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CHAPTER 9

Limping and Lameness on the Early Modern Stage

Susan Anderson

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

> Ay, but the feet were lame, and could not bear
> themselves without the verse, and therefore stood
> lamely in the verse. (3.2.165-7)[1]

Clearly lameness is a negative value here, and "lame" poetry an object for gentle patronising scorn. But "lame" dramatic verse is potentially doubly "lame" because poetic feet do become real feet that stand and walk on the stage. When discussing drama, scholars regularly use idioms like "getting the play on its feet" to refer to acting out passages or scenes. Such phrasing attests to the sense that combining words with action reveals something not present solely on the page. To point this out is hardly revelatory in the context of modern pedagogy.[2] However, it is still worth exploring the implications of this way of thinking about drama and embodiment. Reading dramatic verse necessitates that we also think about the ways in which it might be enacted by real bodies, in space, across time. For drama to come into being *as drama*, both texts and bodies are necessary: bodies that can be read as texts, and texts that become embodied.[3] What would it mean for those bodies and/or those texts to be 'lame'?

To answer this question, I will examine how early modern drama both embodies and describes lameness using Tobin Siebers' notion of "complex embodiment." Siebers asserts a "mutually transformative," or indeed mutually constitutive, relationship between "the body and its representations".[4] In this respect, disability theory offers an important realignment of cultural theory. As Siebers points out, the emphasis on social constructionism since the 1990s

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[1] All references to Shakespeare are taken from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works, 2nd Edition*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
[2] See for example James Stredder's handbook on active learning, *The North Face of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
[3] Genevieve Love foregrounds the persistence of representativeness in dramatic performance emphasising theatre as inherently metaphorical in *Early Modern Theatre and the Figure of Disability* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018.
[4] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 25.

has privileged "performativity over corporeality," when in fact there is a reciprocal relationship between the two.[5] Siebers encourages us to see the body itself as an active participant in the process of constructing identity, describing it as "a biological agent teeming with vital and often unruly forces" that is "as capable of influencing and transforming social languages as they are capable of influencing and transforming us".[6] It follows, therefore, that in dramatic performance the materiality of the body contributes to, enhances, resists, and/or modifies the meanings ascribed to it. This is not to posit the body as an unchanging "natural" or unmediated reality. Rather, it means remembering the reciprocity and interconnectedness of bodies and ideas, materiality and ideals, and feet and verse, and seeking more complex ways of understanding these apparently binary relations.

The notion of "variability," as theorised by Chris Mounsey, presents a more useful approach than a disability/ability binary.[7] Variability foregrounds the inevitable variation in human perception and experience of the world through the uniqueness of individual embodiment. Mounsey articulates this idea in the context of calling for a different kind of disability history, focusing upon historical individuals' experiences on their own terms (rather than in relation to a posited able-bodiedness). This essay explores the ways in which such an argument for "history from below" can be applied to literary texts, especially texts that are literally embodied in performance.

As Mitchell and Snyder assert, historical disability studies provides "an important barometer by which to assess shifting values and norms imposed upon the body".[8] In applying this notion to early modern drama, this essay joins a recent wave of scholarship that is widening the focus of literary disability studies both in terms of historical period and genre, and going beyond *Richard III* as the focus for analysis.[9] Siebers himself in a recent essay outlined the ways in which Ophelia and Falstaff can be considered examples of "disability" as "neither a condition of a person nor a construct of an oppressive environment, but a complex embodiment involving the mutual transformation between the body and its

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[5] Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 57.
[6] Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 68.
[7] Chris Mounsey, "Introduction: Variability: Beyond Sameness and Difference," in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Chris Mounsey (Plymouth: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 1-27.
[8] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 51.
[9] See, for example, Hobgood and Wood's special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly* focusing on Shakespeare in 2009; Hobgood and Wood, eds., *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013); Sujata Iyengar, ed., *Disability, Health, and Happiness in the Shakespearean Body* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

environment".[10] This essay will show that combining Siebers' "complex embodiment" with the idea of variability is a productive way to approach drama as a genre.

Lennard Davis used the novel as the exemplary form to show the ways that literature is specifically implicated in constructing disability. Unlike epic and poetry, which, according to Davis, represent idealizations, characters in novels are "embodied in specific bodies", and thus construct ways in which real bodies should behave and react.[11] It seems curious to ground this argument in prose, rather than drama, where actual bodies enact the practices and behaviours being constructed as normative. Although all literary genres engage with bodily identity and its limits in some way, drama foregrounds complex embodiment as the very medium through which it makes its claims. As Mounsey puts it, "no one is totally 'able' … and no one totally 'disabled"',[12] and drama offers the opportunity to examine how variability affects our readings of characters and their construction in both body and word.

To examine the interaction between ideas about lameness and its manifestations in particular bodies in early modern drama, I begin with some potential definitions, exploring how the term and its cognates are used across several dramatic and poetic texts, and its close association with age and slowness. I then discuss two very dissimilar plays: *A Larum for London* and *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*. Both include lame characters, and refer to lameness at the very outset, demonstrating contrasting examples of the range of meanings made possible by the interaction between ideas about lameness and the performance of it. I then reflect on the interaction between the metrical qualities of verse and the bodily qualities of the characters who speak it in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. I conclude by discussing lameness in recent performances and criticism of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and what this suggests about the relationship between textual evidence and physical embodiment. These examples all demonstrate the inseparable interconnectedness of body, word, and meaning in early modern drama, and its fundamental variability.

Defining Lameness

As Sagal notes, despite widespread use, the term "lame" is especially ambiguous "both in terms of location," that is, "what precise injury renders the subject 'lame'?" and in

[10] Siebers, Tobin, "Shakespeare Differently Disabled," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 435-454 (448).
[11] Lennard J. Davis, *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism and Other Difficult Positions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 45.
[12] Mounsey, "Variability", 16.

terms of its "duration or state of permanence".[13] Despite this vagueness, it is unmistakably negative in the way that it is used. This much is clear from repeated associations with ugliness (e.g. Constance's speech in *King John* where she lists "lame" alongside "Ugly… / Full of unpleasing blots and sightless stains," and explicitly opposes it with "fair" (2.2.44-51). References to lameness and limping in Shakespeare's sonnets are invariably part of their self-deprecation, where the poet positions himself as at a disadvantage to a lover who outranks him in class, wealth, beauty and youthful vigour (Sonnets 37, 66, and 89 in particular). The clearest association Shakespeare makes with lameness is old age. The strength of the conceptual link between "old" and "lame" makes the two terms almost a hendiadys. The principle is articulated in the quasi-proverbial "Youth is nimble, age is lame" of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (12.6), which aligns nimbleness and lameness with a list of other binary oppositions. The poem maps the distinction between youth and age onto, on the one hand, speed and dexterity, and on the other, slowness and immobility, and this pattern of associations is illustrated amply throughout the canon.

In *As You Like It*, Adam's description of saving for retirement invokes the expectation that age is inevitably accompanied by lameness as a state of debility.

> I have five hundred crowns,
> The thrifty hire I sav'd under your father,
> Which I did store to be my foster-nurse,
> When service should in my old limbs lie lame (2.3.39-42)

Adam views disability as an inevitable stage of human development. As Siebers puts it, "being human guarantees that all other identities will eventually come into contact with some form of disability identity".[14] Adam's concerns show, however, that disability is more complex than physical change. The line "When service should in my old limbs lie lame" transfers lameness from its literal manifestation in the body to the notion of service. Adam anticipates that his physical condition will interfere with his ability to perform the service he is obliged to render his master. There is no concomitant expectation of reciprocal care here. Adam's thrift eschews communal responsibility in favour of one-sided self-sufficiency; one-sided because it only applies to those who already work for their living. Orlando, by contrast,

[13] Anna K. Sagal, "Disability, Trauma, and Language in Tristram Shandy," in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Chris Mounsey (Plymouth: Bucknell University Press 2014), 108-9.
[14] Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 5.

expects that he should, on adulthood, ascend to the life of a gentleman. Thus, lameness is inflected through social class as well as the physical condition of an aged body.

The play counters Adam's fears with a paternalistic vision of aristocrats looking after their vulnerable followers. Orlando famously carries Adam when he can no longer walk, and Duke Senior responds magnanimously to Orlando's (initially threatening) appeal for sustenance. This appeal is itself at least partly on Adam's behalf, whom Orlando describes as "an old poor man / Who after me hath many a weary step / Limped in pure love" (2.7.128-30). Adam's limp here derives primarily from the fact that, as established in 2.6, he is famished. His efforts to keep up with his younger, stronger master are read by Orlando as "pure love." Limping is the physical manifestation of Adam's exhaustion, exacerbated by age, but it is also a legible sign of his devotion to Orlando.

Adam's older, lamer self is operating at a reduced speed. Timon's cursing of the Athenians demonstrates the axiomatic connection between slowness and lameness:

> Thou cold sciatica,
> Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt
> As lamely as their manners. (*Timon of Athens*, 4.1.23-5)

Timon wishes for physical affliction to match the senators' moral deficiency – a familiar trope of physical impairment as a metaphor for wickedness. But Timon does not just insist that halting limbs match halting manners. His wish is that the enforced slowness of the sciatic body transfers onto the senators Timon's frustration and pain.

To halt, as a way of describing the uncertain, difficult and slow steps of aged bodies, is another frequent association with lameness, as suggested by the proverbial "You halt before you are lame".[15] That is, a halting quality of movement is a signifier of lameness that should follow becoming lame. Halting movement is somewhere between moving and not moving, progress and stopping. This lexical ambiguity means that "halt" becomes a contronym: it means both to stop completely, and to continue (albeit slowly and tentatively).[16]

Richard III invokes this association between physical difference and slowness when he blames "some tardy cripple" for the death of his brother Clarence, asserting that they must

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[15] Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), H57.
[16] See "halt, v.1", *OED Online*, December 2015, Oxford University Press.

have been "too lag" with the countermand to stop his execution (2.1.90-91). Characteristically, Richard's verbal trickery here both signals and conceals that not only is he the one responsible for Clarence's death but he is also deftly out-manoeuvring everyone on stage at this point. Juliet also links slowness and lameness when, tired of awaiting the Nurse's return, she exclaims

> O, she is lame! love's heralds should be thoughts,
> Which ten times faster glides than the sun's beams (*Romeo and Juliet*. 2.4.4-5)

She attributes this frustrating slowness to the Nurse's age:

> But old folks, many feign as they were dead;
> Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead. (2.4.16-17)

The reversed foot on "heavy" interrupts the meter, slowing down the line's delivery. It also introduces a corresponding "lameness" of the poetic foot by disrupting the iambic rhythm, textually embodying what Juliet perceives to be the Nurse's dragging feet.

Notwithstanding recent attempts to rehabilitate the concept by the "slow food movement," or even "slow scholarship",[17] the term "slow," when applied to the intellect or body, is overwhelmingly negative. Lameness's associations with problematic slowness become figuratively transferred to language in moments like that in *The Winter's Tale*, where the 3rd Gentleman avoids describing Leontes' reunion with Perdita, claiming "I never heard of such another encounter, which lames report to follow it and undoes description to do it" (5.2.55-7). The parallelism here suggests that lameness negates following in the same way that 'undoes' negates doing. The locution is rather tangled, contributing to the sense that such unlikely events are beyond language.

"Lame report" cannot keep up and elsewhere we see speed of language itself presented as a condition for adequacy. Nowhere is this more apparent than the verbal sparring of Shakespearean comedy. Characters match wits, vying to outdo each other in punning and extended sequences of absurdity or bawdy conceits. *As You Like It* repeatedly lines up verbal wit in opposition to foolishness in linguistic flurries in which a quick response is essential:

> CELIA
> When Nature hath made a fair creature, may
> she not by Fortune fall into the fire? Though Nature

[17] Alison Mountz et al, "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 14.4 (2015): 1235-1259.

hath given us wit to flout at Fortune, hath not Fortune
sent in this fool to cut off the argument?
ROSALIND
Indeed, there is Fortune too hard for Nature,
when Fortune makes Nature's natural the cutter-off of
Nature's wit.
CELIA
Peradventure this is not Fortune's work, neither,
but Nature's, who perceiveth our natural wits too dull
to reason of such goddesses, and hath sent this natural
for our whetstone; for always the dullness of the fool is
the whetstone of the wits. (2.1.42-53)

The insistently chiastic writing that pits fool against wit necessitates the dullness of the fool. Wit is competitive, measured by comparison to discover who is the 'quickest'. Rosalind and Celia need a slow fool to present themselves as quick and witty.

Rosalind suggests that Orlando's poetic feet were stranded--they "could not bear themselves without the verse, and therefore stood lamely in the verse"--but this is not strictly true. The poems are publicly displayed and convey Orlando's state of mind (more than he intends, as they reveal his naivety as well as his sincerity). They even communicate his love for Rosalind to Rosalind herself. They move information – bearing verse – between the person who writes them to those who read them.

Like youth and age, nimble speed and lame slowness are not, in fact, exclusive categories, but either end of a contiguous spectrum. Slow and steady may not win the race, but it does reach the destination eventually. There is a large range of adequacy between immobility and top speed, and lameness does not reside at only one end.[18] But Rosalind uses the notion of lameness to turn a quality of variability into an exclusionary absolute in the service of quick wit.

Rhetorical and performative lameness in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* and *A Larum for London*.

The rhetorical value of lameness for Rosalind is that it serves as a foil to the superlative speed of the speaker's wit. Lameness is also invoked as a rhetorical gambit in the prologues to *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* and *A Larum for London*. It is again relational, as both plays use lameness to define their relationship to their audience before the action

[18] C.F. Goodey argues that the association between speed and mental acuity emerged in this period precisely because it enables measurement, making variable ability and speed discrete (*A History of Intelligence and Intellectual Disability: The Shaping of Psychology in Early Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011)), 45-6.

starts. The two plays are, however, completely antithetical in genre, tone, and approach. Whilst *Fair Maid* is a city comedy with a screwball romance plot, *A Larum*, as the title suggests, is a warning in the shape of a sternly moral horror show, displaying bloody acts of war to scare its audience into a more godly lifestyle. Where *Fair Maid* delights in the humorous machinations of middle-class life, *A Larum*'s characters pour scorn on city burghers, merchants, and women while torturing, abusing, and often killing them on stage.

The justification for *A Larum*'s violence and cynicism is declared at the very beginning in the prologue spoken by Time, who expects that his audience will be predisposed to disregard his warnings:

> you will scorne my wants,
> Laugh at my lamenes, looke basely, fume and frowne
> But doe so, doe so, your proude eyes shall see
> The punishment of Citty cruelty:
> And if your hearts be not of Adamant,
> Reforme the mischiefe of degenerate mindes,
> And make you weepe in pure relenting kinde. (A1v)

Time's explicit self-identification as lame provides a clear connection with the character of Stumpe, a lame soldier whose nickname refers to his prosthetic leg. The roles of Stumpe and Time may have been doubled,[19] especially considering Time's use of the future tense in "you will … Laugh at my lameness." Stumpe often delivers judgemental statements blaming Antwerp's residents for their suffering, and these are entirely consistent with Time's message. Stumpe complains bitterly about the fact that the citizens refused to pay him properly. When a Burgher objects that he should fight for duty to his country, not payment, Stumpe's response exacts the implied value the Burgher has placed on human life:

> Bindes me my country with no greater bondes,
> Than for a groate to fight? then for a groate,
> To be infeebled, or to loose a limme? (C3r)

The implication throughout is that, had they invested in experienced soldiers like Stumpe, the citizens might have been defended against the Spanish onslaught. The soldier's damaged limb both symbolises and literalises the mismatch between the soldier's wages and the price he pays, writing his sacrifice onto his body. The play's efforts to provoke repentance center Stumpe's body as an object of pity and emblem of the city's carelessness.

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[19] Genevieve Love also considers the implications of this potential doubling (*Early Modern Theatre and the Figure of Disability*), 88-89).

The spectacularization of Stumpe's body is evident from the title page, which advertises "the ventrous actes and valorous deeds of the lame Soldier" (A1r). Stumpe certainly proves superlative as a soldier and a survivor, living long enough to see those who scorned him "have their throates cut" whilst "still my olde rotten stump and I, / Trot up and downe as long as we can wag" (C4v). "Trot" seems a surprising verb to apply here. Describing the gait of a horse between walking and running speeds, it signifies busy, purposeful and swift movement.[20] This, and "wag", are typical of Stumpe's self-deprecating speech, animalising himself, as well as denoting inappropriately cheerful styles of movement amidst a massacre.[21] Stumpe's movement (or at least his description of it) is ironic, therefore. He is a malcontent who refuses to conform to polite expectations in speech and styles of movement.

References to different kinds of gait abound in the play. At the outset, the Spanish general Danila imagines the forthcoming battle as dancing "a venturous measure" in the streets of Antwerp (A3r). Danila advises a fellow conspirator to conceal his intentions by using a particular kind of movement: "Walke thou into the towne as if thou hadst / But only come abroad to take the ayre" (A4r).When the English governor and companion attempt to make diplomatic representations to the Spanish on behalf of English nationals stranded in the city, they are forced to come in on their knees, and "craule unto his presence to beg life" (D2v). Movement styles explicitly denote power relations, therefore. But Stumpe resists expectations. Conspicuously, his lameness does not prevent him from carrying out extreme violence. His formidable combat skills lead one Spanish soldier to describe him as "a lame fellow that doth want a legge, / Who layes about him like a devill of hell" (E1r). His lameness remains his most notable characteristic, but does not restrict his deadly proficiency

Scraping together a band of desperate holdouts, Stumpe finds two soldiers trying to think of an escape plan. One suggests disguising themselves as "maymed men" (F1v), presumably thinking that such men would be allowed to leave the city because they do not pose a threat. Given the merciless slaughter of a blind man and his family in a previous scene, this seems unlikely. Furthermore, Stumpe, the bona fide maimed man of the play, resists the invaders more effectively than anyone, even when it is suicidally hopeless. He persuades the potential deserters not to run away, and responds to their request to "lead us" with a sardonic

[20] "trot, v.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.
[21] Trot might also have an aural resonance, linking the clatter of a prosthetic leg to the sound of a shod hoof. Love explores the sonic elements of the play in detail (*Early Modern Theatre and the Figure of Disability*, 97-101).

"Yes, Ile halt before you, follow mee as straight as you can" (F2r). Stumpe's quality of movement is clearly different, but he is by no means incapable and is not the only person who stumbles.

Even his enemies respect him, vowing to give him a decent burial at the end. This post-mortem admiration is ironic, however, as it only arrives when he no longer needs it. His heroic 'stand' could not save the city. As he complains earlier,

> let a Soldier, that hath spent his bloud,
> Is lame'd, diseas'd, or any way distrest,
> Appeale for succour, then you looke a sconce
> As if you knew him not. (C2v)

His charge that "you" looked askance at those who could have saved the city is directed towards the singular "you" of the citizen he is addressing, but metonymically encompasses the plural "you" of a citizenry who ignored their vulnerable.

The Fair Maid of the Exchange, by contrast, celebrates all that *A Larum* rails against, revelling in the making and enjoying of wealth and an incipient consumer lifestyle. It, too, begins with a prologue that mobilizes lameness as a symbolic value:

> The humble Socke that true Comedians were
> Our Muse hath don'd, and to your fav'ring eyes,
> In lowest Plaine-song doth her selfe appeare,
> Borrowing no colours from a quaint disguise:
> If your faire favours cause her spirite to rise,
> Shee to the highest pitch her wings shall reare,
> And prowd quothurnicke action shall devise
> To winne your sweete applause she deems so deare.
>
> Meane while shore up our tender pamping twig
> That yet on humble ground doth lowely lie:
> Your favours sunneshine guilding once this sprig
> It may yield *Nectar* for the gods on hie:
> Though our Invention lame, imperfect be,
> Yet give the Cripple almes for charitie. (A2v)

The play opens by directing attention to the actors' feet. The octave invokes the traditional contrast between the footwear worn by actors in Greek comedy and tragedy. The sock, or low shoe, denotes comedy, and this is contrasted with the cothurnus ("quothurn[us]") of tragedy, a kind of boot (or 'buskin'). The lameness claimed in the couplet invokes both poetic and actual feet that walk upon, or are perhaps dragged across, the stage. These lines suggest a paradigmatic link between disability and charity that invokes an automatic association

between lameness and beggary, between physical impairment and economic dependence. Although the play is "lame" in the pejorative sense established earlier, the audience are asked nevertheless to reward the players with alms, because lameness, in the sense of impairment, necessitates charity. Thus, in a neatly self-serving paradox, the worse the play is, the more the audience is obliged to reward it.

As with *A Larum*, it is possible that the actor who played the lame character also spoke the prologue, literalising this rhetorical lameness.[22] However, the character who embodies this request also undermines it. Usually called "Cripple," or "the Cripple,"[23] he is also referred to as "the Drawer" because he draws embroidery designs onto fabric ready for a sempstress to sew and a tailor to assemble the garment.[24] His role in the complex processes of clothing manufacture demonstrates not just economic productivity but also continuing embeddedness in interdependent professional, economic, and social networks. A useful comparison here is *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Ralph's injury provides plenty of opportunity for puns and stage business (see below), but does not prevent him from resuming his occupation. As Hodge declares on Ralph's return from war "Hast thou not hands, man? Thou shalt never see a shoemaker want bread, though he have but three fingers on a hand" (3.4.44-5). In both texts (and *A Larum* too) lameness is explicitly an impairment of the legs, and thus one which allows both Ralph and Cripple to retain their professional identities, and for Stumpe to continue to fight.

Nevertheless, having been highlighted in the prologue as embodying the self-deprecatingly identified lameness of the Invention (i.e. the play itself), Cripple is still "different." His crutches take on part of this symbolic and literal weight. They feature prominently in the action, and operate as a metonym for both Cripple and disability more broadly.[25] In the first scene, Cripple uses his crutches to foil a robbery and rape, saying to himself "of thy foure legs / Make use of one, to doe a virgin good" (B2r), weaponizing the

[22] The 1607 quarto includes a chart showing how "Eleaven may easily acte this Comedie" (A2r), listing Cripple as a role not doubled with any others. The prologue is not included in the list, however.
[23] Katherine Schaap Williams notes the variation in the use of the definite article in referring to this character, that is, between the archetypal ("the Cripple") and the individual ("Cripple"). I follow Williams in using the latter. He is also given the metonymic nickname of "crutch" by both friends and foes. The text almost invariably gives him the speech prefix: "Crip". See Williams, "'More Legs Than Nature Gave Thee': Performing the Cripple in *The Fair Maid Of The Exchange*," *ELH* 82 (2015): 491–519.
[24] Susan North, "Jacobean embroidery," *The Fair Maid of the Exchange: Malone Society Staged Reading and Symposium*, 17 May 2014, Oxford University.
[25] Williams develops the synecdochic overlapping between body, object, and word ("More Legs," 502).

emblem of his disability. Following Schalk's caution about the term,[26] I do not consider this a "supercrip" narrative, as this "overcoming" of disability is almost immediately reversed. Phillis has barely had time to thank Cripple for saving her before the villains attack again. This time, they snatch away the crutches first. The rescue is thus incomplete until the able-bodied Frank enters, saving Cripple as well as the women.

This scene establishes an economy of obligation: Phillis "owes" gratitude to Cripple ("For this aid, Ile ever honour thee" (B2v)), and Cripple "owes" gratitude to Frank ("If I do live, your love Ile recompence" (B3r)). This circuit of indebtedness is overlaid by another, that of sexual desire, which travels in a different direction. Frank desires Phillis, and Phillis desires Cripple. But although every other male character involved in the main plot wants to marry Phillis, Cripple is not interested. He instead acts as a broker, coming up with a plan to help Frank win Phillis's hand.

Cripple, far from regretting being unmarried, embraces singledom enthusiastically, invoking a proverbial misogyny to celebrate his immunity to Phillis's charms: "A yong man's never mar'd, / Till he by marriage from all joy be bar'd" (E1r). But when discussing it with Frank, Cripple uses different language, recruiting a trope of disability as foul deformity:

> I will resigne the same
> To you my friend, knowing my unworthy selfe
> Too foule for such a beautie (H3r)

This metaphorical use of disability as unworthiness is, however, rendered ironic because the character who speaks it has already shown he has no interest in marriage.

Because Phillis loves Cripple, Frank 'crips up,' borrowing Cripple's "crooked habit" and crutch so that she will think Frank is the object of her affections. Williams reads Frank's substitution for Cripple as an instance of "metonymic replication,"[27] ultimately arguing that the play constructs disability as an inability to impersonate others. Cripple's body is irreversibly marked as disabled, making it imitable by others but fixed for Cripple himself. He can facilitate but not participate in economic circulation in a world based on "shifting shapes and impersonating bodies".[28] When all is revealed, Phillis chooses Frank over all her other suitors. This exclusion of Cripple from the heterosexual coupling of the ending could be

[26] Sami Schalk, "Reevaluating the Supercrip," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 10.1 (2016): 71-86.
[27] Williams, "More Legs," 503.
[28] Williams, "More Legs," 494.

considered a form of "narrative prosthesis".[29] As noted above, however, Cripple explicitly disavows the marriage market. Furthermore, he remains on stage, haunting the very marriage that he arranged. The denouement presenting both Cripple and Frank-as-Cripple alongside each other is a powerfully suggestive moment of double vision, which evokes the mutual interdependence of normative and non-normative identities.[30] Phillis's astonishment does not convince us that they must really look alike, but alerts us to the underlying similarities between them. Even as it insists on their difference, the play suggests that these two varying bodies are similar enough to be easily mistaken.

Performing Lameness: *The Shoemaker's Holiday*.

The Shoemaker's Holiday also features a case of mistaken identity. When looking for Lacy, his runaway nephew, Lincoln misidentifies Ralph, assuming that "my nephew, / To hide his guilt, counterfeits him lame" (18.114-5). Lame can be something that you do, then, as well as something you are. Both meanings seem possible in the intriguingly-phrased stage direction "*Enter* Ralph *being lame*" (10.51-2). Other verbal cues also mark Ralph out as moving differently. He acquires the epithet "lame Ralph" (used three times), and reports that his wife did not recognise him because "my lame leg and my travel beyond sea made me unknown" (18.11-12). Ralph's moment of return seems calculated to create maximum impact. It comes as Hodge is teasing Margery, the volatile mistress of the household, by offering her a pipe of tobacco, presumably in order to provoke the disgusted response that ensues. Margery's short but vehement anti-pipe rant ends by declaring "men look not like men that use them" (10.52). This immediately precedes Ralph's entrance, creating an implied link between her notion of masculine degeneracy and Ralph's changed appearance. Does Ralph look not like Ralph?

Although the stage direction's "being lame" might suggest that Ralph's lameness could be a quality of movement, the moment is sometimes presented as a dramatic reveal. Anthony Parr reported that, in the 1981 production at London's National Theatre, Ralph appeared at the top half of a pair of stable doors to a "tumultuous welcome" that was abruptly interrupted when he "threw open the lower half to reveal one leg missing".[31] The implication

[29] This only follows if we ignore the potential for queer readings of desire in the play, however. See David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
[30] Williams notes that Frank's speech prefixes temporarily change to "Crip" during the scene where he is in disguise (Williams, "More Legs," 506).
[31] Anthony Parr, cited in Jonathan Gil Harris, "Introduction," in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, by Thomas Dekker, ed. by Jonathan Gil Harris, vii-xxix (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), xxviii.

being that the joy of Ralph's return is spoiled by shock at his life-changing injury—spoiled, that is, for those around him.

Certainly, Hodge seems to take a moment to clock that Ralph is lame, recognising him first: "What, fellow Ralph! Mistress, look here - Jane's husband!" before exclaiming "Why, how now - lame? Hans, make much of him: he's a brother of our trade, a good workman, and a tall soldier" (10.53-5). Ralph is, to Hodge, first and foremost a fellow shoemaker, a married man and, lastly, a war veteran. Although Hodge's "tall" might be construed as tactless, Margery's efforts at sympathy are more obviously so. Both Ralph and Margery harp on the word "well", starting with her observation "I am glad to see thee well" which elicits from Ralph the rueful "I would to God you saw me, dame, as well / As when I went from London into France" (10.59-60). Margery blunders on, struggling to express sympathy without casting aspersions:

> Trust me, I am sorry Ralph, to see thee impotent. Lord, how the wars have made him sunburnt! The left leg is not well; 'twas a fair gift of God the infirmity took not hold a little higher, considering thou camest from France - but let that pass (10.61-4)

"Impotent" is an etymological equivalent of disabled, but is also potentially bawdy, and Margery's reference to France implies that Ralph might have acquired a sexually-transmitted disease. The term "infirmity" speaks both to this suggestiveness and the euphemistic avoidance of naming what is actually "wrong" with Ralph. He is both well and not well, his body presenting an indeterminate variation on the Ralph who had gone to war.

Margery's clumsy speech is prose, bookended on either side by Ralph's verse, firstly lines 59-60 quoted above, and subsequently the following (assuming elision between the first two words of line 65):

> I am glad to see you well, and I rejoice
> To hear that God hath blessed my master so
> Since my departure. (10.65-7)

Margery's speech is irregular in rhythm, compared to the smooth iambs of Ralph's more elegant verse. Ralph's comment seems a magnanimous response to her probing and innuendo. The control of verse parallels the control involved in taking on the emotional labour of managing other people's reactions to his acquired impairment—dealing with their discomfort on top of, or instead of, his own.

Ralph's use of verse sets him apart from the other shoemakers. Most of the time, he shares their tendency to speak in prose, but here, and when it comes to his involvement in the romance plot of finding and winning back his wife Jane, he speaks in verse, and occasionally rhyme. For example, when explaining that he can identify her by her shoe, he declares

> This is her size, her breadth. Thus trod my love.
> These true-love knots I pricked. I hold my life,
> By this old shoe I shall find out my wife. (14.46-8)

Ralph's metrical speech, therefore, aligns him with the more obvious romantic hero of the play, Lacy, a young gentleman trying to marry his sweetheart in the face of familial disapproval. This is the same character who is mistaken for Ralph when avoiding his uncle. This link does not suggest that there is no distinction between the ways characters move, appear and speak, but that their appearance is on a contiguous spectrum of variability. Ralph's lameness is not a quality of abjection that must be purged from the text. Neither *Shoemaker's Holiday* nor *Fair Maid* conform to the model outlined in Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis* whereby deviance is foregrounded in order to be obliterated through cure, expulsion or extermination. Instead, Cripple and Ralph both remain part of the variability of their respective dramatic worlds.

Conclusion: Variability now in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Textual evidence supports some limited conjectures about how lameness might have been embodied on stage. One has to be careful not to read in an overly literal way, however, making claims about the past that are not supported by evidence. For instance, Weis makes the claim, not adopted to my knowledge by any other scholars, that references to lameness in Shakespeare's sonnets are autobiographical, saying "there is no reason why the lame references should not literally be true," and speculating on a range of causes for Shakespeare's putative impairment.[32] Although there might be attractive reasons for claiming Shakespeare as a potential object of identification for people with disabilities, there is simply no evidence to support the literal reading of these lines back into the life of this particular historical individual.

Such speculative readings are more appropriate where they relate to fictional characters, since their truth value is of a different order and requires different kinds of

[32] René Weis, *Shakespeare Revealed: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 2007), 164; also cited in Jeffrey R. Wilson, "The Trouble with Disability in Shakespeare Studies," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37.2 (2017).

evidence. A case in point here is Petruccio's description of Kate as limping in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Interesting performance possibilities and effects might be elicited by casting actors with visible disabilities in this role, regardless of literal textual direction. In this case, however, there is a potential textual anchor for the interpretation in Petruccio's lines. It is worth quoting the whole passage:

> 'Twas told me you were rough, and coy, and sullen,
> And now I find report a very liar,
> For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
> But slow in speech, yet sweet as spring-time flowers.
> Thou canst not frown. Thou canst not look askance,
> Nor bite the lip, as angry wenches will,
> Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk,
> But thou with mildness entertain'st thy wooers,
> With gentle conference, soft, and affable.
> Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?
> O sland'rous world! Kate like the hazel twig
> Is straight and slender, and as brown in hue
> As hazelnuts, and sweeter than the kernels.
> O let me see thee walk. Thou dost not halt. (2.1.238-51)

The trick here, of course, is that Petruccio is gaslighting Kate and nothing he says can be taken seriously. He is bamboozling her with contradictory statements. His suggestion that she is "slow in speech, yet sweet as spring-time flowers" is an insult wrapped in a compliment negated by her quick and acerbic replies in the rest of the scene. Petruccio's motives distort the value of his statements to the extent that the 'literal' truth of the matter seems somewhat irrelevant. This does not rule out the possibility that it might be interesting to see what happens if Kate really does limp, however. Although unusual, there has been at least one production which has tried this approach. According to Rachel E. Hile, in a 2008 production directed by Peter Hinton at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Canada, Irene Poole portrayed Kate with a physical limp. Hile outlines some of the hostility that met the production, as reviewers mocked the interpretation on the grounds that it was an overly literal reading based on slender evidence.[33] Jeffrey Wilson's critique of Hile's essay replicates the reviewers' incredulity, describing Hile's support for the interpretation as a "misreading" that is derived "by willfully ignoring the evidence against it" and dismisses categorically the idea that Kate might limp.[34]

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[33] Rachel E. Hile, "Disability and the Characterisation of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29.4 (2009).
[34] Wilson, "The Trouble with Disability".

I dispute Wilson's argument on the grounds of its categorical exclusiveness, since it is quite possible that Petruccio's statements can be glossed differently. Rather than claiming that Wilson's view is wrong, I suggest that it is one of a variety of readings and interpretations of varying levels of plausibility and usefulness. Such variety is inevitable in reading a text of this complexity. We are not, as per F.R. Leavis, searching for "one right total meaning" when we read,[35] and in the case of dramatic interpretation and reinterpretation, variation is to be celebrated rather than restricted. If imagining Shakespeare's Kate with a limp leads to interesting readings and performances then it is a valid reading. Readers can hold contradictory interpretations with equal weight simultaneously. In performance, certain choices must be made one way or another. Thus not only is the interpretation of a role like Kate variable, drama itself is complexly embodied. Each performance makes different choices and has different effects upon the text, performers and audience, and these elements in turn all interact with all other variable qualities of performance.

This can be illustrated by a very unusual example from a single performance: a preview of *The Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare's Globe on 17 May 2016, which happens to have been the performance reviewed by Peter Kirwan for his *Bardathon* blog. According to Kirwan, just before the interval the actor playing Kate (Kathy Rose O'Brien) injured her foot. After some delay, the production was hastily reblocked and continued with O'Brien staying seated for much of the rest of the show, being assisted on and off-stage by Edward MacLiam (playing Petruccio). Kirwan's review speaks of "the uneasy intimacy added to the second half by O'Brien's injury" and its effect of making "Kate and Petruchio a symbiotic pair, where the one's pain directly affected the other".[36] Clearly, I am not suggesting that pain and injury are a desirable part of live theatre, and sadly, O'Brien's role was recast after this performance. But its uniqueness is an acute example of the intervention of bodily variability into the experience and meaning of dramatic performance.

Taking Kate as a variable element, this performance demonstrates very clearly the specificity of the acting body and its combination with the consistent elements of the performance. That is, the interaction between body and text, thing and idea is essentially what creates dramatic performance. Whilst this is potentially a banal thing to say about theatre more generally, its implications for disability and disabled performers are important to bring

[35] Leavis, F.R., *Education and the University* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1943), 72.
[36] Kirwan, Peter, "*The Taming of the Shrew* @ Shakespeare's Globe," *Bardathon* (blog), May 17 2016.

forward. Casting actors with disabilities, by accident or design, brings their variability into dialogue with the ideas and ideologies of the text. Such casting practices worked to the benefit of the 2017 Sheffield Theatres production of *Julius Caesar*, for example, in which a cast diverse in its genders, ethnicities and impairments created a production that had a vital relevance to its contemporary context.[37]

Lame characters, and indeed all characters, should therefore be portrayed with at least as much variety and variability as they have had in the past. This essay has shown that variable bodies moved and spoke on the early modern stage, creating variable effects arising from the complex interactions between visual, kinetic, aural, and verbal signifiers of lameness. Thus, lameness must be understood as the product of both ideas and bodies. Judith Butler is right to assert that there is no "prediscursive anatomical facticity",[38] but this is not because bodies do not exist per se, but because our understanding of them is always already mediated through ideology. This essay does not pretend to talk outside discourse, but it understands that bodies can intervene in the possible meanings we attach to them. Although its associations with age and slowness make it something negative, lameness is not necessarily an exclusionary absolute. It is true that, in *A Larum for London*, the lame character's death in battle eliminates him from the play's dramatic world. But in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, lame characters are and remain embedded in their social worlds. Their feet, poetic, prosthetic, and otherwise, speak and move, and in doing so alert us to alternative ways of imagining bodies and experience both then and now.

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[37] Susan Anderson, "Review of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (directed by Robert Hastie for Sheffield Theatres) at the Crucible, 31 May 2017," *Shakespeare* 13.4 (2017).
[38] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, 1990, 8.

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