accept his physical shortcomings" (98). By desensitizing the audience to the incessant insults leveled at Falstaff by his friend and superior, Shakespeare allows the illusion of this friendship to continue, while having us laugh at Falstaff's girth, gluttony, and alcoholism as if he was a misbehaving child who needs correction. This prejudice against gluttony and drunkenness, codified in religious teaching, functions as a general othering of obesity and addiction which will continue forward to our day. Ellis goes on to defend contemporary, non-moralist views on Falstaff which presumably permit us to see beyond the prejudice and immorality of the play and to enjoy the jokes leveled at Falstaff without feeling any guilt: "The critics of the past were certainly moralists and we do not, it would seem from this, have the trouble they did in reconciling our principles with our urge to laugh" (99). I disagree with Ellis here, however, and argue that it is not our ability to rise above the immorality of the play which helps us to laugh at Falstaff—it is because we embrace the othering of his disabilities. By doing so, we segregate ourselves into the normal group, relegate Falstaff to the abnormal group, and figuratively point our fingers at him in derision. We have not succeeded in bypassing the morality of the play's problematic narrative. Instead, it is Shakespeare who has succeeded in convincing us, his audience, that those with disabilities should be scorned and ridiculed.

The sheer volume of personal physical and mental attacks on Falstaff, just in *1 Henry IV*, is surprising. In the five scenes occupied by Falstaff and Prince Hal in the first play, 68 lines are devoted to insulting and othering Falstaff based on his obesity and alcoholism, most coming directly from Hal and his friend, Ned Poins. The old knight is described in the play variously as

“a tun of man,” a “bolting-hutch of beastliness,” and a “stuffed cloak-bag of guts,” among other eloquent examples of fat-shaming. (2.4.436, 438, 440) As likable a character as Falstaff is, he is not completely immune to the relentless attacks of Prince Hal and Poins. Based on audience reactions, neither are we.

The end for Falstaff is still surprising in its mortal seriousness. At the end of *2 Henry IV*, King Henry IV is dead, and the Prince must take on serious regal responsibilities. Most in the audience know what that means. It is not as if they think that Falstaff will be joining Hal at court, or that the new King will continue to visit taverns with Falstaff. They know that Falstaff must go. However, the audience is still largely unprepared for the drastic reception the old knight receives from the newly crowned king:

I Know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.  
How ill white hairs becomes a fool and a jester!  
I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,  
So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane;  
But being awake, I do despise my dream.  
Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace.  
Leave gormandizing; know the grave doth gape  
For thee thrice wider than for other men.  
Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.  
Presume not that I am the thing I was,  
For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,  
That I have turned away my former self;  
So will I those that kept me company. (5.5.45-57)

While still a prince, Hal tolerates Falstaff's disabilities for as long as they entertain him. However, once crowned, the young king describes his dream of his previous life and the horror of waking. In despising his dream, he is saying he despises Falstaff. But he is also saying more. He loathes not only Falstaff's disabilities, but also what he became while he tolerated those disabilities, as if he was somehow infected by that person. The young king chastises Falstaff for his obesity, warning him about his gluttonous behavior. When Falstaff responds with a laugh (implied by the text), the king reproves him sharply, stating for all the world to hear his intolerance for this specific disability. When the newly-crowned King Henry V tells Falstaff, "Presume not that I am the thing I was," he is informing Falstaff that he will no longer endure someone with such disabilities in his presence. They are not regal, not suitable in the presence of a king, at least in Henry V's mind. It also has a more subversive meaning: it is also an accusation by Hal that he, while still a Prince, had allowed Falstaff to lead him into temptation, to turn him from his royal lineage, to disable *him*. Seeing Falstaff reminds the new king of this ostensible, stigmatized loss, and it is intolerable. Having seen this play staged several times, I have witnessed the audience reaction firsthand. At this point in the play, they are often conflicted, some rooting for the new king and others for the rejected old knight. Having just lost his father, Hal is a sympathetic character, and thus the playgoers want to see him succeed. Having been taught so effectively by the playwright to other Falstaff's disabilities, the audience just might side with Hal as he rebukes and banishes his former friend. Like the new king, we leave the theater content in the knowledge that normalcy has been restored to the world.

Henry V banishes Falstaff, calling him, "The tutor and feeder of my riots" and naming him as his "misleader" (5.5.60, 62). He banishes Falstaff because he misled the royal prince into accepting as a friend someone with disabilities—specifically socially embarrassing ones. By



banishing Falstaff and all his other misleaders, or friends with similar disabilities, he is forcing them out of his sight so he is not burdened with the thought of them again. Hal uses Falstaff for his own amusement, and when he is done, he does not want to have the embarrassment of Falstaff's disabilities at court, the embarrassment of obesity, gluttony, alcoholism, and lameness. Hal has spent two full plays insulting and othering Falstaff for his disabilities. The audience understands that Hal will eventually have to grow up and stop frequenting taverns when he becomes king, putting away childish ways, as it were. However, his next statement to Falstaff in that dismissive scene seems unnecessarily cruel. Hal tells his former friend that until he completely changes (i.e. fixes his own disabilities—as if they were mendable), he will be barred from the King's presence: "...till then I banish thee, on pain of death / As I have done the rest of my misleaders, / Not to come near our person by 10 mile" (63-65). The new king has banished Falstaff because the great man's disabilities are now inconvenient, and an embarrassment, to him.

All playwrights in the early modern period were subject to censorship, and the crown did disapprove of some plays, sometimes spelling doom for the author. Shakespeare was no different in this regard, and in writing a history play about British monarchs, he naturally had to tread lightly. He knew (or at least he hoped) his plays would be given a royal audience (Queen Elizabeth, when he began, until her death in 1603), and the only way he could get away with a historical character like Crown Prince Hal hanging out with a rogue like Falstaff was to have Hal constantly belittle and insult his compatriot. The audience must constantly be reminded that Hal is better than Falstaff, that being able-bodied ( a cultural norm) is better than being disabled.

Beginning in *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff ingratiates himself with Prince Hal, and Hal abuses Falstaff from the privileged position of wealth, royalty, and able-bodiedness. He uses Falstaff for comedic enjoyment. Naturally, Falstaff gains from his friendship with Hal, but this relationship

teaches the audience that it is acceptable to ridicule and even to despise the physical shortcomings of alcoholics and the obese. Tapping into a mixture of audience patriotism and prejudice, Shakespeare writes Hal as a regal character, coaxing playgoers into seeing the play from a point of view sympathetic to Hal and the aristocracy. However, the young prince signals to the audience early in the play that his use of these vulgar acquaintances for his own amusement is only temporary: “I know you all, and will a while uphold / The unyoked humour of your idleness” (1.2.173-174). He then reveals how his tolerance of these socially disabled characters has limits:

When this loose behavior I throw off  
And pay the debt I never promised....  
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;  
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,  
My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,  
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes  
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.  
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill. (1.2.186-87, 188-94)

Seen in this light, Hal seems a cruel user of others, so Shakespeare keeps the jokes coming to distract the audience from the completely self-serving nature of Hal's actions.

This shift makes it easier to laugh at Falstaff and his shortcomings, even though most audience members likely had much more in common with the pitiful knight than they did with royalty. By making the audience think this way, the playwright grants them permission to condescend, to ridicule, and not to care about the suffering of the lower class—their own suffering. Moreover, the audience is given moral authorization for prejudice against those with

disabilities. One can imagine Renaissance playgoers as 16th Century versions of our modern *What's the Matter With Kansas* conundrum. Shakespeare and other playwrights of the era played into the hubris of commoners imagining the wealthy/aristocracy would allow them into their ranks, and that allowed him to sway the opinion of theatergoers against the disabled.

## CONCLUSION

My thesis has evaluated the changing views on disability and more specifically, the role Renaissance playwrights have played in negatively shaping those views. I have attempted to convey, via a brief history of disability and several historical cultural perspectives, from Antiquity through the Reformation, the myriad views that came together in Renaissance England and were harnessed and manipulated via the stage. Although various distinct philosophies fed into 16<sup>th</sup> Century audiences, the mass media aspect of the greatly expanded role of the theater in England created an opportunity to manipulate public opinion on a widespread basis. What was done for artistic, comedic, and financial gain had enduring effects, many of which still burden Western societies today.

Recognizing the problem is the first step. Social opinion regarding disability has been manipulated. This is done much the same way political opinion is manipulated, as expertly described by Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent*. Inasmuch as the public is awakening to the nature of these political machinations, further scholarship could attempt to illuminate the additional sources of cultural manipulation and ways our cultural consent is being manufactured in the field of disability.

From Aristotle to Shakespeare to modern cultural and political demagogues, societies continue to other those with physical or mental difference. Today, these efforts come with the promise of the good intentions, but scholars have the opportunity to illustrate the way these actions might further marginalize those determined to be outside of cultural norms, and in the process, attempt to tear down the cultural walls that corral the ostensibly abnormal in managed boxes.

## Notes

1. There are many examples of laws established to enforce cultural ideas of normalcy. Here I merely discuss the laws created to restrict the violent behaviors that we, as members of a society and parties to a social contract, can rightfully expect our governments to enforce.

2. Michel Foucault draws a distinction between monstrosity and disability; he discusses monstrosity widely in *Abnormal*, but his arbitrary separation of it from disability is what leads to his conclusion that the concept of societal norms does not predate the nineteenth century.

3. See *A History of Disability* by Henri-Jacques Stiker and *Encyclopedia Judaica* for who was categorized as unclean and what penalties and restrictions applied to them.

4. For example: see the character Deflores from Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*; also, *Richard III*. Each had obvious physical deformities and each describe their non-normal bodies to the audience, including the impact their deformed parts have had on their social status.

5. See Falstaff from *Henry IV Parts 1* and 2; also, Sir Toby Belch from *Twelfth Night*, and Prince Hamlet. All are presented during at least part their respective plays, as being consumed by a mental weakness that is the source of their suffering or outward flaws.

6. Aaron from *Titus Andronicus* and the character Othello are both described as Moors. During the Early Modern period of English literature, most writers wrote openly with disdain about races or cultures they considered subordinate to their own.

7. It is, in some ways, understandable that the medical community's default view is that people with deformed/disabled bodies want to be corrected to full functionality. But this is an

ableist position, an assumption often presumed without seeking the input of those with non-normative bodies. A one-size-fits-all assessment of every single non-normative body as a repair project negates the value and agency of the person inhabiting that body.

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