

‘A rotten and dead body’: Disabled Villainy on the Early Modern Stage

by

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Introduction

GLOUCESTER

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 so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them -
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

And hate the idle pleasures of these days (1: 1: 14-31).

In this extract, the Duke of Gloucester from Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard III* (1592) presents one of the more plainly stated correlations between disability and villainy in early modern theatre. The diabolical Duke draws a direct line from his various disabilities to his displeasure with the current "time of peace", specifically, his inability to enjoy "sportive tricks" and games of romance, which he uses as justification for his multiple treacheries. That Richard's body is objectively inferior to others' is a point he takes for granted, although Katherine Williams contends that we need not take him at his word, given the frequency with which Richard capitalises upon his body's ability to 'signify an array of claims', and the way this abundance of interpretative possibilities offered by his disabled form abets his rise to power (2009). Even armed with Williams' productive reading, a contemporary audience could construe Richard's impairment as indicative of, and, to a certain extent, an explanation for his moral deficiencies. In this sense, Shakespeare's tragedy can be situated within the body of Western literature that associates disabled bodies and minds with immorality, conflict, and general negativity, as documented by a number of disability theorists (Sontag, 1978; Margolis and Shapiro, 1987; Dahl, 1993).

In his seminal text *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (2003), Paul Longmore offers the most recent and succinct account of this phenomenon, noting several key suppositions surrounding the disabled body that resonate strongly with Richard's monologue:

Giving disabilities to villainous characters reflects and reinforces, albeit in exaggerated fashion, three common prejudices against handicapped people: disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their 'fate'; disabled people resent the non-disabled and would, if they could, destroy them (134).

Here, Longmore draws attention to the assumptions underpinning the prevalence of disabled villainy in fiction, many of which align with Richard's professed view of himself. He is a man 'embittered by his fate', a 'monster' whose resentment of his impaired status prompts him to seek the destruction of all around him, becoming, in the process, the play's primary generator of conflict and disharmony.

Although Longmore describes disabled villainy in a contemporary context, Richard's monologue suggests that much of the ableist sentiment entrenched in the idea of the disabled villain had already taken shape in the early modern period. Recent work by Allison Hobgood supports this notion. Contrary to theorists such as Lennard Davis, who present the widespread social perception of disability as an innately negative deviation from an ideal body or brain type as a product of late modernity, she contends that early modern culture already held that the abled body should view 'the disabled body as its oppositional term' (pars. 1-3).

While this dissertation relies on this scholarly tradition, it also departs from it in significant ways. Firstly, it localizes the representation of the disabled as villainous to a specific time and place, which is early modern England, and secondly, it contends that disabled villains serve a specific role in this period: namely, as symbols through which playwrights may explore the challenge to social hierarchy and stability posed by ambition and greed. Indeed, the Duke of Gloucester exemplifies this trait, as his disability and villainy are part of his ambitious pursuit of the highest position in English politics: the crown.

That said, within the broader trope of the disabled antagonist there are a range of complicating factors. Different types of disabilities may be vilified in different ways, and for different reasons, and the extent of said vilification may be contingent upon the level of impairment conferred by the disability, the disabled person's proximity to 'normal' social, sexual and professional roles, and the visibility of the impairment in question.

Analysing the different ways in which the persistent trope of the disabled villain manifests on the early modern stage is, I believe, necessary work. There has been no extended scholarly account of this phenomenon; analyses of the fictional disabled villain have generally served as side arguments to larger discussions regarding the placement of disability in cultural consciousness. They have also been quite broad; in both the accounts of Margolis and Shapiro, and Longmore, *Richard III* is lined up with Melville's Captain Ahab as an example of negative disabled representation. While it may be granted that all disabled villains in Western fiction share common literary DNA, situating *Richard III*

within a specifically early modern line-up of disabled villains will demonstrate the ways that early modern plays use disabled villains to explore the impact of ambition and greed and the threat they pose to social order.

In order to do this, I assemble a variety of readings that showcase not only the negative implications of disabled villainy, but also the complexity underlying this seemingly self-explanatory trope. In doing so, I hope to build on a dynamic body of research surrounding the cultural placement of disabled bodies at the time. While Hobgood and David Wood have worked to redress the notion that ‘disabled’ was not an operational identity category prior to the nineteenth century, CF Goodey has used early modern discourses surrounding the highly mutable concept of ‘intelligence’ to make a claim as to the historical contingency of the category ‘intellectually disabled’. Similarly, Carol Thomas Neely has applied feminist theory to a range of early modern medical, legal and theatrical texts, in order to reveal the extent to which ‘the cultural discourses that narrate and stage disorder themselves divide and produce reclassifications, revised diagnoses, changing gender associations, and new remedies’ (3). Kenneth Jackson has attempted to reframe our contemporary understanding of disabled living spaces such as Bethlem Asylum. However, despite increasing critical interest in impairment, illness and neurodiversity in the early modern period, the theatrical coding of antagonistic figures as disabled – and of disability itself as an antagonist – has not received a sufficient amount of sustained critical examination. The importance of redressing this oversight seems best indicated by the continued presentation of disability as sinister or grotesque in contemporary mass entertainment, as Longmore has documented. In addition, the

disabled villain is the most easily discernable expression of cultural anti-disabled sentiment, showcasing an early modern audience's foremost anxieties regarding ambition and greed on the part of those who achieve or strive to achieve positions of high status which, due to their faulty minds or bodies, they do not deserve. In this way, the disabled villain serves as a sort of cultural bellwether for attitudes toward the disabled in general.

In the chapters that follow, I examine this trend by putting plays that have received a great deal of critical scrutiny - although generally not through the lens of disability studies - into conversation with plays that have been critically overlooked. While disability theorists such as Williams and Robert McRuer have provided valuable new perspectives on *Richard III* - perspectives that I shall later analyse in greater detail - the play, in its prominence and popularity, can risk dominating the conversation, becoming a monolithic lens that shapes our perception of all early modern disabled villains. This investigation will, therefore, expand upon existing scholarship by incorporating a diverse range of texts, including tragedies, city comedies and parody pieces.

John Fletcher and Phillip Massinger's *A Very Woman* (c. 1619-1622) is a usefully straightforward example of this trend, and, as such, it illustrates the kind of plays that will form the backbone of this investigation. It has received relatively little critical attention and none from disability theorists, so I will briefly analyse it both as a case study of disabled villainy on the early modern stage and an example of the methodology I will employ in the chapters to follow.

The date and location of the first performance are unconfirmed, although evidence suggests that it was performed at Blackfriars Theatre by the King's Men. Despite the fact that the date of its completion is equally difficult to establish, Roma Gill notes a general agreement among critics that the play is the end result of a collaboration between Massinger and Fletcher (136-148). There are two disabled figures in *A Very Woman*; Martino Cardenes, the son of the Duke of Messina, who sustains injuries that leave him temporarily physically disabled and psychologically traumatised, and his lover Almira, the daughter of the Viceroy of Sicily, who enters into a state of psychological disability in the wake of Cardenes' injuries. While both characters are examples of an association of disability with antagonism, the play differs from *Richard III* in that disability is not the cause of Cardenes and Almira's villainy. Instead, disability functions as a punishment for their villainy. The lovers incur their impairments as a direct result of their bad treatment of the protagonist; thereafter, the vulnerability that is shown to accompany impairment functions as a behavioural corrective. This has the counterintuitive effect of casting disability itself in a positive light, even while disabled people are rendered morally suspect.

This seeming contradiction makes sense in light of one of the prevailing accounts of disability at the time, articulated in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621):

...if we give reins to lust, anger, ambition, pride, and follow our own ways, we degenerate into beasts, transform ourselves, overthrow our constitutions, provoke

God to anger, and heap upon us this of Melancholy, and all kinds of incurable diseases, as a just and deserved punishment for our sins (86).

This passage illustrates both the link between immoral ambition and disability - the latter being posited by Burton as divine retribution for the former - and the extent to which this link works to dehumanise the disabled. 'Incurable diseases' and degeneration into bestiality are both natural, complimentary consequences awaiting those who challenge social hierarchy and stability with their ambition and their pride.

Such are the most prominent qualities in Fletcher and Massinger's antagonists. Almira, courted by the protagonist, Prince Antonio of Tarent, scornfully rejects his suit. When she goes so far as to make a gift of one of Antonio's lavish presents to the servant of Cardenes, her brother scolds her for her rudeness:

Do not flatter
Yourself with the opinion that your birth,
Your beauty, or whatever false ground else
You raise your pride upon, will stand against
The censure of just men (1: 1: 109-113).

This extract establishes that in confidently rejecting Antonio's suit, Almira has displayed unwarranted and excessive pride, acting above her station in the social hierarchy. In this, she has diverged from the play's moral centre. Moreover, the allusion to beauty's

fickleness - “false ground” - foreshadows the way that said beauty will be taken away from her, as punishment for her behaviour.

Noting this, it may be further argued that the impairments that overtake both antagonists are specifically tailored to fit their crimes, lending weight to the idea that disability is being deployed as retribution. Upon hearing that Antonio has yet again made overtures, the prideful Cardenes asks Antonio to duel and during this fight, Antonio inflicts a serious wound upon his person. Cardenes is thereafter rendered physically immobile. Even when his body has recovered from its trauma, his psychological state remains dire. Awash with newfound meekness and self-loathing, Cardenes post-injury bears little resemblance to the combative young man presented in the play’s first act; as the Viceroy’s steward pronounces, “His brain-pan’s perish’d with his wounds” (4: 1: 108). At one point, Cardenes, reflecting that “had don Antonio done that to me I did to him, I should have kill’d him”, attempts suicide before being hastily disarmed by the onlookers (4: 1: 120-122). In this way, Cardenes’ impairment is framed as having eliminated that part of him which was originally responsible for his transgression, that being both his martial prowess and his excessive pride; resultantly, his potential to function as an antagonist has been effectively neutralised.

Almira’s crimes have different and distinctly gendered roots. Although her initial offence is in daring to refuse the courtship of one of her brother’s high-ranking friends, she transgresses a second time following the duel between Cardenes and Antonio. Seeing the injury inflicted upon her lover, Almira attacks Antonio with a sword procured from a

servant, prompting her brother to question her womanhood and her compatriot, Leonora, to declare her a “flint-hearted lady” (1: 1: 423). Although Cardenes’ sin is rooted in the threat he poses to the protagonist’s romantic endeavours, Almira’s sin lies in posing a threat to the structure of the romantic game itself: firstly she makes a mockery of Antonio’s gift, and secondly she endangers her womanhood. While Cardenes is merely an obstacle to the play’s romantic infrastructure, Almira threatens its very foundations.

Accordingly, Almira’s punishment is even more cruelly ironic than Cardenes’. While Cardenes is rendered physically vulnerable by his disability, proud Almira enters into a state of extreme depression shortly after the duel, as remarked upon by an onlooker:

I am sure she slept not. If she slumber’d, straight,
as if some dreadful vision had appear’d,
She started up, her hair unbound, and, with
Distracted looks staring about the chamber
She asks aloud, Where is Martino? Where
Have you conceal’d him? Sometimes names Antonio,
Trembling in every joint, her brows contracted,
Her hair face as ‘twere changed into a curse,
Her hands held up this; and, as if her words
Were too big to find passage through her mouth,
She groans, then throws herself upon her bed,

Beating her breast (2: 1: 3-14).

Disability, in Almira's case, targets that which first ensnared her wronged suitor, specifically her appearance, which is distorted when a lack of sleep leaves her, as her maid observes, "careless of her beauties" (2: 1: 20). That Almira's psychological distress has a detrimental affect on her looks is further emphasised when Leonora entreats her to "clear those clouds up that feed upon your beauties like diseases" (3: 3: 1-3). Moreover, her oratorical skills, the means by which she first transgressed against "just men", are also stripped from her; her words now "too big to fit through her mouth". Her two primary powers - her beauty and her words - negated, she is able to evoke only pity on account of her diminishment, and able to articulate only a plaintive request for the comfort of one of her respective suitors. This serves to simultaneously produce a simplistic image of the disabled as tragically reduced by their impairments, and to situate Almira's disablement parallel to Cardenes'; both are made dependant upon the kindness of the abled as penance for their sins.

Further reinforcing the disability-punishment paradigm is the fact that as the perpetrators suffer a reduction in agency and capacities, the wronged Antonio experiences an equivalent increase in abledness. He disguises himself as a Turkish servant to infiltrate Almira's home, thereafter deploying the verbal prowess previously exemplified by Almira to fascinate and court her, and the physical power previously exemplified by Cardenes to defend her from burglars. To put it differently, if Almira and

Cardenes become less able in the play, Antonio becomes more than able, almost superhumanly able, as the narrative unfolds.

In this way, the play uses the framing of heteronormative romance to establish the supremacy of abledness. The romantic winner is not only the suitor who is himself the most able, but also the suitor who can cure others of their disabilities. For as the play progresses and the antagonists shift away from their status as immoral agents, falling in line with the play's internal morality by earning Antonio's forgiveness, their disabilities depart. Later in the play, the distraught Almira first catches sight of the disguised Antonio, and is immediately struck by his handsome appearance and articulacy. Leonora, delighted by the sudden change in her mistress' emotional state, remarks, "I am glad you have found your tongue yet" (3: 4: 72). As Almira continues to ruminate on the handsome newcomer, Leonora observes that her grief has been "clean forgotten!" (4: 2: 4). Almira's return to psychological abledness strengthens in proportion with the tenderness of her feelings towards her erstwhile unwanted suitor and her acceptance of his overtures.

Cardenes' healing process is structured in much the same manner, further emphasising the notion that abledness and moral correctness go hand in hand. Eventually, following the revelation of Antonio's identity and Almira's confession of her newfound love, the question of marriage is raised once again. As Antonio asks for Almira's hand, Cardenes reappears, having made a full physical and psychological recovery. To the surprise of all, he graciously apologises to Antonio and concedes his claim to Almira. As

in Almira's case, this newfound orderliness of spirit blossoms with Cardenes' return to physical and mental normativity. Cardenes informs Antonio:

I have received from your hands wounds,
And deep ones
My honour in the general report
Tainted and soil'd, for which I will demand
This satisfaction - that you would forgive me
My contumelious words and blow, my rash
And unadvised wildness first threw on you
...
I'll add to this, he that does wrong, not alone
Draws, but makes sharp, his enemy's sword against
His own life and his honour. I have paid for't;
And wish that they who dare most, would learn
From me
Not to maintain a wrong, but to repent it (5: 6: 56-73).

This extract encapsulates the paradox of Cardenes' disability; in being made corporeally sick, he has been spiritually cured. While initially leading his audience to presume that the 'wounds' he describes are those physical wounds that led to his state of impairment, Cardenes performs a bait-and-switch, substituting the wounding of his honour for the wounding of his body. The former he attributes to his own transgression in the shape of

the “contumelious words” thrown against Antonio; in essence, he claims to have been self-wounded, reinforcing his point by stating that any man who “does wrong... makes sharp his enemy’s sword”. In this way, immoral actions are explicitly framed as inviting punishment both bodily and spiritual at the hands of the wronged party. This extract also demonstrates the difficulty of considering Cardenes’ moral conversion as distinct from his return to bodily normativity; just as his physical wounds are intertwined with his moral wounds, so his physical healing is intertwined with the spiritual healing Antonio’s forgiveness will entail.

The sequence of disability in *A Very Woman* is, then, as follows: displays of immorality directly or indirectly lead to impairment, which renders the villain in question dependent upon the compassion of the play’s morally upright characters and ultimately results in their repentance. Any objection to the disability-punishment paradigm on the part of the audience is muffled by the playwright’s efforts to place a filter between the audience and the disabled body. Common to both antagonists’ ‘mad scenes’ is the presence of an in-story abled audience made up of their friends and family members whose response to their disabilities discretely directs that of the actual audience. Rather than have either Cardenes or Almira relay their conditions to the audience directly, their disabilities are translated and made intelligible by doctors, relatives and friends. In this way, a filter of abledness makes coherent the story of the disabled villain to the audience.

What is striking about *A Very Woman* - and, as I shall contend through this dissertation, a range of other early modern plays - is that while it is fascinated with the

potentials of disability, this fascination extends only so far as disability affects the abled. Disability is not depicted as an ongoing state of existence for a significant subsection of the population. Instead, it is a temporary condition, one that briefly strips the abled of certain benefits and privileges, and leaves them morally improved upon its departure. In this way, disability is a force for good, in that it is a means through which that moral improvement is even possible. However, this situation obtains only because to be disabled is to experience a far less pleasant, less successful, and less worthwhile existence than which is enjoyed by the abled.

While this idea might not seem erroneous to audiences entrenched in widespread ableist assumptions, a wealth of research by disability theorists and psychologists points towards its inaccuracy. For instance, Shane Frederick and George Loewenstein's influential theory of 'hedonic adaptation', in which the majority of people do not deviate drastically from a certain base level of contentment over the course of their lives despite major alterations to their way of living, suggests that there is no inherent link between impairment and quality of life. Jerome Bickenbach contends that hedonic theory is in need of revision, but maintains that '...people with disabilities are no different from anyone else living a life of circumstantial highs and lows...' (189). My point is that early modern disabled narratives often reiterate the idea that disability automatically entails a massive reduction in quality - and in worth - of life. This leads, as in the case of *A Very Woman*, to a conceptualisation of disability as a cosmic lash that punishes the villains who are beyond the reach of normal institutions of justice, either because they are too powerful or because the evil they have committed is not illegal.

I will elaborate on this notion in my first chapter through an analysis of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612-1613), which will demonstrate that this play both reinforces and undermines this paradigm of disabled villainy. The central focus of my analysis will be Webster's use of sickness as a metaphorical representation of evil and villainy, in light of an observation made by several seminal disability theorists; namely, that the connection between disability and negativity is still sufficiently ingrained in everyday language that it passes unnoticed even today (Shakespeare, 1994; Davis, 2013; Schalk, 2013). In this way, not only are disabled people rendered villainous on stage, but in *The Duchess of Malfi* the concept of disability itself is vilified - in contrast to *A Very Woman*, in which disability is a useful tool for punishing evil.

The second chapter will move from a more general examination of disability's linguistic proximity to evil to an analysis of the specific ways in which intellectual disability - or 'witlessness' - is vilified on the early modern stage. Beginning with a reading of George Ruggle's *Ignoramus* (1615), which is then compared to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1602), I examine the social anxieties evoked by intellectual and other 'invisible' disabilities on stage, in particular the prospect that said invisibility - or, to use Allison Hobgood's term, 'illegibility' - might allow the disabled to penetrate spaces reserved for the abled. Figures like Ruggle's advocate Ignoramus in *Ignoramus* and Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* are both 'unintelligent' men who have obtained professional positions despite their lack; they are also villainous figures, as their 'unintelligence' results in their attempting to violate class hierarchy. To punish them for their

transgressions, both undergo a process of pathologisation, which strips them of their pretensions and puts them back in their 'proper place'.

That the disabled are vilified when they try to move beyond their designated class is a point investigated from a different angle in the third chapter, which analyses Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622). In this play, a disabled man's villainy is first signified by his resentment at being categorised as a nonviable romantic actor. George Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596) and Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607) explore further the subtextual assumption that disability renders one romantically defunct. As a result of this assumption, any attempt on the part of the disabled to participate in normative romantic relationships casts them as dangerous intruders for attempting to participate in (hetero)sexuality. This, I argue, falls in line with Anna Mollow's contention that, in the eyes of the abled, 'disabled sexuality is somehow both lack... and excess', an unresolvable paradox also articulated in early modern plays (286).

I return to the idea of theatrical disability as a domain of extremes in the final chapter, in which I place John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* in conversation with Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore (Part 1)* (1604) and Dekker and Webster's own collaboration *Northward Ho!* (1605). A common feature in these three plays is the presentation of psychologically disabled people in groups, either in mad masques or Bethlem charity shows. In the first two, such scenes render psychologically disabled people as part of a violent, homogenized collective, imbuing them with an aura

of horror and dread; in the third, the trend is inverted, as Dekker and Webster place under scrutiny the ethical implications of abled audiences deriving pleasure and entertainment from the sight of disabled people in distress.

In the course of these four chapters, the construction of an image of the early modern disabled villain as a pervasive theatrical trope - one that even infiltrates narratives without obvious examples of disabled figures - will uncover how the theatre utilises the link between disability and villainy to express socio-cultural concerns regarding hierarchy and social location.

Chapter 1

‘Death and diseases through the whole land spread’: Metaphors of Immoral Impairment in John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*

Seminal disability theorist Lennard Davis argues that stigma against the disabled is sufficiently entrenched in Western literature that it generally passes unnoticed. In support of this broad claim, he places under scrutiny the intrinsic correlation between disability and negativity in literary texts that seem, at first glance, entirely benign, contending that said correlation indicates the depth of prejudice against the disabled in Western culture. Examining Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, Davis draws attention to metaphors and figures of speech that require a pre-existing belief in the supremacy of the abled body on the part of the reader in order to function properly in the context of the narrative. For example, at one point in the text Conrad’s narrator describes a character’s grim reflections as ‘...a dance of lame, blind, mute thoughts - a whirl of awful cripples’ (Conrad 1986, 114). The effectiveness of this imagery rests upon the twin assumptions that bodies possessing such disabilities as blindness are innately inferior to sighted bodies - such that ‘blind thoughts’ are implicitly worse than ‘sighted thoughts’ - and that disability itself is a reliable indicator of horror and disorder. More recently, Sami Schalk has examined similar examples of casual ableism in feminist literature, noting theorist bell hooks’ ‘repeated use

of the term *emotional cripples*’ along with ‘the concept of the mute body’ referenced by Tania Modleski (par. 6). Schalk posits that ‘the use of disability metaphors promotes an ideology of impairment as a negative form of embodiment. These metaphors typically position disability as invariably bad, undesirable, pitiful, painful, and so on’ (par. 6). Both Davis and Schalk demonstrate that, within Western cultural and political discourse, disability serves as shorthand for moral or spiritual lack.

Although Lennard Davis perceives this correlation to be a product of late modernity, as discussed in my introduction, there are an abundance of early modern plays in which the idea of disabled villainy is perpetuated through dramatic metaphors. To demonstrate this, I shall examine John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612-1613), arguing that the play offers examples of both the way disabled characters on stage are framed as villainous and the more insidious manner in which the very idea of disability itself is vilified through metaphorical language and symbolism. Moreover, I contend that although the play frequently uses disability as a signifier of evil, it also works to unsettle and, to some extent, to denounce the theatrical connection between physical frailty and moral lack.

First performed by the troupe the King’s Men at Blackfriar’s Theatre, Webster’s enduringly popular play has been praised as ‘the final example of powerful Elizabethan tragedy, written when the Puritans were excoriating dramatic representations and the courtiers of James I preferred insubstantial romantic plays’ (Casey, 3). Critical interest in the play remains substantial, but although scholars such as David Gilmore, Lori Haslem

and Maurice Hunt have noted the manner in which questions of health, decay and corruption haunt the play, none have yet done so from the perspective of what Davis terms a ‘disability studies consciousness’ (2).

Long before the play’s central antagonist becomes disabled, the play establishes that the Malfian court is, itself, an example of disabled villainy. The court’s primary representatives are an adulterous cardinal and a warmongering duke, both of whom plot to procure the inheritance of their recently bereaved sister, the titular Duchess. The abundance of sycophantic courtiers and lackeys at Malfi is remarked upon repeatedly by Bosola, a generally amoral mercenary who swiftly descends into espionage, and, ultimately, murder, following his introduction to the court by the aforementioned Duke Ferdinand. The Duchess herself is enamoured of her young steward Antonio, and their deep love and clandestine marriage at once set her at odds with her devious brothers and distinguish her from them; Ferdinand scorns those of lower rank, and the Cardinal’s interest in his own younger lover is purely carnal, and ends in his murdering her with a poisoned Bible. In this way, the virtue of the play’s heroine serves to reinforce the deep immorality of her surroundings.

Critical reactions to the text have frequently reiterated the notion that disease, frailty and bodily strangeness are used by Webster as vectors for conveying both the extent of the social corruption of the court and the internal moral corruption of individuals. In his examination of the play’s use of melancholia, Richard McCabe contends that ‘the image of the body is insistent throughout the play, from Bosola’s

scatological loathing to Ferdinand's morbid fascination...' (254). Erica Fudge posits a more direct link between disability and evil in the play, arguing that 'Ferdinand's lycanthropic frenzy is specifically a mania generated by the court and overtly an index of its moral crisis' (61). Alan Hager's contention that 'for Webster, even the most honourable characters still bear the taint of human corruptibility, immorality, and decay' is another example of critical acceptance of the play's alignment of evil with illness (356). David Gilmore, discussing the play's gender dynamics, states that:

...Webster compares women with leprosy and gangrene; using grotesque images of decay, he warns against the pleasures afforded by female flesh, comparing the kiss of a beautiful woman to a 'dead man's skull' (3.4) and a woman's body to a 'poisoned garden' and a 'burial plot'... the morbid Webster identifies woman with physical and moral rot and introduces a series of revolting montages to get the message across; putrefying flesh, skeletons dripping poison, skin-withering syphilis.... (117-118).

In this extract, the use of the words 'revolting' and 'grotesque' to describe natural organic processes like bodily degeneration reiterates an understanding of disability as innately repulsive and wrong. Gilmore's analysis is one of the more recent examples of a longstanding tendency on the part of critics to approach Webster's depiction of decay, illness and evil by taking for granted that the playwright is invested in the correlation between these three elements of his story in a way that is straightforward and consistent.

However, I argue that the default abled-centric lens through which audiences and critics have engaged with *The Duchess of Malfi* has led to the creation of a false sense of coherence in the play's use of decay, illness and evil. Webster seems to engage with immorality and with corporeal frailty as two separate issues, and while several characters do explicitly correlate illness with morality, the play as a whole does not seem to accept or endorse this viewpoint - at least, it does not accept it entirely or complacently.

That said, upon first inspection, *The Duchess of Malfi* seems to be heavily invested in the notion of disabled villainy. This is most prominently displayed in the heroic Antonio's summation of the Malfian court upon his return from France:

Considering duly that a prince's court
Is like a common fountain, whence should flow
Pure silver drops in general, but if 't chance
Some curs'd example poison 't near the head,
Death and diseases through the whole land spread.
And what is 't makes this blessed government
But a most provident council, who dare freely
Inform him the corruption of the times (1: 1: 12-19)?

In this extract, Antonio's metaphorical language takes for granted an alignment between the idea of bodily frailty and moral corruption. The court is embodied in his monologue, its immorality figured as a rapidly-spreading infection. While the duty of members of the

ideal French court is to act as physicians, identifying and curing vice before it can spread, at Malfi a “poison” exists “near the head” of the court that prevents it from serving this function. This poison, in the form of powerful men such as Ferdinand and the Cardinal, has therefore sickened the courtly body and threatens to contaminate the whole country.

So while the French court is a place of cures and healing, the Italian court is a place of disease, and its members are untreated patients - as Bosola shortly confirms, in a conversation with Antonio and Delio regarding the general moral turpitude among Malfian aristocracy: “Places in the court are but like beds in the hospital/ Where this man’s head lies at that man’s foot/ And so lower and lower” (1: 1: 42-43). The hospital Bosola envisions is not a place of care. Rather, in keeping with the play’s general scepticism regarding medicine (exemplified by Bosola’s derisively describing urine as “the physician’s whore, because she cozens him”) it is a place of hierarchies and subjugation (1: 2: 133). That such hierarchies are undesirable is established in the text’s repeated indication of the folly of using rank as a means of judging character; its foremost villain expresses disgust at his sister’s marrying a man who “never in’s life looked like a gentleman” (3: 3: 76). Moreover, in her attempts to ascertain whether or not Bosola is trustworthy, the Duchess tests his opinion of Antonio’s character; upon hearing the litany of compliments Bosola bestows upon her husband, the Duchess’ final test is to remind him that ‘he was basely descended’, in response to which Bosola reprimands her, “Will you make yourself a mercenary herald/ Rather to examine men’s pedigrees than virtues” (3: 2: 294 - 296)? Upon being informed of her marriage, Bosola’s initial reaction is to express his admiration for her willingness to forego “shadows of wealth and painted

honours” (281-282). Furthermore, Bosola himself slides from antiheroicism to villainy as he accepts ever more substantial rewards from Ferdinand and ascends the social ladder, progressing from espionage to kidnapping to murder. Of greatest relevance to the interests of this chapter is the fact that, in his deployment of the metaphor, Bosola positions sickness itself as a *creator* of hierarchy - all members of the court are ‘infected’ with corruption, but the very fact of infection places some subservient to other. This reinforces the so-far predominant theme of physical frailty as emblematic of moral corruption.

This theme is buttressed by the Duchess’ own moral positioning within the play’s language of sickness and cure. While her villainous brothers are agents of infection and disease, the Duchess’s grace is indicated by her ability to alleviate sickness - at least, so argues Antonio, claiming that “Whilst she speaks/ She throws upon a man so sweet a look/ That it were able to raise one to a galliard/ That lay in a dead palsy” (1: 2: 77-80).

By now, the play seems to have firmly established its use of the framework and terminology of bodily frailty to enhance its descriptions of the moral and legal corruption of the court at Malfi. Davis’ concerns regarding ‘the novelistic gaze that sees meaning in normative and non-normative features’ and the extent to which ableist sentiment is ingrained in language seem here to be wholly justified (11). However, just as it seems as though pathologisation will run rampant, the play stages an intervention. The first murmurs of a counternarrative are evident when, proceeding from his mocking an old

woman of the court, the mercenary Bosola decries the act of cosmetically concealing illness or bodily frailty:

What thing is in this outward form of man
To be belov'd? We account it ominous
If nature do produce a colt, or lamb,
A fawn, or goat, in any limb resembling
A man, and fly from 't as a prodigy:
Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity
In any other creature but himself.
But in our own flesh though we bear diseases
Which have their true names only ta'en from beasts -
As the most ulcerous wolf and swinish measles -
Though we are eaten up of lice and worms,
And though continually we bear about us
A rotten and dead body, we delight
To hide it in rich tissue; all our fear,
Nay, all our terror, is, lest our physician
Should put us in the ground to be made sweet (2: 1: 16-31).

In this extract, Bosola frames the idea of bodily impairment in a manner markedly at odds with the previously dominant paradigm of disability in the play. His reflections on the old woman shift from a firmly gendered mode of criticism, in which women are the key locus

of dissimulation, to a general indictment of the concealment of fragility. Decay, while frightful, is framed as the natural and universal human state, and to be human is to bear “deformity”. Unlike Antonio’s previous denunciations of the ‘sickness’ of the court, Bosola does not attack said sickness itself; rather, he takes issue with the desire to *hide* frailty, to lay claim to any state other than one of ongoing, lifelong decomposition. Sickness - and, by extent, disability - is, by this account, not an external attacker capable of ‘poisoning’ a person, a court, or a community. Instead, sickness is internal, expected, and to pretend otherwise is fraught.

At this point, Davis’ account of the social entrenchment of ableism may be pertinent. Davis makes an important distinction between the concepts of the ‘norm’ and the ‘ideal’, describing the former as a product of industrial Europe’s investment in identifying the statistically average citizen (5). Once the norm was established, all civic projects pertaining to disability became focused on bringing the disabled body or mind in line with the norm, rather than maximising access by altering existing structures. Prior to the social creation of the norm, Davis argues that public perception of non-normate bodies or minds was, to a large extent, governed by the concept of the ‘ideal’. Replicated in classical sculpture, the ideal body was the divine body, distinct from the statistical norm of industrial Europe in that it ‘contains no imperative that everyone should strive to be perfect’ (5). Crucially, inherent to the notion of the classically ideal body is that it is unattainable by humans; that all bodies are flawed, by virtue of their very existence.

Although Davis views the establishment of the norm as a post-industrial phenomenon, it is a concept that resonates strongly with Bosola's monologue. By centring his denunciation of the Malfian court around the aristocratic struggle to project an image of bodily 'wholeness', Bosola drastically countermands the simplistic correlation between illness and evil that has, until now, pervaded the text. While Antonio perceives the Malfian court as 'diseased', in light of Bosola's monologue it can be argued that what the play seems to instead indicate is a court that, in disavowing disability, frailty and illness, has become self-obsessed and prideful, and that this is the genesis of the court's moral failings. This extract, in essence, indicates that Antonio is misattributing blame, and, by extension, implies that to blame evil on bodily frailty and disablement is not only unjust, but counterproductive.

This reading seems supported by the fact that the Duchess, the play's foremost moral actor, is herself implicated in sickness and impairment. This is most clearly shown when, as a means of punishing his sister for her secret marriage and disobedience to his wishes, Ferdinand has her taken prisoner by Bosola and prepares an array of psychological tortures. He arranges the transportation of an asylum and its inmates to the Duchess' quarters, who arrive singing a song replete with apocalyptic imagery and invocations of wild animals and violent death. But Ferdinand's desire to horrify his sister by exposure to the sick is roundly subverted. When Cariola laments the "tyranny" Ferdinand has inflicted upon his sister, the Duchess replies: "Indeed, I thank him. Nothing but noise and folly/ Can keep me in my right wits; whereas reason/ And silence make me stark mad" (4: 2: 6-8). Throughout the performances of the madmen, the

Duchess retains her composure, even though she does not succeed in altering her fate. When the madmen depart and Bosola arrives to murder her, she reaffirms her identity, claiming to be “Duchess of Malfi still”, and dies without ever having displayed any hint of the emotional breakdown later suffered by her brother.

In light of this, critics often place the Duchess’ retaining her sanity in contrast to the psychological collapse Ferdinand undergoes following her death. Henderson contends that the Ferdinand brings the madmen before the Duchess ‘with the ostensible aim of making her sane but with the true aim of making her insane, and yet it is he and not she who becomes mad’ (197). Similarly, Forker describes the performance of the inmates as ‘a grotesque ballet of rational collapse that not only puts the lady’s psychic strength to its severest test’ (325). Framing the scene in terms of an attack on the Duchess’ very identity and sense of self-hood, she argues that ‘in a person of the Duchess’ independence the barrier between sanity and insanity is not so easily breached’ (326). Pearson, while acknowledging the extent to which the madmen aid the Duchess in maintaining her composure, only permits this reading on the grounds that the Duchess is fortified by an ability to perceive her own mental state in binary opposition to those of her tormentors, to place her perfect sanity in contrast to the madness surrounding her. According to Pearson, the madmen’s performance ‘genuinely helps to keep her in her right wits by asserting her essential sanity in the face of the grotesque madness of her opponents, Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and Bosola’ (86). In these critical readings, the threat of psychological disability is framed as a weapon, a battering ram attempting to knock down the ramparts of the Duchess’ inviolate sanity. The Duchess, by this account, emerges from her

encounter with disability victorious, having validated herself as a psychologically ‘whole’ subject, and thereby earned her identity.

The case can be made, I believe, that the construction of a neat binary between the Duchess’ mental harmony and Ferdinand’s mental chaos is not supported by the text. Instead, the scene in which the Duchess is introduced to the inmates may be read as doing the same work as Bosola’s interaction with the old woman, in that both work to contest such dichotomous interpretations of the universal capacity for frailty, and the assumed superiority of the ‘whole’ body.

This is most evident in the fact that Ferdinand’s scheme to terrorise his sister rests on a foregone acceptance of the idea that disability is innately bad, and thus innately frightening. If the Duchess chooses not to perceive the loud, strange but ultimately non-violent actions of the hospital’s inmates as signalling terror, disorder, and chaos then Ferdinand’s scheme cannot work. And, indeed, it does not; as described, of all his schemes to distress his sister, this is the least successful. Not only does the proximity of the hospital fail to instil terror in the Duchess, as stated, it offers her some degree of comfort. The same tumultuous noise and disorder that signal distress on the part of the inmates serve to maintain the Duchess’ composure, and her claim to “right wits” (4: 2: 7). She expresses an appreciation for the presence of the disabled mind, while simultaneously contaminating the valued ideals of “reason and silence” by insisting that they would make her “stark mad” (4: 2: 8).

Beyond simply not being horrified by the sight of impairment and the closeness of the hospital, the Duchess implicates herself in sickness by declaring her appreciation of ‘madness’ as a comfort to her in her imprisonment, for in doing so she also indicates her own potential for madness; silence, she states, *can* make her stark mad. She is as vulnerable to madness as the doctor, the astrologer, and any of the previously professional inmates who have capered before her. This is a point that has already been more clearly made by Cariola, who, in reaction to witnessing the Duchess’ proposal to Antonio, notes that “Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman/ Reign most in her, I know not; but it shows/ A fearful madness. I owe her much of pity” (1: 2: 410-412). Cariola raises similar concerns shortly before the inmates arrive. The Duchess claims that her wet eyes indicate “nothing. When I muse thus, I sleep”, to which Cariola replies, “Like a madman, with your eyes open” (4: 2: 15-17)?

The Duchess’ intensely organic, changeable body has been the subject of ongoing critical attention. Lori Haslem, in an analysis of the use of the female ‘grotesque’ in early modern theatre, lauds the Duchess’ exuberant consumption of apricots and frank physicality as ‘outfacing cultural shaming’ (459). Pearson notes that, in contrast with Antonio, the Duchess’ body is ‘a spokesperson for fruitful disorder’ (86). Martha Lifson pursues a similar line of inquiry, describing the Duchess’ body as ‘a spectacle of corporeality that announces her position as a political, sexual, maternal, suffering, and dying figure’, and contending that it is resultantly ‘threatening to male rule’ (49-50). A potential addition to these arguments may be the observation that, while the Duchess does celebrate normal fleshly appetites, she also embodies an acceptance of fleshly

dysfunction and decay. Her comfort with the prospect of ageing and the accompanying physical alterations is firmly established when, following Antonio's somewhat obtuse reflections on female beauty, the Duchess examines her hair for greying. Rather than entertaining means of concealing the signs of aging, in accordance with the charges Bosola levels at women of the court, she declares that, upon their arrival, she will "have all the court powder their hair with arras to be like me" (3: 2: 59). Jocular and off-hand as this comment is, it encapsulates the Duchess' attitude towards bodily matters - if grey hair is likely to lower her in the estimation of her peers (as Antonio's comments imply), then it is they, not she, who will be adjusted accordingly.

Although she does not accept the prospect of mental frailty as readily as the prospect of physical frailty, it is, paradoxically, in the Duchess' attempts to reaffirm her sanity that her proximity to 'madness' is similarly revealed. She deploys violent, infernal imagery to make the case for her own mental 'wholeness': "I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow/ Th'heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass/ The earth of flaming sulphur/ yet I am not mad" (4: 2: 31-33). But the very way in which she frames this defence of her sanity is strikingly reminiscent of the imagery deployed earlier by the first madman, who speaks of "all the world on fire", and the second madmen, who describes hell as "a mere glass-house, where the devils are continually/ blowing up women's souls on hollow irons, and the fire never goes out" (4: 2: 72-75). Despite implying a dichotomy between 'madness' and 'right wits', the Duchess herself destabilises this dichotomy by gesturing towards the fluctuating boundaries of what constitutes sanity, and her own shifting proximity to same. The suggestion that the

Duchess has been touched and contaminated by impairment is reiterated when Bosola arrives to murder her at Ferdinand's behest. In response to his declaration that that he has "come to make thy tomb", the Duchess feigns ignorance of his motives, asking whether he believes her to be sick, to which Bosola responds, "Yes, and the more dangerously since thy sickness is insensible" (4: 2: 114-119).

But it is in this scene, where she is most strongly implicated in sickness, that the Duchess is at her most morally admirable. The bravery with which she faces her death is sufficient to prompt Bosola towards repentance at last, and to shift his allegiance away from Ferdinand. Once again, the Duchess undermines Antonio's assumption of the logical alignment of physical frailty with moral corruption.

The Duchess of Malfi is, then, invested in a more complicated view of bodily frailty and diversity than that which is offered by John Fletcher and Phillip Massinger's *A Very Woman* (c. 1619-1622). But the play's portrayal of its most prominent disabled antagonist, Ferdinand, makes evident the limitations of said view, and reveals a contradiction at the heart of the text's attitude towards the disabled body and mind.

It is easy to argue that, to the contemporary reader, Ferdinand represents a particularly harmful stereotype of psychological disability. During his mental breakdown, as a result of which he is diagnosed with 'lycanthopia', a humoral imbalance prompting those afflicted to "imagine/ Themselves to be transformed into wolves" (5: 1: 4-10), he becomes a figure of horror, digging about in graveyards and attacking others at random.

Even prior to his pathologisation, he is a destroyer of domestic harmony and social stability, perversely sexual yet entirely celibate, self-centred and entirely without empathy; in many ways, Ferdinand seems an early modern manifestation of DC Comics' The Joker or Tinto Brass's Caligula. As such, he problematises any attempt to read the play as an example of an early modern celebration of disability. In arguing that the play works to dislocate disability from evil, it is difficult to get around the fact that the play's only overtly disabled character is also its foremost and most grotesque villain. This is made particularly problematic by the presence of Ferdinand's moral opposite, Antonio, who is both an accomplished sportsman and enthusiastic lover - and thus an icon of healthy vitality - and a staunch upholder of the association between disability and evil.

But Ferdinand's status as the play's most foremost representative of severe disablement is complicated by his professed loathing of fleshly frailty, which is so severe that he describes the acts of eating and sleeping as an "idle, offensive, and base office" (1: 2: 14). This contempt for the requirements and vulnerabilities of the flesh also manifests in his scorning the prospect that bodies and minds may be altered by external intervention. After Bosola raises the possibility of the Duchess' being subjected to witchcraft "to make her dote on some desertless fellow she shames to acknowledge", Ferdinand pronounces his opinion on potions:

Away! These are mere gulleries, horrid things

Invented by some cheating mountebanks

To abuse us. Do you think that herbs or charms

Can force the will? Some trials gave been made
In this foolish practise, but the ingredients
Were lenitive poisons, such as are of force
To make the patient mad... (3: 1: 87-93).

The irony of this extract lies, of course, in the fact that Ferdinand will 'go mad' without any assistance from potions. But more significant is the fact that Ferdinand's disbelief in the power of "herbs or charms" to effect alteration in a patient runs adjacent to his willingness to speak of 'curing' his sister's disobedience via medical methodology; upon hearing of his sister's giving birth, he furiously insists to his brother that "We must not now use balsamum, but fire/ The smarting cupping-glass, for that's the mean/ To purge infected blood, such blood as hers" (2:5: 33-36). This is not merely hypocritical, but represents a resurrection of Antonio's rhetorical framework, in which immorality is linked to illness and must be 'cured' as illnesses as cured.

Further in keeping with this rhetorical approach, Ferdinand repeatedly deploys the language of pathology against his enemies. He warns his sister off remarriage by insisting that those who do possess livers "more spotted/ Than Laban's sheep" (1: 3: 12-13), and later, upon learning of her disobedience to his orders, declaring that "her fault and beauty/ blended together, show like leprosy/ The whiter, the fouler" (3: 3: 62-64). And like Antonio, he deploys metaphors of disability; when the Duchess confides in him her concern over rumours at court "touching mine honour", he replies, "Let me be ever deaf to it" (3: 1: 58). In addition to establishing himself as an enemy to disability as it

manifests in individuals, Ferdinand is, like Antonio, concerned with the prospect of disease threatening the embodied Malfian court. But where Antonio sees Ferdinand and others like him as the root of such ‘diseases’ as corruption and espionage, Ferdinand perceives his sister and her willingness to consort with a man of lower rank as having contaminated the body of the court, and dedicates himself to the eradication of her “infected blood” (2: 5: 36). This point is clarified by the Cardinal, who, in response to his brother’s wrathful denunciation of the Duchess in the wake of learning about her clandestine marriage, surmises that it is not only her disobedience that has enflamed Ferdinand, but her ‘tainting’ their rank; he asks, “Shall our blood/ The royal blood of Arragon and Castille/ Be thus attainted” (2: 5: 30-32)? In Ferdinand’s mind, bodily contamination such as that of his sister augurs contamination of the social hierarchy. In seeking to remove such contamination, he positions himself as the head physician of the courtly ‘hospital’ described by Bosola, “Where this man’s head lies at that man’s foot” (1: 1: 42).

As discussed, the Duchess’ own feelings towards bodies and their foibles stands in stark contrast. Unlike her brother, she comes to terms with the possibility of corporeal alteration, of ‘madness’ and, ultimately, of death. In the interests of engaging with the play from a disability-positive perspective, it is tempting to read the Duchess as championing what Davis perceives as a more valid notion of disability, one in which bodily ‘perfection’ is unattainable and impairment is ubiquitous and natural. By this reading, Ferdinand corresponds to Davis’ conception of the modern valorisation of the ‘norm’, in that he upholds a staunch belief in purity as an attainable quality - purity of

blood, of rank, of reputation, and of body. The fallibility of such a belief is showcased in the fact that Ferdinand himself is not corporeally 'pure'. Succumbing to psychological illness in the form of delusions that compel him to dig up bodies in graveyards as a result of guilt and grief incurred in arranging his sister's death, Ferdinand fails to meet his own standards. His loathing of his sister's bodily frailty and the 'disease' she represents results in his dying trapped within his own ableist rhetoric. Much as he sees his own end foreshadowed in the corpse of his twin after engineering her murder, he is, through his upholding of notions of corporeal purity and social hierarchy, complicit in his own annihilation.

Furthermore, Ferdinand's use of the metaphorical language of disabled villainy reveals its innate inadequacies. When deployed by the villainous duke, it becomes clear that the rhetorical linkage of illness to immorality has become a tool for obfuscation, a means of concealing true intentions - for by defaulting to such terminology, Ferdinand relieves himself of any obligation to identify the exact immoral action the Duchess has supposedly committed to warrant her punishment. The conflation of impairment with evil, when utilised by Ferdinand, is exposed as a tool of control and tyranny.

But instead of positioning *The Duchess of Malfi* as opposing the trope of disabled villainy, this reading only complicates the issue. The fact remains that Ferdinand is at his most terrifyingly villainous when he is most visibly disabled; while in his grip of his delusions, he brutally attacks his doctor, his brother, and his shadow. In this way, he recalls Paul Longmore's point that disability in literary villains 'unleashes violent

propensities that 'normally' would be kept in check by internal mechanisms of self-control' (134-135). The connection between disability and villainy is further reinforced in the way Ferdinand's disability is most prominent after his murdering the Duchess, suggesting that it is being used by the narrative to punish him.

So while the play does subvert the paradigm of disabled villainy it creates through Antonio's earlier rhetoric, said subversion is only partial; to be disabled is, in Ferdinand's case, clearly portrayed as losing a large portion of one's humanity as a result previous moral failings.

A further challenge to reading the Duchess as the play's champion of disability and Ferdinand as her antagonist is implied in Haslem's analysis. Her investigation into the outrageously 'grotesque' female form seems primarily interested in the normative functioning of a normative female body, albeit presented in a manner more public and overt than is deemed socially appropriate. The functional physicality of the Duchess' body - its voracious appetite, gastronomical and sexual, and its multiple pregnancies - are presented by Haslem as radically disruptive to the existing social order. But it is uncertain where this leaves bodies that are perceived as 'grotesque' not in their excessive functionality, but in their lack of functionality. For while the Duchess recognises and accepts the universal capacity for bodily frailty and diversity, and while implications of sickness and frailty surround her, she herself is never categorically positioned as impaired in the way that Ferdinand is.

This results in a paradox that bars reading *The Duchess of Malfi* as either clearly reproducing or deconstructing the notion of disabled villainy; the most progressive way of thinking about disability is presented by an abundantly healthy and physically normate person, albeit one who recognises her body's capacity for failure, while the most reductive way of thinking about disability is presented by a disabled person. To put it another way, while disability is not inherently villainous in Webster's tragedy, disabled people are nonetheless implicated as generators of villainy.

Chapter 2

‘He and such as he that overthrows all lawful government’: Villainy, Intellectual Disability, and Hierarchy in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* and George Ruggle’s *Ignoramus*

Allison Hobgood’s analysis of *Julius Caesar* (1599) describes the unique way in which a disability that is mostly undetectable to the naked eye counters early modern cultural discourses surrounding disabled bodies. She writes:

...*Julius Caesar* performs the ‘falling sickness’ as a disability that thwarts this ableist demand for control over the non-standard body. Epilepsy’s muddled signification as divine, pathological, wondrous, intemperate, heroic, and depraved only begins to hint at the slipperiness of its categorization. By exposing how these discourses, even in their differences, consistently assume epilepsy’s visibility on the body, the play complicates the idea of early modern disability as an observable physical phenomenon to instead posit a more complex notion of disability as less overt or legible. Shakespeare’s play reveals how epilepsy’s corporeal invisibility, even more than its discursive malleability, undoes the disciplining of bodily variation Renaissance culture undertakes (par. 3).

In the above extract, Hobgood suggests that Caesar's epilepsy - oft-referenced but never actually shown on stage - possesses subversive potential largely as a result of what she terms its 'corporeal invisibility'. In doing so, Hobgood opens up an intriguing discussion regarding a culture's assumptions about its ability to discern disability. For the purposes of this argument, I am particularly interested in the extent to which the 'invisibility' of certain types of disabilities makes those disabilities sites of special anxiety to abled audiences. While the cavorting madmen, leprotic skin, and violent delusional fits found in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612-1613) have all been read as highly visible signals of the horror of disabled villainy, in this chapter I examine how impairments that affect intellect and learning speed can, in their invisibility, invoke a certain, specific ableist rhetoric regarding disability's villainous potential.

Placing Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1602) in conversation with George Ruggle's lesser-known *Ignoramus* (1615), I argue that on the early modern stage, the invisibility of 'witlessness' - an impairment not marked by fits or physical manifestations of any kind - carries with it two alarming implications. The first is that said invisibility may allow witless people to infiltrate social positions to which they are not suited, and to resultantly gain power over the more intelligent, without being detectable to the abled until it is too late. The second implication is that the witlessness of such a person will be not simply invisible to others, but also to the impaired person in question; that is, a witless person might be too witless to recognise how witless he is, and thus might attempt to infiltrate the aforementioned lofty positions without realising how inappropriate it is for him to do so. When combined, these two factors generate a wealth of villainous potential around

the figure of the intellectually disabled person, and this villainy focuses on how the witless threaten social hierarchy.

‘Wise men’ and professional foolishness in *Twelfth Night*

Ascertaining the exact nature of the threat that witlessness poses to social harmony in *Twelfth Night* requires first establishing the claim that the play contains a dichotomous representation of the heroically witty and the villainously unintelligent. This contrast is both sharpened and complicated by the fact that the heroic wit in question is a professional fool, while the witless villain is a professional maintainer of domestic order. In order to dissect the latter – the play’s example of ‘real’ impairment – I must first scrutinise the former: Feste, the professional fool. Stanley Wells describes Shakespeare’s professional fools as characters who

... hover on the edges of the play’s action, enabled by their classlessness to move easily between high and low characters, glancing obliquely in anecdote, jest and song at the follies of their social betters... (139).

In Wells’ summation, the power of the fool lies in his ability to transcend the limitations of social niceties and class hierarchy under the auspices of entertainment. Fools may tease characters of higher rank and critique their actions without fear of repercussion. And, as this extract implies, fools exemplify a paradox since they are men who have a high level of insight into the ‘follies’ of others, despite being professionally categorised

as generators of follies themselves. This paradox, combined with their capacity for complex reasoning, and intricate wordplay, results in a commonality between such diverse figures as Costard of *Love's Labour's Lost* (1597), Touchstone of *As You Like It* (1603), *King Lear's* nameless fool (1606), and Feste. Despite their differences in motivation, manner and narrative relevance, Shakespearian fools like these present an idea of what it is to be intelligent.

This is ironic in light of the extent to which the history of professional foolishness is intertwined with the history of intellectual disability. Everett Neasman describes the 'charitable custom of royalty to keep an innocent fool, imbecilic or mentally retarded by birth, as an expression of alms', and how this tradition resulted in the early modern theatrical fool:

Since the clown was believed to be a simpleton incapable of comprehending late feudal law, he was immune to its corruptive forces. Thus, the court jester had a familial association with the court and was valued as a speaker of unblemished truths with impunity. As the court jester becomes the play actor, the gifts attributed to real court service find their way into dramatic plots. The clown's talents of profound situational insight, and language manipulation, and the ability to out think and outwit his adversaries allowed him to act deliberately simplistic, odd, or eccentric, in an attempt to entertain as well as advise (48).

Neasman posits that the lineage of fools is as follows; initially, a disabled person is employed as a 'natural fool', due to a combination of charitable impulses on the part of his or her employer, and the various spiritual connotations surrounding his or her type of brain. Thereafter, such fools have access to a unique social space in which they are free to say things others cannot. Early modern playwrights capitalise on the narrative potential of this space, creating characters who are able to access it and amuse the audience with their audacity, without imbuing them with any 'actual' impairment or lack of wit. That is to say, the theatrical professional fool takes advantage of the liberties historically granted to members of a certain category - 'real' fools - despite not existing in that category himself.

Of particular interest to my chapter is the fact that, in *Twelfth Night*, the wit of the professional fool is shown to have positive connotations - primarily in helping to maintain social harmony - *specifically* because said wit allows the fool to recognise and respect categories. Wit, in other words, serves a disciplinary function. Resultantly, they may safely and temporarily slide into categories to which they do not belong – categories of intelligence, rank, and religion - in acknowledgement of the fact that such transgressions are not 'real' and that all the fool is doing is what CF Goodey describes as 'mimicry' (140). Thus the professional fool may safely play at witlessness, tease those of higher rank, impersonate members of the clergy, and otherwise overstep categorical boundaries without ever actually challenging or undermining them.

First performed in 1602 at Middle Temple, *Twelfth Night* has drawn critical attention for the gender dynamics embedded in its romantic subplots, and also for its

investment in issues of class categories and social mobility. Mikhail Bakhtin supplies one of the most influential readings in this regard, arguing that that festivals such as Twelfth Night serve as temporary spaces in which early modern social hierarchies could be subverted and normal notions of propriety forgotten (46). Following Bakhtin, Barber proffers the 'safety valve' theory, which describes the festival as ultimately serving to preserve the aristocracy by dissipating social frustrations that might otherwise lead to rebellion (4). The steward Malvolio, by this account, represents a danger to the maintenance of hierarchy in his attempts to contain the festive excesses surrounding him. What is not featured in these critical interpretations is an examination of the role the intelligence binary - established in the interactions between the intellectually superable Feste and the witless Malvolio - plays in the threat presented to social stability in the course of the play.

One end of this binary - Feste's keen intelligence - is presented when the clown visits the grieving Countess Olivia. To redress her lack of cheer, he reassures her that her brother's soul is in heaven, while, in a masterful display of wordplay, using that same reassurance to chastise her for her excessive grief. In this way, he is shown to be a stabilising force, curbing disproportionate emotion and curtailing Olivia's proposed seven-year mourning period, which, given her unwed status, would not only leave her household without a high-ranking male authority figure for an extended period, but would also risk her dying in the interim without producing an heir - both prospects that threaten the social harmony of Illyria.

Moreover, the exchange between the lady and the professional is the first illustration of the latter's ability to slide between categories because, despite their difference in rank, Feste is able to briefly countermand Olivia's authority. When she orders his removal, he uses the guise of foolishness to pretend not to understand, and claims that she - being a fool in her excessive grief - must wished to be removed herself (1: 5: 65). His gambit is successful, and he is allowed to remain. By sliding into the category 'foolish', the clown is able, for a moment, to overrule his employer's direct instruction, which troubles traditional hierarchical distinctions.

But even as Feste displays this ability to transgress categories, he affirms his understanding of his own true categorical placement, reminding Olivia that "I wear not motley in my brain" (50). This statement serves three purposes. Firstly, it establishes a distinction between true foolishness and the pretence thereof, setting up dichotomous categories of cleverness that will be further solidified as the play progresses. Secondly, it confirms that Feste belongs to the category 'intelligent', his foolishness is but another part of his costume, the accoutrements of 'real' foolishness belying the truth of his brain. Thirdly, it showcases his ability to recognise categories and to situate himself appropriately within them. Feste's true categorical placement is later reinforced by Viola, another wearer of costumes:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool
And to do that well craves a kind of wit;
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,

The quality of persons, and the time,
And, like the haggard, cheque at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practise
As full of labour as a wise man's art
For folly that he wisely shows is fit
But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit (3: 1: 29-37).

In this extract, Viola at once lauds Feste's intelligence and establishes that professional foolishness is skilled labour, requiring a high level of insight into the minds of one's audience and, accordingly, a capacity for wit. More important, however, is her articulation of the paradox of the professional fool; the more intelligence a person is, the better they are able to play at being unintelligent.

From the first, the power of the professional fool is derived from an awareness on the part of his audience of the existence of people whose witlessness is not pretence. In this way, professional foolishness requires the acceptance of a binary between those whose brains can perform certain functions to a high standard and those whose brains cannot. The other end of the binary is nested within Viola's praise of Feste, in aid of which she raises the figure of the fool's opposite number; "wise men, folly fall'n", who "taint their wit". These are non-professional fools, men who commit foolish acts by accident, despite being categorised as non-foolish. And while the professional fool's intelligence is indicated by how well he is able to perform foolishness for the pleasure of his audience, the non-professional fool's foolishness is indicated by how hard his

foolishness is for his onlookers and for himself to detect; Maria, Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch must go to considerable lengths to strip the play's 'wise man' of his pretensions towards wisdom.

The 'wise man' in question takes the form of Olivia's steward, Malvolio. Grounded in grim practicality and convinced of his own non-foolishness, Malvolio is staunchly opposed to the excesses of the festival and unable to understand or participate in the creative chaos surrounding him. In positioning Feste in contrast to the steward, Viola surmises the inevitable tension between the professional fool and the 'real' fool, through which the play produces a testament to the moral worth of intelligence and the villainous potential of witlessness. This is first signified when Olivia asks Malvolio's opinion of Feste's efforts to cheer her:

What think you of this fool, Malvolio? Doth he not mend?

MALVOLIO

Yes, and shall do till the pangs of death shake him; infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool (1: 5: 38-41).

Here, an early indication of Malvolio's witlessness is shown in his failure to properly situate the professional fool in categorical terms. Faced with Feste's professional foolishness – which, although historically rooted in real disability, as per Neasman's analysis, has by now been established in the text as simply the pretence of disability

concealing an extensive, nimble intellect - Malvolio invokes “infirmity”, misplacing the performance of disability alongside actual, corporeal disability. In bringing the spectre of physical impairment into the realm of professional foolishness, he muddles the binary established by Feste between professional foolishness and real foolishness.

But his confusing categories of intelligence foreshadows a more dangerous categorical confusion. When he delivers his summation of professional foolery to Olivia, the first hint of Malvolio’s failure to understand where the boundaries of categories of rank lie emerges. After proclaiming his surprise that Olivia ‘takes delight in such a barren rascal’, Malvolio notes that:

Unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged. I protest, I take these wise men, that crow so at these set kind of fools, no better than the fools’ zanies (1: 5: 41 – 45).

In this extract, Malvolio expresses his contempt for those who are amused by Feste’s antics, holding them responsible for giving the professional fool a platform on which to perform. But Malvolio neglects to consider that Olivia herself is his adversary’s primary benefactor and audience; in seeking to insult Feste, the steward’s verbal clumsiness leads him to indict one of his social betters.

That Malvolio’s first attack on rank-based hierarchy comes as a result of his inability to skilfully manage his words is significant, given that Feste - as critics have

noted - is a cunning wordsmith who, in his interaction with Olivia, displays his ability to use his words to critique his social betters without challenging their power (Janik, 188; Mahood, 167; Neasman, 234). Compared to Olivia's self-described "corrupter of words" (3: 1: 33), Malvolio is verbally untalented. This is emphasised again when Maria, questioned as to her motivation for tricking the steward, extemporises on his pomposity and high opinion of himself. Both of these traits, she argues, are indicated in the way he "cons state without book and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself, so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him" (1: 3: 150). This line establishes that although Malvolio believes that his pretences towards a sophisticated level of articulacy win him the approval of others, in actuality such artificial eloquence does nothing but earn their scorn.

In addition, when presented with Maria's forged note, Malvolio is quickly fooled by the formation of her letters, failing to recognise the content as inauthentic. Malvolio exclaims: "By my life, this is my lady's hand! These be her very C's, her U's, and her T's; and thus makes she her great P's. It is, in contempt of question, her hand" (2: 5: 51-53). The 'very coarse and vulgar appellations' which Sir William Blackmore first recognized in the above extract, which critics have since acknowledged as referencing Olivia's genitalia, fly over Malvolio's head (88). While Feste's puns invite the audience to laugh with the punner, Malvolio is oblivious to the amusement he engenders in Maria, Sir Toby Belch and Aguecheek. That this reiteration of Malvolio's verbal incompetence runs adjacent to his most serious assault on social categories - considering himself to be a

viable marriage partner for Olivia - suggests that the true danger of Malvolio lies not in his arrogance or his pomposity but in his essential witlessness.

CF Goodey examines the historical interplay between early modern ideas of intelligence and class divisions, listing honour, grace and wit as three complimentary qualities believed by early modern society to be the purview of people of high social status (80-87). Professional fools, he suggests, pose a threat to this paradigm. Their ability to 'mimic' genuine foolishness, despite not being 'actually' foolish, opens up the possibility that foolishness is a category with porous borders, not only occupied by 'real' fools. Of central concern to early modern society was that a person of high status might 'try to mimic the fools, thereby demeaning himself and his class' (140). I argue that one of *Twelfth Night's* contentions is that the real threat to social stability is not the professional fool, whose antics encourage the carnivalesque atmosphere that Barber argues supports rank-based hierarchy. Of greater concern is the prospect that an 'actual' fool might attempt to use the professional fool's powers of mimicry - or categorical sliding - without an awareness of what he is doing. Because of his witlessness, most prominently featured in his inability to skilfully wield words, Malvolio has first presumed to dictate the behaviour of his social betters and now has been deluded into believing that he might marry above his station.

The dire consequences of this categorical confusion are showcased once more in the final confrontation between Malvolio and Feste. After Malvolio falls for Maria's trick and appears before Olivia in his famous yellow stockings while grinning inanely, he is

deemed a mad man and locked away. Ivo Kamps scrutinises this act of pathologisation, arguing that *Twelfth Night* depicts madness as a process of becoming 'unintelligible' to one's peers. Shakespeare, contends Kamps,

uses the figure of Malvolio to explore again how a community diagnoses madness when a person fails to perform his known identity, but he expands the concept of unintelligibility to include Malvolio's failure to perform his social identity as a member of a certain class as well (234).

While Kamps' analysis is insightful, in my reading it is not that Malvolio is situated in a category of disability - 'madness' - as a result of his attempt to move beyond his rank. Instead, the play implies more clearly that it is Malvolio's existence within a category of disability - 'witlessness' - that results in his attempt to move beyond his rank in the first place. This failed attempt at mimicry makes visible to all his previously invisible disability, strips him of his powers of professionalism, and renders him vulnerable to pathologisation.

Moreover, Kamps does not take into account the significance of professional foolishness, against which the play's concept of true foolishness is made coherent, in the play's discourse of disability. This significance is reiterated after Malvolio's incarceration, for although the trick was Maria's, it is, appropriately, Feste - the maintainer of categories - who arrives to punish Malvolio for his social misstep. To do so, he dons the sombre garb of a curate to gain entrance to Malvolio's cell. This scene

lays out, once again, the different consequences awaiting abled and disabled men who move outside of their rightful categories. Feste receives no narrative retribution for impersonating a man of the church; instead, his clever act of mimicry gives him the power to torment Malvolio further. This mirrors the way in which, in his capacity as a professional fool, Feste slides into a social space historically reserved for disabled people and is able to take advantage of the privileges afforded by that space. By the end of the play, he surrenders his curate's garb just as Viola surrenders her own disguise before the assembled cast, in a symbolic reassurance that his category-sliding was, as always, only temporary.

By contrast, Malvolio, in donning colourful clothing, smiling outrageously and becoming a source of amusement for a noble audience, has not simply transgressed against rank-based hierarchy by attempting to move into the role of a suitor for a noble lady; he has also, unwittingly, tried to move into the category of the professional fool. But it has been established that Malvolio is an 'actual' fool, and when an actual fool takes on the role of a professional fool, he destabilises the intelligence binary on which the institution of professional foolishness in *Twelfth Night* rests. In this way, anxieties regarding intelligence operate in tandem with those of class distinction in this scene; Malvolio is as inappropriate a suitor for Olivia as he is a candidate for professional foolishness. It is as a result of both transgressions that he is so swiftly and so thoroughly punished.

In the end, the witty fool becomes a hero for his skill in moving across categories of intelligence, class and religion safely. The play, by contrast, frames the 'real' fool as dangerous because he cannot recognise categories and attempts to move into categories not his own - that of the clever professional fool and that of the nobleman - without an understanding of his limitations. In this way, *Twelfth Night* shows the villainous potential of the intellectually disabled person, which is illegible to the fools themselves as well as to others. Thirteen years after *Twelfth Night*'s first production, George Ruggle's *Ignoramus* would depict this threat in greater detail, and lay bare the terrible consequences resulting from the witless man's invisible disability.

***Ignoramus* and the disabled threat fulfilled**

Compared to *Twelfth Night*, George Ruggle's comedy *Ignoramus* has received comparatively little in the way of contemporary critical attention. A reinterpretation of Italian playwright Giambattista della Porta's comedy *La Trappolaria* (1596), first performed in Clare College, Cambridge in 1615, it has been commended by Jan Bloemendal and Howard Iorland for the way Ruggle 'extends the conventions of contemporary Italian drama, but he also harks back to the traditions of Roman comedy' (513). A common point of critical interest has been its representation of the legal profession. Robert C. Evans argues that it was 'one of the most notorious plays produced during James reign', on account of its having provoked 'controversies... between representatives of competing legal traditions' (64). The reading offered by Jonathan Walker and Paul Streufert reiterates this point; in their view, Ruggle intended the

character Ignoramus, who ‘can only orient himself using Latin tags or inappropriate terms of Law French’, to function as ‘a biting satire on English lawyers’ (91-92). No critic has yet read the play through the lens of disability studies, nor have they examined closely the way categories of intellectual ability are used to separate out those who have a legitimate place in the professional realm from those who do not.

The plot is labyrinthine, and, given the play’s relative obscurity, requires an outline: The twins Antonius and Antoninus are the intended husbands of Isabella and Catharina respectively, who are the daughters of the twins’ father’s wife’s previous husband from another marriage. Following Isabella’s abduction as a child by the Moor Urtado, Antonius and his father travel to Bordeaux, leaving behind Antoninus and Catharina with the twins’ mother. Antonius falls in love with the daughter of a dying Portuguese lord, Rosabella, who has been placed into the care of the pander, Rodrigo Torcol. The titular Ignoramus, a wealthy lawyer, has agreed to pay the sum required by Torcol in exchange for Rosabella’s hand in marriage, and much of the plot revolves around Antonius’ efforts to win Rosabella back by exploiting Ignoramus’ stupidity. Throughout the plot, Antonius is aided by ‘subtill Trico’, a servant and a deviser of complicated schemes, who assists his master in confounding Ignoramus.

Reading this play in conversation with *Twelfth Night*, the range of traits Ignoramus shares with Malvolio are striking. Both are professional men, bestowed with autonomy and a significant amount of power within their respective spheres. Both take themselves far more seriously than anyone else takes them. Both imagine rising above their rank by

way of marriage. Both are thwarted by the machinations of one of the protagonist's witty allies. But, while Malvolio, at worst, distracts the revellers from their fun and bewilders Olivia with his failed wooing, Ignoramus is an outright villain for the entirety of the play. Moreover, *Ignoramus* - as a city comedy, and all around less fantastical drama than *Twelfth Night* - depicts the threat of witlessness as closer to home, and thus, more dire.

The most sobering illustration of the villainous potential of the disabled mind found in *Ignoramus* comes in a conversation between the villain himself, his aides Dulman and Pecus, and the university-educated Musaeus, in the wake of a successful case. Ignoramus' lack of intelligence is made manifest by the juxtaposition of Musaeus and Ignoramus; Musaeus observes Ignoramus' gloating over having "tickled the points o'the'law" and confesses that he understood little of Ignoramus' legal tickling (1: 3: 18). Ignoramus despairs of ever making a lawyer out of him, and Dulman attributes Musaeus' lack of delight in their triumph to his having attended university. Replies Ignoramus:

These universitants are such idiots they'll ne'ere make good
Clerks; I wonder how thou hast spent thy time amongst them.

MUSAEUS

I have been busied most in Logick.

IGNORAMUS

In Logick? What town or city is that (1: 3: 28-31)?

The humour of this scene derives from the juxtaposition of the lawyer's contempt for university education, and his total ignorance as to what such an education actually entails. That Ignoramus' witlessness is showcased in a display of misguided confidence in his own correctness recalls Malvolio's failure to recognise his own lack of wit. While neither character is without depth or nuance, both are as ignorant of their own lack of intelligence as they are oblivious to others' reactions to their foolish pretensions. This lack of self-awareness echoes one of the more widespread misperceptions of intellectually disabled people in contemporary society, as described by Kelley Johnson; namely, that they have no 'inner life' and are thus unique among the disabled in not recognising their own 'deficiency' (172).

But Walker and Streufert interpret this scene not as an indictment of Ignoramus' innate witlessness, but as a comparison between two avenues of education, arguing that 'Musaeus' university education... stands as a beacon of rationality in comparison to Ignoramus' legal training' (95). Moreover, their reading contends that, by juxtaposing Ignoramus and Musaeus, Ruggle 'directly challenges English common law for its absurd and empty rhetorical constructions; thus the training of the English lawyer is mocked in relation to academic training' (93).

However, I argue that the true problem of Ignoramus is not that he is indicative of an ineffective education system. Musaeus himself implies as much when, in conversation

with the servant Trico regarding his mistreatment at the lawyer's hands, he offers a firm defence of the legal profession in the course of his denunciation of Ignoramus:

Aye, there are butt few of his like. Yet
There is noe calling but has wise and foolish;
I ever thought it an uncharitable thing
That only for the sakes of two or three
The whole order should be censured (which we find
To usuall now a dayes), for I know many
Of his profession, very judiciall men,
Eminent for their learning, and indeed,
Those are the men that should be honoured.
For there's noe greater enemy to knowledge
Then Ignoramus; this he and such as hee
That overthrowes all lawfull government.
And church and -

TRICO

Wee have enough of them fare 'em well (2: 6: 46 - 59).

Contrary to Walker and Streufert's reading, in this extract Ignoramus' lack is framed as distinct from his profession and education. Ignoramus himself is, by Musaeus' account, an anomaly in his field. But in addition to making plain that the problem of Ignoramus is

not that he is a lawyer, Musaeus describes in graphic detail the scale of the threat Ignoramus represents. In the broader context of the play, Ignoramus' severest act of antagonism - threatening to divide the protagonist from his lover - is comparatively small in scale. Now, Musaeus describes him as not simply a disgrace to his profession, but as the ultimate 'enemy to knowledge' and a fundamental threat to the stability of society. Moreover, Musaeus positions Ignoramus as symptomatic of a more widespread problem, envisioning an entire category "such as hee" who are due to receive the bulk of blame for the corruption of law and government. Ignoramus is, in the abled imagination, representative of a citywide infestation of Ignorami.

What, then, is the missing element hinted at by Musaeus, which is responsible for his master's failings, if not a faulty education? An answer to this question is supplied obliquely by the wit, Trico. Learning of Antonius' wish to visit Rosabella, Trico devises a means by which the young lover can circumvent the Deaf woman assigned by Torcol to guard his romantic prize. Taking advantage of Surda's reliance on sign language, Trico persuades her not only that her charge and Antonius have no amorous intentions towards one another, but also that he himself is enamoured of her. He declares:

Oh my little piece of deformity, composed of Nature's excrements,
Who can but admire this single-eyd, needle-nosd, maple-faced, wafter-chopt,
snaggle-tooth'd, hoop-shouldred, paper-gutted, brawny-buttockt, tun-bellyed
hoggs-head? Ah my little pretty, little handsome, little sweet, little bearded monkey.

SURDA

He is astonish'd at my beauty; oh that I could but heare my own commendations (1: 6: 34-40)!

Here, Trico exploits Surda's sensory impairment to at once exemplify his own skill with words and play-acting - in manner notably similar to Feste - and also to advance Antonius' goals of wooing and winning Rosabella. This mirrors the manner in which he makes use of Ignoramus' lack of wit to achieve Antonius' romantic ends; taking advantage of Ignoramus' reliance on Latin terminology as a means of disguising his witlessness, Trico spreads rumours throughout the community that Ignoramus has been possessed by demons. The damage done to Ignoramus' reputation ultimately results in his incarceration. And as in the case of Malvolio, the problem of Ignoramus is ultimately solved via pathologisation and institutionalization. Removed from the public gaze, he is tied to a chair and subjected to an exorcism by Trico, during which his efforts to defend himself by recourse to legal Latin terminology are deliberately misinterpreted as attempts to summon demons. Trico then escorts him to an asylum, where he is sequestered for most of the rest of the play, leaving Rosabella to Antonius.

This reading suggests that the play is framing Ignoramus' witlessness in much the same terms as Surda's deafness; that is to say, as an innate impairment, rather than the result of a faulty education. From this, it may be inferred that the nature of the threat Ignoramus poses lies not in his miseducation, but in the fact that he is a witless man who, because of his disability's invisibility, has obtained access to the power of

professionalism. In his witlessness, Ignoramus lacks the skill to wield his undeserved power properly; instead, he unjustly wields it against better, cleverer men, to whom such power should rightfully belong. Like Malvolio, who was able to become a steward - and, consequently, to repeatedly challenge the authority of his betters - because his witlessness was undetectable, the danger of Ignoramus is his ability to slip through categorical filters undetected. This indicates the wider social anxieties Ignoramus plays into - for if a witless person can cross barriers designed specifically to keep him out of the realm of intelligent people, may he not just as easily cross through barriers of rank? And that is precisely what Ignoramus plans to do in marrying the noble Rosabella. Through his misuse of power, his bringing disgrace to a professional class, and his attempting to invade a rank not his own, Ignoramus demonstrates the full range of dire consequence of the illegibility of intellectual disability.

As in *Twelfth Night*, pathologisation intervenes to salvage the situation, becoming a stabiliser of categories by way of punishing those among the disabled who fail to adhere to their own categories. Although Ignoramus, like Malvolio, is arrested on false charges - regardless of his many sins, he has not actually consorted with demons - those false charges are only able to be brought against him as a result of displayed witlessness. Ignoramus's incessant use of Latin serves the same role as Malvolio's yellow stockings in signalling their hidden deficiencies to the world. Immediate incarceration and segregation from the rest of society are shown to be efficient methods for dealing with the anxieties evoked by people who violate hierarchy; the problems facing the legal system are solved when the corrupting element that Musaeus identifies is removed from the

professional sphere and forcibly situated in his pathologically appropriate category. In the context of the play, institutionalization is not a means of separating out those whose divergent neurologies require specialised accommodations. First and foremost, it is a means of neutralising those whose behaviour endangers social harmony.

The starkest contrast between Ignoramus and Malvolio appears in the manner in which they depart their respective plays. Following his humiliation, Malvolio is released and appears before the assembled lovers to air his grievances. In this final scene, he is allowed to regain some measure of dignity - as Kamp describes, the steward's final declaration 'prominently asserts Malvolio's right to speak out as a wronged human being' (242). Olivia acknowledges that he has been "notoriously abused", and, so far as can be ascertained, Malvolio has not lost his previous position of authority (5: 1: 340). But Ignoramus is granted no such dénouement. Having already been once dehumanised via the rumoured association with demons, a secondary dehumanisation is implied when a foxtail is pinned to his back in the final scene as a final insult.

A possible explanation for this lies in the fact that, while Malvolio has demonstrated a gross misunderstanding of categorical boundaries, the threat he poses never fully comes to fruition. He is, throughout the play, a servant, with no more real power than that which is given to him by his betters, and his effort to marry Olivia fails. Ignoramus, by contrast, has succeeded in penetrating a high status profession which, as the play establishes, he had no right to aspire to in the first place. In contaminating the ranks of the intelligent in becoming a lawyer, just as he attempts to contaminate the ranks

of the nobility via marriage, Ignoramus is, in essence, the threat of Malvolio come to fruition.

In both of these plays, invisible disability is intimately intertwined with the threat of social disharmony. In this, they echo a trend established in *A Very Woman* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, both of which contain examples of disabled antagonists whose improper behaviour disrupts the peace of their respective social circles. But while Ferdinand's coveting his sister's body and her wealth and Almira's rude rejection of a worthy suitor are immoral actions that ultimately result in their being punished with disability, in *Twelfth Night* and *Ignoramus* the hidden nature of a pre-existing disability is itself what threatens social harmony, as a result of the danger such disabilities present to class hierarchy and to the categories of intelligence which help to maintain said hierarchy.

Chapter 3

‘Wrinkles like troughs, where swine deformity swills’: Disabled Debauchery and Crippled Chastity in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s *The Changeling*, George Chapman’s *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* and Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*

Both John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) and George Ruggle’s *Ignoramus* (1615) depict disabled antagonists being undone by an excessive sexual attraction to abled people. Ferdinand’s obsessive lust for his sister drives him to extremes of jealousy and, ultimately, to murder, after which he suffers debilitating psychoses which neutralise much of his villainous potential. Likewise, the deaf Surda’s instant infatuation with Trico leads her to neglect her duty and leave her charge unguarded. In neither play does the attraction of the disabled to the abled result in a stable romantic union. But the extreme nature of Ferdinand and Surda’s lusts, combined with the clear impossibility of their attaining fulfilment in the context of their respective stories, does recall a pervasive paradigm in Western culture regarding the sexuality of the disabled, surmised by Anna Mollow as the paradoxical manner in which ‘ubiquitous cultural representations of disabled people in terms of sexual deficiency’ exist alongside ‘pervasive associations of disability with excessive sexuality’ (286).

In this chapter, I offer three examples of the way this paradigm manifests on the early modern stage, and make the case that the theatrical depiction of the disabled as sexually dysfunctional runs concomitant to a persistent subtextual anxiety at the potential of disabled desire to taint or destroy the romantic unions of the abled. This anxiety results in the vilification of the disabled person who attempts to behave as a functional sexual being. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) showcases the disabled body as - in Mollow's words - 'both lack (innocence, incapacity, dysfunction) and excess (kinkiness, weirdness, perversion)', in the form of a disabled man who forces his way into the sexual game (286). By contrast, George Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596) and Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607) both suggest that disability can help to facilitate the romances of the abled - provided the disabled display no desire whatsoever to participate in said romances themselves. Lastly, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) breaks away from the paradigm of disabled villainy, gesturing toward the hidden romantic potentials of disability in its capacity to strengthen marital bonds.

***The Changeling* and the disabled rapist**

First performed at court by the Queen of Bohemia's Company in 1622, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* has been read as a fictional rendering of the early marriage and scandalous divorce of Countess Frances Carr and Robert Devereux (Rose, 21; Hopkins and Steggle, 4). Accordingly, critics have been concerned with the play's depiction of womanhood and female sexuality. Judith Haber interprets the

play's heroine, Beatrice-Joanna, as evoking early modern anxieties over the dangers inherent in the transition from virgin to 'changeling' in the wake of marriage. Sara Eaton discusses the way that, in the play, 'public and private languages demonstrate both sides of the rhetoric of Courtly Love, the idealized language appropriate to wooing, and the private language reflecting physical corruption', and contends that both rhetorical strategies ultimately serve to repress female self-expression (277). What has received little critical attention is the way *The Changeling* uses the body of its main antagonist, De Flores, to establish the threat posed by disabled sexuality.

De Flores is one of three prospective romantic partners presented to Beatrice-Joanna, who is the governor Vermandero's daughter. Although her father intends her to wed Alonzo de Piracquo, Beatrice-Joanna is romantically enthralled by Alsemero, the play's central protagonist. Upon hearing Alsemero profess that he is smitten with her face, claiming to "love her beauties to the holy purpose" (6), she admonishes him for planting the roots of his love in her physical attractiveness:

Be better advis'd, sir;
Our eyes are sentinels unto our judgements,
And should give certain judgements what they see;
But they are rash sometimes, and tell us wonders
Of common things, which when our judgements find,
They can then check the eyes, and call them blind (1: 1: 71-76).

The sincerity of this reprimand is called into question almost immediately after it is uttered, when Beatrice-Joanna encounters the third of her suitors; her father's servant, De Flores. De Flores is infatuated with Beatrice-Joanna despite her oft-articulated loathing for him, the origin of which remains a mystery throughout their initial interaction; Beatrice-Joanna, when questioned by Alsemero as to the cause of her abrupt dismissal of De Flores, does not explain exactly what it is that spawns her dislike of the man. De Flores himself insists that she "knows no cause for it, but a peevish will" (1: 1: 107).

But thereafter, reflecting on Beatrice's disdain for his person, De Flores implies that it is his body that revolts her:

... she baits me still

Every time worse than other, does profess herself

The cruellest enemy to my face in town,

At 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,

But I know far worse has better fortune,

And not endur'd alone, but doted on;

And yet such pick-hair'd faces, chins like witches',

Here and there five hairs whispering in a corner,

As if they grew in fear of one another,

Wrinkles like troughs, where swine deformity swills,

The tears of perjury that lie there like wash,
Fallen from the slimy and dishonest eye (2: 1: 32-45).

In this extract, as in the case of Beatrice-Joanna's earlier admonishment to Alsemero, the play offers a perfunctory acknowledgement of the fact that external appearances are no guarantee of a prospective lover's value. However, the earnestness of the message is diluted by a gleefully detailed description of the full horror of De Flores' visage, invoking images of witches and swine, and by later events in the story, which reveal that De Flores' physical features were indeed an apt indication of "danger, or ill luck". Whether or not De Flores' unnamed condition causes him actual impairment or pain is never addressed; its primary importance is in establishing him as the least desirable of Beatrice-Joanna's alternatives.

Having demonstrated the first half of the disabled paradox - disqualified from the romantic game on account of his disability and thereby rendered sexless - De Flores soon lives up to the connotations of monstrous hypersexuality that make up the second half. Desiring to be with Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna attempts to persuade De Flores to murder Alonzo de Piracquo, her fiancé. She explains away her sudden tolerance for his presence by pretending to be taken aback by a change in his facial appearance, asking if he has met with "some good physician" (2: 2: 72). Bewildered, for "'tis the same physnomy to a hair and pimple/ Which she call'd scurvy scarce an hour ago", De Flores is nevertheless delighted at the attention (2: 2: 76-77). Having begun by minimising the negative aspects of his appearance, Beatrice then attempts to frame what ugliness remains as a laudable

trait: “Hardness becomes the visage of a man well / It argues service, resolution, manhood/ If cause were of employment” (2: 2: 92-94). Ugliness, Beatrice-Joanna now argues, is not an innately negative quality; when it manifests in men, it may take on positive connotations, becoming a sign of healthy masculinity. In the case of De Flores, she implies, ugliness may even be a romantic advantage, heightening his sex appeal, even as it detracts from his aesthetic appeal.

This moment is reminiscent of another, better known example of a man capitalising on the masculine connotations of his ugliness, an example found in Shakespeare’s *The Life of King Henry the Fifth* (1599). Following his victory over the French army, Shakespeare’s Henry V presents himself to Princess Katherine of Valois to ask for her hand in marriage. Positioned in the aftermath of Henry’s demonstrating his tactical prowess at Agincourt, this ‘romantic’ scene comes off as yet another calculated military manoeuvre on his part. Now he has secured France’s land, he will win her royalty as well. In the course of his short but strategic courtship, he woos the princess with a combination of flattery, self-deprecation and subtle threats. One particular tactic is the denial of his ugliness. Describing his face as “not worth sun-burning”, and himself as one “that never looks in his glass for love of any thing he sees there”, Henry apologises to the princess for his lack in this regard, framing it as a result of his soldierly nature and cursing his father’s militaristic ambitions: “...he was thinking of civil wars when he got me: therefore was I created with a stubborn outside, with an aspect of iron, that, when I come to woo ladies, I fright them” (5: 2: 133-135). This strategic modesty serves two purposes. Firstly, it functions as a reminder that Katherine has, indeed, good cause to be

frightened of the young king's wooing; however charming and witty his courtship, Henry is a conqueror from a line of conquerors, under no obligation to allow Charles VI to retain his throne and no obligation to ask politely for the princess' hand. Secondly, it increases his sex appeal by reinforcing his status as a soldier, framing ugliness as a battle trophy and a natural result of the same "service, resolution, manhood" that Beatrice-Joanna praises.

Although both plays demonstrate some rhetorical framework for a defence of male physical strangeness, these defences are undermined by the suspect motives of their originators; Beatrice-Joanna wants her fiancé assassinated, and Henry desires a quick and convenient marriage. De Flores himself shortly proves how unreliable an indicator of masculine worth his ugliness is. Won over by Beatrice-Joanna's flirtation, he acquiesces to her request and murders Alonzo de Piracquo. Afterwards, when he comes to claim his reward, De Flores reacts with indignation to her offer of three thousand florins:

Do you place me in the rank of verminous fellows
To destroy things for wages? Offer gold?
The lifeblood of man? Is anything
Valued too precious for my recompense (3: 4: 64-67)?

Beatrice-Joanna attempts to double the reward, but only succeeds in strengthening De Flores' ire. After she asks that he leave the palace to avoid being caught and incriminating her, he attempts to kiss her against her will, and insists that she owes him

her virginity as payment. Moreover, he states that, if she does not yield to his demands and offer up her body, he will incriminate her himself: “She that in life and love refuses me/ In death and shame my partner shall be” (3: 4: 154–155). In De Flores’ ultimatum, Beatrice-Joanna’s earlier celebration of ugliness is roundly subverted. The reversal of their relationship’s power dynamic, wherein Beatrice-Joanna is made into his sexual servant, casts her praise of his ‘service’ in a darkly comedic light; he was only ‘resolute’ in expectation of a reward which was never offered; and the only demonstration of ‘manhood’ of which De Flores is capable is in taking a woman against her will.

In this way, *The Changeling* establishes the paradox of disabled sexuality. De Flores is at no point treated as a serious romantic rival to Alsemero, being sexually repulsive to the beautiful Beatrice-Joanna. At the same time, he is revealed as monstrously amorous, slaving over the first hint of sexual attention, and swiftly turning violent when said attention is inevitably withdrawn. In his inability to draw women to him by his own merits and his willingness to rape the object of his affections, he presents disabled sexuality as both lack and excess.

Moreover, the very idea of disabled sexuality is shown to be poisonous to the natural course of romantic coupling between the abled. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the psychologically disabled Ferdinand’s lust for his sister results in the sundering of the normative heterosexual family unit, separating wife from husband and mother from children. Similarly, in *The Changeling*, the disabled man’s desire to emulate an abled romantic partner taints and ultimately erases all possibility of Beatrice-Joanna and

Alsemero's union. After being stripped of her virginity by De Flores, Beatrice-Joanna is rendered a nonviable romantic partner in her own right, unable to participate in her own wedding night for fear of being discovered. In desperation, she asks a friend, Diaphanta, to secretly take her place. Shortly after, however, the union of Diaphanta and Alsemero is also annulled by De Flores' meddling. Consumed with jealousy upon overhearing Alsemero and Diaphanta consummating their 'marriage', Beatrice-Joanna asks for De Flores' help in disrupting it. He starts a fire in the room in which the two lovers are trapped, ending their festivities and killing Diaphanta, upon retrieval of whose corpse De Flores is publicly hailed as a hero.

In presuming to touch abled flesh reserved for better, abled men, the disabled man not only disrupts two potentially viable unions, but renders impotent the play's representative of healthy masculine sexuality; with one potential partner bereft of her virginity and the other dead, Alsemero is left alone. Upon discovering Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores' complicity, he confines both to a closet before deciding their fate. When, shortly thereafter, De Flores emerged having killed Beatrice-Joanna and commits suicide, Alsemero proclaims: "Here's beauty chang'd/ To ugly whoredom, here servant obedience/ To a master sin, imperious murder" (5: 3: 197-199). In aligning Beatrice-Joanna's transition from physical beauty into spiritual ugliness with her descent into 'whoredom' at the hands of a man physically and spiritually lacking, Alsemero sums up the danger disabled sexuality poses to the romantic games of the abled; sexual contact with the impaired not only disqualifies the abled from future 'healthy' unions, but risks imbuing them with the spiritual taint of disability.

The compulsory chastity of the disabled accomplice in *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* and *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*

Despite the grim picture painted in *The Changeling*, there are theatrical instances in which disability does not set fire to the abled marriage bed, but instead helps make it. George Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596) and Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607) are two such examples. Both make use of disability in a similar way; their respective romantic storylines are reliant upon the direct and indirect intervention of disabled men who, while unable to achieve romantic fulfilment or function as 'whole' sexual agents themselves, are nonetheless vital to the success of abled, heterosexual romances. In this way, space is provided for the disabled within the romantic game - but only on the condition that the subversive potential of disabled sexuality is undermined by having any erotic desires on the part of the disabled redirected towards supporting the romantic endeavours of the abled.

First performed in 1596 by the Admiral's Men to a widely positive response, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* has often been read as Chapman's satirical take on Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587) (Cole, 77; Margeson, 20; Waith, 124). The story concerns Cleanthes, a philandering con artist recently exiled from the court of Ptolemy. He devises a range of personas to advance his goals of regaining his reputation, becoming king, and seducing several women at once, among them the ill-tempered Count Hermes, the wealthy usurer Leon, and Irus, the oracular blind beggar. Of

interest to this chapter is the way blindness positions the Irus persona as handmaiden to the romantic games of the abled.

While Irus' disability is framed as a debilitating physical lack, it grants him access to spiritual endowments unobtainable by the abled. His endowments lure Ptolemy's wife, Queen Aegiale, to his cave outside the city, where she begs to learn the fate of the exiled Cleanthes. In the course of their conversation, the queen reveals that she harbours strong romantic feelings for Cleanthes:

Irus, thy skill to tell the drifts of fate,
Our fortunes, and things hid from sensual eyes,
Hath sent me to thee for advertisement
Where Duke Cleanthes lives, that was exil'd
This kingdom for attempting me with love
And offering stain to Egypt's royal bed (1: 1: 23-28).

As in *The Changeling*, allusion is made to the potentially positive connotations surrounding disability; just as De Flores' ugliness carried connotations of "service, resolution, manhood", Irus' blindness allows him to see 'things hid from sensual eyes.' This idea is further reinforced upon Irus' refusal of payment for his services, prompting the queen to exclaim, "Most rich is Irus in his poverty/ Oh that to find his skill my crown were lost!/ None but poor Irus can of riches boast" (1: 1: 87-89). In manner still similar to *The Changeling*, however, this idea is shortly undermined. Just as Beatrice's

commendations of De Flores' facial appearance were based in ulterior motives, so Irus' special 'sight' is revealed in the scene as nothing more than an elaborate trick. As the queen departs, the gloating Cleanthes drops his disguise, announcing to the audience his intention to scheme his way to the Egyptian throne, and, until then, to pass the time "in sports of love" (1: 1: 124).

Thus is Irus revealed to be twice a handmaiden to the cause of abled love, his initial abetting of the Queen's romantic desires merely a cover-up for his secret abetting of Cleanthes' sexual games. Regarding this second enterprise, Jean Macintyre has noted that Irus' blindness would serve another, more practical purpose: "The costume of Irus was probably one of the 'Hermetes sewtes' in Henslowe's 1598 inventory, a ragged loose garment, perhaps worn with a hood or bandages to indicate blindness and conceal much of the actor's face" (128). While in the story the clothing of the blind beggar serves to conceal Cleanthes' identity from a woman who, presumably, knows his face well, it also serves the playwright's purposes by keeping the face of the actor playing the play's hero hidden from the audience until the dramatic revelation.

But the usefulness of Irus' blindness is not limited to Cleanthes' sexual machinations. Beyond allowing Cleanthes into the presence of his former love interest, Irus' blindness functions as a marker of his status as a wise man, conferring sufficient cultural capital to make up for what Cleanthes has lost thanks to his ruined reputation. The utility of this social marker to Cleanthes' schemes is further demonstrated when Cleanthes attempts to convert the fictional wealth of Leon the usurer into actual wealth.

Presenting himself to Ptolemy in the guise of Leon, he accuses Leon's former client of failing to pay a debt; when said client insists that the debt was already paid, Ptolemy summons Irus, outside whose cave the transaction supposedly took place. When Irus claims to have "heard no penny tender'd, only proposed", Ptolemy decrees that "this holy man, no doubt, speaks what he heard", and orders the client to pay Leon the full amount again (1: 4: 176-188). The spiritual insight that his blindness supposedly bestows upon Irus also secures his reputation with the king and others as a truth teller, and this reputation enables Cleanthes' trick and Leon's riches. Irus' financial usefulness becomes apparent once again in the play's final act, when it comes time for Cleanthes to shed the garb of Leon and join in the military defence of Egypt, funding his campaign with a jewel earlier given to the blind beggar by Queen Aegiale in thanks for his advice.

However, it is Irus' role in Cleanthes' adultery that most clearly displays how the disabled may be of service to the romantic aims of the abled. As a result of the trust Irus obtains by tapping into the archetype of the blind oracle, he is made privy to the private concerns and sex lives of a variety of abled characters. Queen Aegiale, who facilitates his eventual return to court, only confesses her secret love for Cleanthes in the certainty that the blind recluse would not expose her to her husband. The exclusion from the normative social order that disability entails thus allows Irus voyeuristic powers which, even had Cleanthes not been exiled, he would not have had. In addition to this privileged perspective on the romantic game, Irus' blindness grants him substantial power to influence the game's players and its outcome. Having assured himself of Queen Aegiale's continued affection, and directing her to send out a decree pronouncing death

to any who endanger Cleanthes, the disguised conman observes the arrival of his two secondary love interests. The blind beggar serves Cleanthes' plot once again, as the sisters Elimine and Samathis seek information from the oracular Irus as to the whereabouts of their future husbands. Cleanthes has Irus inform them both that they will shortly meet with their ideal partners, who, naturally, take the forms of Hermes and Leon. In all these instances, the disabled Irus appears outside the circuits of sexual desire that the plot initiates. But this external position empowers him to influence these circuits, directing the lovers in whatever direction he opts; resultantly, although Irus does not have desire, he can conduct it.

The blind man is able to play puppet master over a host of romantic actors, his capacity to manipulate the romantic game exceeding that of the abled Cleanthes. Despite this, it is the abled personas of Leon and Hermes who enjoy the spoils of the beggar's oracular proclamations. For all his insight into and influence over the sex lives of others, the persona of Irus is entirely sexless. It is never suggested that Irus might serve as a sexual threat to Cleanthes; although Cleanthes' masquerade is later complicated as both Leon and Hermes' respective paramours are drawn into adulterous trysts with the other disguises, Irus is the one persona who does not participate. When the queen bids Irus to dismiss his servant Pego so that she may lead him instead, and thus confess her crime in private, Pego remarks "Would that I were blind that she might lead me" (1: 1: 22). But while it is recognised that Irus' blindness allows him greater proximity to the object of Cleanthes' desire, this proximity comes as the expense of an impenetrable barrier between the beggar and the pleasure enjoyed by the rest of the characters. Irus'

sexlessness is in the play's best interests, given the paradigm of disabled sexuality exemplified in *The Changeling* in which an attempt on the part of the disabled to draw from the sexual well ends up poisoning it for everyone else. In order for the disabled man to prop up abled romance, he must remain, at all times, a spectator. Irus' status as a holy man who purports to have foregone the sensual world is vital to neutralising the threat his disability might otherwise pose.

A similar neutering process is evident in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*, most often attributed to Thomas Heywood and first performed in 1607 (Howard, 60). The play opens upon the villainous Bobbington and Scarlet plotting a night of "thefts, murders, rapes and such like damned acts" (1: 1: 4). Coming upon them in the street, the maids Phyllis and Ursula call for help as they are attacked, summoning the attention of a disabled man referred to only as a Cripple - later revealed to be a drawer who works in the marketplace - who bravely defends both women. Bobbington bids his accomplice to "snatch away his crutches", and the Cripple is swiftly overcome (1: 1: 112). Helpless, the Cripple and the women call out for help, to which the able-bodied protagonist Frank Golding responds. Now in Golding's debt, the Cripple offers his service in the wake of Golding's newfound infatuation with Phyllis. Golding intercepts love letters from his brothers, both of whom are also in love with Phyllis, and, with the Cripple's help, forges two replies from Phyllis, refusing their suits. Moreover, when it becomes apparent that Phyllis has developed romantic feelings for the Cripple himself, Golding disguises himself as the Cripple - who makes plain his lack of interest in romantic interaction of any kind - and accepts her romantic overtures in his stead. Eventually, Phyllis is forced to

choose between her potential partners, and, following the Cripple's lack of romantic reciprocation, marries Golding.

Unlike *The Changeling* and *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* has been analysed from a disability studies perspective. Kelly Neil describes the interplay between disability and sexuality in the story, arguing that the Cripple's valiant but futile attempt at executing a heroic rescue is presented as a process of emasculation; physically overcome by his opponents, he is forced into the same perilous position as the sexually threatened women. Moreover, Neil reads the loss of his crutches - 'both prosthetic and phallus' - as a metaphorical castration (par. 5). Juana Green's interpretation reiterates Neil's point that the Cripple is feminised in the course of the attack. Green, however, portrays this feminisation as only temporary, drawing attention to the fact that early modern anxieties surrounding masculinity rose in proportion to a man's proximity to women:

From a post-Freudian perspective, Cripple's lameness could cause him to be read as an effeminised or castrated man whom the women love because they can control him. But from an early modern perspective, effeminisation results from associating too closely with women (1104).

By this account, in rejecting the games of romance other male members of the cast such as Golding and his brothers partake in, the Cripple reaffirms his masculinity. Regarding his ability to direct the romantic games of the abled without taking part in them, Green

deemphasises his disability, and focuses instead on the Cripple's status as a manifestation of authorial intervention - being a drawer, he, like the playwright, is a creator of art. In Green's reading, the Cripple is not desexualised, but is instead a sexually viable man who has redirected his erotic energy towards the marketplace.

While Green's account of the Cripple is rich and intriguing, I believe that the play may still be viewed as demonstrating the potential of the disabled to disrupt the healthy coupling of the abled, albeit in a far subtler manner than that of De Flores' sexual cannibalism in *The Changeling*. Golding's desire for Phyllis faces an obstacle when Phyllis, apparently not viewing the Cripple's disability as a detriment to their union, repeatedly declares her love for her would-be rescuer. But the threat is defused; the Cripple has no interest in romantic liaisons whatsoever, and so their potential union is rendered nonviable. In the wake of his rejection, Phyllis forms the anticipated union with the heroic Golding. So while the threat of disabled sexuality is raised - had the Cripple responded to Phyllis' overtures, the play's eventual happy ending would not have come about - it is neutralised by the Cripple's self-imposed chastity - his 'lack', as Mollow would have it.

Read in conjunction, these three plays suggests that, though the sexless disabled man is a lauded defender of virginity and a useful accomplice to the romantic plots of the abled, the sexual disabled man is a dangerous predator who sours the debauchery of both his own sexual relationship and that of any in proximity.

Swapped shoes and marriage in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*

But although disabled sexuality is a site of intense anxiety on stage, a play may also use sexuality and romantic games to deconstruct the tropes of disabled villainy, as indicated by crip theorist Robert McRuer's analysis of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. McRuer argues against the liberal model of disability's well-meaning tendency to disavow the diabolical Duke of Gloucester and the manner in which 'his 'deformity' ... is generally causally connected to his evil machinations' (295). Instead, McRuer suggests embracing the play's sundering of disability and 'good', insofar as 'good' entails the maintenance of normative family unit represented by the royal relatives to whose annihilation Richard is so singularly dedicated (295). Richard, says McRuer, may be enjoyed specifically because of the threat he and his disability pose to the unholy union of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, as this reading 'allows crips and queers to take pleasure in representations of any and every normal body's undoing' (298). McRuer's formulation of disabled desire is compelling in its efforts to rescue *Richard III* from the paradigm of disabled villainy without downplaying either his impairment or his wickedness.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to examine another work that may be read as deploying a novel and disruptive idea of disabled desire: Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday, or The Gentle Craft*. Arguably inspired by Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* (1597), the play was first performed by the Admiral's Company in 1599 (Smallwood and Wells, 17). Its central plot concerns the forbidden romance between the

noble Rowland Lacy and Rose, a merchant's daughter. A subplot portrays the rise of shoemaker Simon Eyre to the position of Lord Mayor of London. The play's depiction of disability has been largely critically overlooked, although its gender dynamics have received some attention; Ronda Arab contends that the rugged physicality and plain speech of the play's artisan protagonists is meant to stand in contrast to the powders and paints donned by early modern male courtiers with hopes of social advancement, and thereby celebrate the masculinity of the working class hero (47-48).

Of greater interest to this chapter than either the star-crossed lovers or Simon Eyre is the second subplot, which concerns one of Eyre's assistants, Ralph Dampport. Called to join Henry V's war in France, Ralph makes a gift of a pair of shoes to his newly wedded wife, Jane. In his absence, Jane is wooed by the wealthy gentleman, Hammon. By the time it has become broadly accepted that Ralph has been killed in the field, Jane agrees to Hammon's offer of marriage - somewhat imprudently, as Ralph returns to London having sustained a battle wound that has cost him the use of his legs. The play's secondary dramatic climax revolves around the question of who should marry Jane: the wealthy, abled Hammon, or the poorer, newly disabled Ralph. What is notable about this subplot is the fact that, unlike in the three previous examples of disabled sexuality on stage, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* allows for the possibility of the impaired body's being included within the circle of productive masculinity championed by Simon Eyre's workshop, and within the romantic games of the abled. Although disability does, at first, disrupt the course of abled love, by the end of the story space has been opened up in which to read disability as not simply compatible with normative masculinity, but a part thereof.

Upon first inspection, however, it seems as though this play will retread ground covered in *The Blind Beggar* and *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*. As Ralph's wound delays his homecoming, leading to his wife falling under the sway of a man who does not share his impairment, it is tempting to interpret it as another symbolic neutering. But centralising Jane's storyline allows the play to be read as tapping into the subversive potential of disabled sexuality described by McRuer. For it becomes apparent that disability may reinforce bonds of marriage and fidelity that might otherwise be taken for granted. Having decided to marry Hammon in the wake of her husband's 'death', Jane sends the shoes her husband gave her to Simon Eyre's workshop, to be repurposed into wedding shoes. Ralph, recognising them, marches on the church with a gaggle of fellow shoemakers in tow, to disrupt the wedding. When they reach the church and confront the prospective bride and groom, it seems as though a brawl will break out, until one of Ralph's allies suggests that Jane "choose her man, and let her be his woman". Jane responds by addressing Ralph:

Whom should I choose? Whom should me thoughts affect
But him whom Heaven hath made to be my love?
Thou art my husband, and these humble weeds
Make thee more beautiful than all his wealth.
Therefore, I will be put off his attire,
Returning it into the owner's hand,
And after ever by thy constant wife (5: 2: 27-33).

Jane's public declaration of loyalty and love for Ralph challenges the excess-lack paradigm contained in the previous plays. Ralph's surrendering the shoes to Jane foreshadows the loss of mobility he incurs in combat and, potentially, the loss of his status as sexually viable since he has no way of asserting himself sexually without his wife. It would be easy to read this in much the same light as the Cripple's losing his crutch - that is, as a metaphorical castration.

But the loss of his shoes is not the end of Ralph's participation in the sexual game. Taking up the shoes for which her husband now has no need, Jane becomes the more active partner, attempting to marry again and gaining the power to dictate the terms of her eventual reunion with her husband. As in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*, the disabled man's impairment positions a woman as wooer; however, unlike *The Fair Maid*, in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, this dynamic does not annul the wooed's status as a sexual being. In stark contrast to the Cripple's staunch chastity, Ralph is passionately eager to return to being Jane's husband, and their eventual reunion is celebrated as a restoration of the natural order, rather than a distortion thereof. While Jane, like Phyllis, expresses no reservation over desiring to be romantically bound to a disabled man, unlike Phyllis her desire is not an indication of the dangerous sexual freedom granted to women in the marketplace - as per Green's reading - but a sign of her own moral worth. While Phyllis' misguided romantic impulses towards a sexually nonviable partner are corrected, Jane's choosing Ralph showcases her own constancy and does credit to their marriage.

A similar contrast is apparent between the two plays' male romantic partners. Although the comparison between the abled Golding and Cripple is one of sexual 'wholeness' versus sexual sterility, in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the contrast between Hammon and Ralph ultimately reveals that Hammon loses in the game of desire. When Hammon's failure to win Jane is compounded by his failure to bribe Ralph into surrendering her, he declares, "Since I have fail'd of her, during my life/ I vow, no woman else shall be my wife" (5: 2: 53-54). Hammon's desire to forgo any desire marks the sexual sterility he embraces, a sexual sterility not unlike that of the Cripple.

Disability in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* continues the work left unfinished by *The Fair Maid*, presenting disabled sexuality as neither nonexistent nor excessive. Ralph's impairment reaffirms the strength of his marriage, and when Jane hands her husband back his shoes - both a token of his previously successful romantic conquest and a signifier of the abledness which his body no longer possesses - Ralph re-enters the romantic game immediately. Using soldierly tactics, he goes to war on the wedding with a small army at his back, and his display of physical prowess and normative desire wins him back his wife.

Herein may lie a clue as to why Ralph, unlike the Cripple, Irus, De Flores, Surda, or Ferdinand, is allowed to retain his status as a proper sexual being, neither chaste nor perversely predatory. As mentioned, Ronda Arab's analysis posits that Dekker deliberately challenges the mode of masculinity preferred by courtiers by presenting everyday heroes who celebrate physical, productive labour over discourse and idleness

(47-48). Said physicality is, Arab argues, imbued with patriotic connotations; the shoemakers' workshop is shown to be a vital centre of national and family life, and its leader, the boisterous Simon Eyre, wins the king's approval without surrendering his unapologetically rough manners. In light of this, it stands to reason that Ralph, having incurred his injury in service to his country, is not desexualised by his disability. Instead, in manner similar both to the coarse language and unchecked physicality of Dekker's shoemakers, and to the battle-hardened ugliness of Shakespeare's Henry V, his disability emphasises his willingness to deploy his body in the service of his country. My earlier point regarding the way certain forms of impairment may reinforce their possessor's placement within normative sexual categories seems to have some relevance here; Ralph's loss of mobility really does signify the "service, resolution, manhood" which De Flores lacked. This affirmation of his masculine worth offsets the distortion disability brings to the sexual realm, making his impairment into a feature that enhances his position in the sexual game, rather than disqualifies him.

Chapter 4

‘Ravens, screech-owls, bulls, and bears’: Mad Masques and the Dehumanisation of the Psychologically Disabled in John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton’s *The Honest Whore (Part 1)* and Dekker and Webster’s *Northward Ho!*

The disturbed sleep of John Fletcher and Phillip Massinger’s Almira in *A Very Woman* (c. 1619-1622), the violent delusions of John Webster’s Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), and the incarceration of Shakespeare’s Malvolio of *Twelfth Night* (1602) on false charges of ‘madness’ all serve to promote an idea of the psychologically disabled villain as someone who has, in some way, overreached. Almira not only callously rejects Prince Antonio’s romantic overtures, but attacks him with his own sword after he wounds Cardenes; her initial rudeness escalates into an unacceptable act of violence against a man who outranks her, transgressing boundaries of class and gender. Similarly, Ferdinand not only attempts to control his sister’s wealth and future through intimidation but also has her spied upon, incarcerated, and finally murdered to further his own ambition, while Malvolio not only assumes to chide his social betters but attempts to court one. In all these instances, an initial display of unseemly greed or ambition pre-empts a far more serious attack on normative social structures, after which the villain experiences a moment of mental crisis – or, in the case of Malvolio, has a crisis manufactured around him – resulting in the punishment of their villainy through

impairment or imprisonment. Psychological disability - here defined in Brenda Brueggeman's productively inclusive terms as both 'the loose popular cultural category of 'madness'' and as 'mental disorder, mental disability, psychiatric disorder mood disorder and mental illness' - is a reliable indicator of some previous act of immorality on the part of an early modern theatrical antagonist (293).

However, when psychologically disabled people are presented in a group, brought in en masse to entertain or terrify the sane, the villainous connotations of disability manifest differently. Instead of having storylines of their own, disabled people in theatrical mad masques or charity shows generally have only one scene to themselves; beyond vague one-liners about their personal history, we are not shown in any detail how they 'went mad', and as such we can only guess at how they transgressed in order to warrant such punishment. As a result, they do not reinforce Robert Burton's paradigm of disability as divine retribution in the way that singular 'mad' characters like Ferdinand's do. But even though mad masque participants are rarely, if ever, themselves central antagonistic characters, they do mobilise the discourse of disabled villainy, albeit in a different way. In their presentation, speech and behaviour, they connote chaos and dread, which places them at a distance from the play's moral centre. So although the immoral actions that lead to their punishment are deemphasised, the horror of the punishment itself - and, by extension, the horror of disability - is shown in a harsh light. Moreover, the extent to which the mad collective is dehumanised before the sane gaze is in excess of the level of dehumanisation brought upon figures like Ferdinand and Almira, who remain complex characters with some degree of agency and an important role in their respective

stories even after they have ‘gone mad’. Members of the mad collective are, by and large, flat, without agency and vanish from the plot after their one scene.

To demonstrate this dehumanization, I will return to John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612-1613), placing it in conversation with Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton’s *The Honest Whore (Part I)* (1604) and Dekker and Webster’s own collaboration *Northward Ho!* (1605). The first two showcase the discriminatory effects of theatrical mad group scenes, presenting a distorted image of ‘madness’ that simplifies and sensationalizes the disabled experience. The manner in which a plurality of disabled people is presented in these plays establishes psychological disability as an innately sinister force that leaves its victims bereft of selfhood, morality and reason. In the case of *Northward Ho!*, however, this paradigm is critiqued, indicating the contested vision of the disabled collective in this period.

Several scholars have analysed the historical realities of the psychologically disabled in the early modern period, as well as the medical, legal and cultural discourses through which competing ideas of ‘madness’ circulated through early modern society, and these analyses often incorporate theatrical texts (Salkeld, 1994; Neely, 2003; Jackson, 2005). Carol Thomas Neely makes the point that the professional male characters most prominently featured in theatrical mad masques and charity shows bear little resemblance to those who would have inhabited historical asylums such as Bethlem, who were ‘mostly poor, mostly old, and half women’ (189). Productive as these

discussions have been, my interests are in the specific literary tactics deployed on the early modern stage to render groups of disabled people as less than entirely human.

The first such tactic is the depiction of the disabled as largely homogenous, which appears vividly in *The Duchess of Malfi*. While other characters in the play are introduced sequentially, given names and histories and storylines of their own, the inmates deployed by Ferdinand to torment his sister arrive and depart in a group. The servant who introduces them gives them some measure of individuality by explaining to the Duchess their previous professions, and the event that rendered each one disabled: one is a doctor “that hath forfeited his wits by jealousy”, another is a tailor “craz’d in the brain with the study of new fashion”, and so forth (4: 2: 56-61). But the overall effect of the introduction is to imply that uniqueness and individuality are the purview of sane people, and that once sanity is lost, the disabled are an amorphous mass who all experience psychological disablement in much the same way. In addition, Neely posits that describing the former professions of mad masque participants in this way may serve to lessen an audience’s ability to empathise with the mad collective:

Their routines satirise, especially, city professionals with more prestige and authority than playwrights and players, skewering doctors, lawyers, merchants, and scholars for ambition, lasciviousness, and stupidity (186).

Neely contends that the city professionals most commonly featured in mad masques are those whose brains have succumbed to the excesses and vices endemic in their respective

professions, and are therefore at least partly to blame for their disability. This suggests that, as in the case of Almira and Ferdinand, the impairments displayed by mad masque participants are a form of narrative retribution for immorality, albeit that this immorality is not shown to the audience directly. In her recent analysis of the way socially inappropriate displays of excessive emotion inform the early modern understanding of ‘madness’ on stage, Bridget Escolme makes a similar point. Referencing Ferdinand’s inmates, she argues that the description of the inmates’ previous professions might not work to humanise them, but instead might mute an audience’s ability to relate to the inmates as fellow human beings: as she puts it, ‘It is not each madman’s fault, per se, that he has been incarcerated in the madhouse close to the Duchess’ prison – but his former authority reduces the likelihood that an audience should feel pity for him’ (70).

But far more effective in the dehumanisation of the disabled than these fleeting reminders of past wrongdoing is the behaviour of the inmates when they are presented. Their entrance is heralded by a song, which enhances the depersonalisation of the disabled experience:

O, let us howl some heavy note,
Some deadly dogged howl,
Sounding as from the threatening throat
Of beasts and fatal fowl!
As ravens, screech-owls, bulls, and bears,
We’ll bell, and bawl our parts,

Till irksome noise have cloy'd your ears
And corrosiv'd your hearts.
At last, when as our choir wants breath,
Our bodies being blest,
We'll sing, like swans, to welcome death,
And die in love and rest (4: 2: 71-82).

The song establishes the inmates as a “we”, an assemblage who will all perform an identical function - an assault on the sense of the sane - using identical tactics. They do not operate as individuals, but as a bickering hive, a homogenous idea of ‘madness’ that manifests identically in all it afflicts.

More significant, however, than the homogenisation of the disabled contained in the song is the way it characterises disability as a matter of extremes, as shown in the sharp juxtaposition between the final lines – ‘love and rest’ – and the preceding chaotic invocations of wild animals and clamorous noise. The inmates are at once sacred and profane, both a ‘blest’ choir and a pack of wild animals, howling and screeching and bawling. In Escolme’s brief analysis of this song, she argues that ‘through singing it, the performing madmen both demonstrate their complex humanity and comment on their animal-like state of distraction’ (79). To me, this reading is not wholly convincing, as I have difficulty reconciling the alignment of the disabled with animals with their alleged ‘complex humanity’. The inclusion of animal imagery seems to be a more straightforward indication of a loss of humanity on the part of the inmates.

The extent to which this emphasis on extremity works to vilify and dehumanise the disabled is also shown in the inmates' intense morbidity. After their arrival, they descend into strange arguments fuelled by their respective delusions, deploying apocalyptic imagery; the first claims that "Doom's day not come yet! I'll draw it nearer by a perspective, or make a glass that shall set all the world on fire upon an instant", and in response to this, the second states that, "Hell is a mere glass-house, where the devils are continually blowing up women's souls on hollow irons, and the fire never goes out" (4: 2: 72-78). DC Gunby finds these violent proclamations significant insofar as they reference Ferdinand's having created "a hell on earth" (par. 16). This reading points toward another significant factor in the theatrical dehumanisation of the psychologically disabled; namely, that their actions and words only have meaning insofar as they are relevant to the actions and words of the abled (Ferdinand, at this point, not having yet undergone his mental crisis). In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the mad collective is a conduit through which the playwright can comment upon the actions of 'real' characters. The essential meaninglessness of the inmates' behaviour is underscored by the fact that, despite the violence of the inmates' proclamations, they are not shown to have any 'inner life', to use Kelly Johnson's term (172). Like set pieces, they are brought in by Ferdinand, watched and remarked on by the Duchess, and then removed by Ferdinand. Because we have no insight into their personal feelings or motives, they are little more than reflective surfaces, in that their songs and their arguments have little meaning or worth beyond their relevance to sane people.

Beyond the specifics of the inmates' behaviour, the format of the masque itself enhances this reduction of the disabled to a veneer. Because the masque functions as in-story entertainment, enthralling the central cast just as it enthralls the audience, it creates a double layer of sane spectatorship. This has the dual effect of reassuring those watching that *their* sanity is not in danger - madness is kept at arm's length, so to speak - and also gives the playwright a heightened level of control over his audience's reaction to the sight of disabled people. The in-story audience serves as a filter, their reactions - horror, anguish or amusement - at the sight of disability guiding those of the actual audience. In the case of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the in-story filter provides the audience with two competing ways of reacting to the disabled: that of Ferdinand, who perceives the inmates as a source of horror and that of the Duchess, who subverts the audience's expectations by stating that she finds comfort in their presence since "Nothing but noise and folly/ Can keep me in my right wits; whereas reason/ And silence make me stark mad" (4: 2: 6-7). Although Ferdinand is the less sympathetic of the two perspectives on offer, the fact that both spectators are themselves implicated in 'madness' - the Duchess by self-diagnosis, Ferdinand by pathologisation - means that the question of which is 'right' remains unresolved.

Either way, neither perspective counters the dehumanising effect of this scene. In the first chapter, I argued that the Duchess' reaction to the inmates undermines Antonio and Ferdinand's paradigm of disability in which all sickness and frailty are an innate evil. Although this point stands, it does not change the fact that, even though Ferdinand and the Duchess have opposite views on the madmen, neither view works to humanise them.

To Ferdinand, they are tools to help him horrify his sister, while to the Duchess, they are a comforting presence that distracts her from her losses. Both perceptions are themselves extremes, not permitting a multivalent reading of disability – echoing the aforementioned notion that disability is itself a matter of extremes – and both promote the idea that the disabled exist to have their behaviour interpreted by the sane.

Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest Whore (Part 1)* reiterates this idea, along with many of the dehumanising tropes of the mad collective contained in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Likely first performed by the Admiral's Men at the Fortune Theatre in 1604, the central plot concerns the young noble Hippolito's infatuation with Infelice, daughter of the Duke of Milan (Mulholland, 280). Their parents oppose their union, and, to thwart Hippolito's courtship, the Duke fakes Infelice's death. While Hippolito mourns his love, the marital troubles of a successful merchant named Candido occupy the play's parallel plot. Candido's wife, Viola, is frustrated by what she sees as her husband's excessive good nature, and devises a range of schemes to test the limits of his temper. When all her efforts to anger him prove in vain, she has him committed to Bethlem Asylum under false pretences, a decision she later repents. Meanwhile, Hippolito has won the heart of the titular whore, Bellafont, who threatens suicide if he does not return her love. When she fails to move him, she has herself committed to Bethlem Asylum. All three plots collide when the Duke and his companions arrive at Bethlem, followed by Viola, to discover that Father Anselmo has married Hippolito and Infelice in secret. Prior to this revelation, however, Anselmo provides them with a charity show, bringing out the inmates of the asylum for the viewing pleasure of the visitors.

The most recent critical engagement with *The Honest Whore*'s use of psychological disability has not come from the quarter of disability studies but from the perspective of the psychiatric profession. In his book, *Separate Theatres: Bethlem ('Bedlam') Hospital and the Shakespearian Stage* (2005), Kenneth Jackson attempts to redress what he feels to be an inaccurate cultural understanding of early asylums like Bethlem and the shows they offered to the public. He critiques Michel Foucault's characterisation of early modern asylums as complicit in the 'Great Confinement' of the disabled, and places under scrutiny the historical veracity of theatrical charity shows such as the one depicted in *The Honest Whore*. Ultimately, Jackson argues that the grim 'Bedlam' into which the sane were invited to callously mock the disabled is a product of the theatrical imagination, and that early modern audiences understood the real public displays of disabled people offered by Bethlem Asylum as rooted in charity and genuine good will towards the unfortunate.

Despite the value of Jackson's contribution to a fuller understanding of the historical realities of the disabled experience, his effort to dismantle the infamous 'Bedlam' of whips and chains and to emphasise the charitable aspect of the historical asylum in his reading of *The Honest Whore* overlooks a crucial factor in the play's treatment of its disabled subjects; namely, it sidesteps the dehumanising effect of pity. That pity is a volatile topic within the context of disability studies, evoking deep anxieties regarding its capacity to infantilise, to position the disabled as dependant upon the kindness of the abled, and to strip the disabled of the right to interpret their own

experiences, is a point best demonstrated by the activist slogan 'Piss on Pity'. In an article written for the *New York Times* in 1981, prominent disabled activist Evan Kemp provides one of the earliest and most resounding critiques of what he called the 'pity approach' to disability. Regarding the telethons of the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Foundation and their tactic of presenting the disabled as figures of deepest tragedy to increase donations, he notes that 'playing to pity may raise money, but it also raises walls of fear between the public and us' (par. 6).

Because Jackson sidelines such concerns, his interpretation of Dekker and Middleton's play draws neither parallels between the fundraising tactics of the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Foundation and those of Bethlem Asylum, nor does it examine the way, within the play, the pity of the abled aids and abets the vilification of the disabled. This seeming conundrum is embedded in the welcome Father Anselmo gives to the visitors:

...gentlemen, I must disarm you,
There are of mad men, as there are of tame,
All humour'd not alike: we have here some,
So apish and fantastic, play with a feather
And tho 'twould grieve a soul to see God's image
So blemish'd and defac'd, yet do they act,
Such antic and such pretty lunacies,
That spite of sorrow they will make you smile,

Others again we have like hungry lions,
Fierce as wilds bulls, untamable as flies,
And these have oftentimes from strangers' sides
Snatch'd rapiers suddenly and done much harm,
Whom if you'll see, you must be weaponless (5: 2: 158-170).

Anselmo's welcome serves as both a warning and an enticement, building up anticipation of the spectacle to come by emphasising both the danger of the inmates and their wretchedness. Where Ferdinand's madmen were "ravens, screech-owls, bulls, and bears", Anselmo's are apes, flies, bulls and lions, and quite capable of posing a physical threat to those who have come to gawk at them. Notably, this vilification of the inmates as dangerous beasts does not lie at odds with the pity expressed by Anselmo towards his charges. His graphic description of those whose plight might "grieve a soul" as "blemish'd and defac'd" suggests that pity is wholly compatible with horror; it may even be enhanced by horror. These lines imply that the disabled inmates are not people in their own right but the denigrated remains of abled people.

Jackson uses this extract as indicative of the play's adherence to the reality of the historical Bethlem Asylum because he claims that it demonstrates the pure motives of Bethlem's maintainers. He points to Anselmo's insistence that 'in spite of sorrow they will make you smile' to argue that 'the show of Bethlem may have provided a perverse pleasure, but that does not contradict its charitable purpose. It elicits smiles and pity' (402). Escolme's interpretation of the welcome runs along similar lines, as she argues

that 'in this prologue to the Bethlem scene, the mad are no more subsumable into one humour - or stereotype - than the sane. Anselmo suggests that watching them will conflate pity and humour' (95). Shortly thereafter, she states that

the scene suggests that it was possible for the early moderns to find a madman amusing and simultaneously to empathise with him - indeed, to have a complex and shifting relationship with him as a human subject (95).

Both of these readings depict Anselmo's speech as encouraging a multivalent interpretation of disability, one in which mockery is tempered with pity - or, at least, one in which pity transforms mockery into compassionate mockery. Escolme, in particular, implies that the pity of the abled encourages the likelihood of their viewing the disabled as complex and fully human. But neither reading acknowledges Kemp's earlier point regarding the problematics of pity, and moreover, that the play shows pity and mockery to both be rooted in an assumption of the innate supremacy of the abled mind over the disabled. If anything, Anselmo's speech establishes that pity is just as effective in dehumanising the disabled as mockery, appearing as it does alongside a reintroduction of animal imagery found in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

In order to feel that even one of the inmates had been presented as a 'human subject', some indication as to his having an 'inner life' would have been necessary. As it is, Anselmo's inmates, when they appear, are bestialised and stripped of nuance in much

the same manner as Ferdinand's inmates. When the first - driven mad "by loss at sea" - is presented to the onlookers, he launches into a monologue:

Dost not see, fool? There's a fresh salmon in't. If you step one foot further, you'll be over shoes, for you see I'm over head and ear in saltwater, and if you fall into this whirlpool where I am, y'are drowned, y'are a drowned rat! I am fishing here for five ships, but I cannot have a good draught, for my net breaks still, and breaks, but I'll break some of your necks and I catch you in my clutches. Stay, stay, stay, stay, stay. Where's the wind, where's the wind, where's the wind, where's the wind? Out, you gulls, you goose-caps, you gudgeon-eaters! Do you look for the wind in the heavens? Ha, ha, ha, ha! No, no, look there, look there, look there! The wind is always at that door. Hark how it blows, puff, puff, puff (5: 2: 193-206)!

The wild animals and cacophonous noises of Ferdinand's inmates reappear in this extract. The fish, rats and gulls serve as the nautical equivalent of the "ravens, screech-owls, bulls, and bears" invoked earlier, while his mimicking the sound of the wind suggests that he too is a powerful but mindless force of nature. The narrative has already made this connection in Anselmo's welcome, and also in an exchange between the gallant Fluello and the asylum's sweeper, an erstwhile inmate himself, wherein Fluello says that "I perceive all sorts of fish come to your net" (5: 2: 143). And like Ferdinand's inmates, the nautical madman is made threatening to the onlooker by repeated references to violent death, this time in the form of drowning and snapped necks.

More significant, however, is the reestablishment of the idea that to be psychologically disabled is to be both eye-catching and essentially empty of meaning. Vocal and overwrought, Anselmo's inmate cycles through emotions quickly and without provocation, one moment insulting the onlookers, the next threatening them, the next pleading for their attention. The frequent instances of repetition in his speech suggest that, while the madman has much to say, little of it is new or meaningful.

This is a notion reinforced when Anselmo brings in two more inmates, promising the onlookers that these two are notably different; whereas the first was 'all words', the next two 'unless you urge 'em, seldom spend their speech' (259-260). But Anselmo's insistence on the diversity of his madmen seems unfounded; the next arrivals are just as verbose as the first. After the second inmate enters bellowing the word "whore" five times, he launches into the following speech:

Gaffer shoemaker, you pull'd on my wife's pumps, and then crept into her pantofles: lie there, lie there. This was her tailor; you cut out her loose-bodied gown and put in a yard more than I allowed her. Lie there by the shoemaker. Oh, master doctor, are you here? You gave me a purgation and then crept into my wife's chamber to feel her pulses, and you said, and she said, and her maid said that they went pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat. Doctor, I'll put you anon into my wife's urinal. Heigh, come aloft, Jack! This was her schoolmaster, and taught her to play upon the virginals: still his jacks leapt up, up; you prick'd her out nothing but bawdy lessons,

but I'll prick you all! Fiddler, doctor, tailor, shoemaker; shoemaker, fiddler, doctor, tailor: so, lie with my wife again now (5: 2: 274-289)!

Again, threats and emotional extremes - predominately irrational anger - are shown to be the hallmarks of psychological disability, while the use of repetition, both of the word “whore” and of “fiddler, doctor, tailor, shoemaker”, reordered immediately thereafter, gives the impression of a surplus of meaningless words. As in *The Duchess of Malfi*, this contributes to an overall impression of the inmates as surfaces without substance. The spectre of violent death returns as the second and third inmate fall to arguing, and in the course of their dispute the third inmate convinces himself that his “brains are beaten out” (306).

The mad collective present in Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest Whore* thus has much in common with that of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, insofar as both plays present a similar set of assumptions regarding the psychologically disabled. Firstly, psychological disability is a matter of extremes, most clearly indicated by loud, public breakdowns. Secondly, psychologically disabled people do not have lives outside of their conditions and are totally incapable of participating in normal social interaction. Thirdly, psychological disability involves a fundamental loss of selfhood and humanity, reducing human beings to the level of wild animals, and the duty of the sane is to tame and care for these human animals. This last point is reminiscent of Paul Longmore's description of the stereotypes perpetuated by the disabled villain, specifically the idea that disability involves the ‘loss of an essential part of one's humanity’ (134). Combined, these

assumptions promote a simplistic, sensationalised idea of disability that imbues the disabled with an aura of horror and power insofar as they are a spectacle to be watched. Moreover, the portrayal of such 'mad mobs' has the tangential effect of rendering the idea of a disabled community ludicrous. In neither play is there evidence of solidarity between the inmates in the face of the abled come to gawk at them; they are either solely interested in interacting with the visitors, or, when they do engage with one another, fall to vicious fighting. Consequently, the playwrights' attempts to arouse the audience's sympathy at the plight of the disabled feel like little more than another manifestation of the theatrical degradation of the disabled in the face of the moral superiority of the abled.

However, in Webster's collaboration with Thomas Dekker, *Northward Ho!*, likely performed for the first time in 1605 by the Children of St Paul's boys' theatre, the playwrights present a vision of the disabled collective unlike that which is contained in the aforementioned plays (Henke, 188). Although the structure of the scene in which a plurality of disabled people appear is similar to that of *The Honest Whore* - a gaggle of visitors assemble at Bethlem Asylum, wherein they are met by a caretaker and invited to gawk at the inmates - the disabled themselves are notably less dehumanised, and the prospect of disability itself is shown to be far less horrifying than the potential for a misuse of power by those whose role it is to care for and control the disabled. Such a different treatment of the disabled collective points to contesting views of disabled groups and of institutions in early modern culture, which in turn signify an incipient critique of the abled that is worthy of note.

The central plotline of *Northward Ho!* concerns the protagonist Mayberry's attempts to get revenge upon the gallants Featherstone and Greenshield for tricking him into believing his wife to have committed adultery. Aided by the poet Bellamont, he joins Featherstone and Greenshield on their journey to the town of Ware. Before they reach their destination, the group comes across Bethlem Asylum, and Bellamont, excited at the prospect of seeing the inmates, pleads that they stop and enter. Upon arrival, Bellamont is presented with two inmates: a prostitute and a musician. Fascinated, Bellamont engages them in conversation, while Greenshield persuades Mayberry to play a prank on the distracted poet. They inform the warden, Full Moon, that Bellamont is himself mad, and soon after, the poet is set upon by the warden and his assistants. After a short but violent struggle, he is released, and the group continues on to Ware with no further mention of the incident.

Like the aforementioned plays, *Northward Ho!* has received no attention from disability theorists with the exception of Kenneth Jackson, who provides the most recent interpretation of its depiction of a Bethlem charity show, focusing his attention on the influence of the Poet's War in the construction of the character of Bellamont. In particular, Jackson argues that the play's use of Bethlem can be interpreted as both a parody and a rebuke aimed at the poetic detachment and hubris of Dekker and Webster's contemporaries. I propose that this play may also be read as a reconsideration of the villainous potential of the disabled collective.

This is first evident in the fact that, while the previous two plays present their respective madmen as a tempestuous hive mind, in *Northward Ho!* there is evidence of an attempt to individualise the inmates. Only two are introduced to the onlookers, the first a prostitute “frighted out of her wits by fire” and the second a musician, driven mad “for love of an Italian dwarf” (4: 3: 56-64). The warden Full Moon, like Anselmo, claims to be in charge of a “diverse” array of inmates, but here, the claim seems somewhat substantiated; the prostitute and the musician have distinct characters, each with their own mode of speaking and manner of interacting with the visitors. The musician is noted to be “somewhat prouder and sullener” than the prostitute (4: 3: 132), but is also more readily drawn into conversation with Bellamont on the grounds of professional solidarity, declaring them “sworn brothers” (4: 3: 141).

While the inmates in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Honest Whore* readily bicker amongst themselves, the prostitute and musician do not bring with them the same atmosphere of volatility and meaningless aggression; in fact, they do not interact with one another at all. More significantly, although Full Moon references “unruly tenants” to whom he needs to attend before leaving the onlookers alone, such unruliness is not evident in the two inmates we are shown. They are less combative in their interactions with the onlookers than either Ferdinand or Anselmo’s inmates; indeed, the musician’s initial mild truculence is attributed to his profession – “so be most of your musicians”, notes Mayberry (4: 3: 133). They are also substantially less morbid; although the prostitute’s utterances are bawdy, referencing sex, miscarriage, urinals and syphilis, they lack any connotations of doom’s day, chaos and violent death. Wild animals are

referenced only once, when Bellamont refers to the prostitute as a “dancing bear”, and the correlation between disability and violent, primordial nature is much weaker (4: 3: 61). While some of the excesses of the mad group scenes in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Honest Whore* are present - both of them sing, the bawd repeats herself a few times, and both offer the onlookers mild insults - generally this is a far more down to earth, less ‘dramatic’ rendering of psychological disability than that which has been seen previously.

While this scene does offer the audience a moment of high emotion and threat, it does not come from the inmates, but from Bellamont, outraged at being set upon by the warden. Jackson, situating this scene within the context of the Poets’ War, argues that Dekker and Webster intend it to serve as an example of the dangers of poetic hubris. In Jackson’s reading, Bellamont’s poetic inclination to behave as a detached observer of society is challenged and corrected when he enters Bethlem and finds himself at risk of incarceration; in this way, the jest ‘is meant to help the poet keep his place in the follies of the world, as opposed to apart from it in solitude, judging, evaluating, critiquing, and, more simply, visiting and viewing without a clear sense of real human charity’ (149). Of greater interest to my chapter is the fact that this scene offers a radical revision of the paradigm of disability established in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Honest Whore*. The cordiality of the interactions between the visitors and the inmates, combined with the fact that the only moment of serious tension arises in the interaction between visitors and the warden dislocates the disabled from their previous position as the primary locus of horror. Now, it is the prospect that those who are charged with containing the disabled might, with the best of intentions, use their power improperly that becomes Bethlem’s

most unsettling feature. To put it another way, what is now horrifying is not disability itself, but the fact that to be disabled is to be vulnerable to having one's personal freedoms removed.

Moreover, the play shows that it is dangerously easy for anyone to fall out of the social safety net of sanity. Bellamont expresses a desire to visit Bethlem under the assumption that his personal categorisation as one of the 'sane' is sacrosanct. But upon entering, he discovers that madness is as much a matter of appearance and hearsay as anything else. An exchange between Greenshield and the warden reveals this:

FULLMOON

The old gentleman, you say? Why, he talked even now as well in his wits as I do myself, and looked as wisely.

GREENSHIELD

No matter how he talks, but his pericranium's perished (4: 3: 160-164).

In this extract, the play establishes that Bellamont falls out of the category 'sane' not as a result of any change in his behaviour, but simply because his erstwhile allies have testified against him. Neely's reading contends that Bellamont's 'brief false confinement' ultimately serves to maintain the binary between the abled and the disabled since the poet is able to assert himself as belonging to the category of the 'sane' and to use the authority of that category to regain his liberty (192). However, this scene also demonstrates some

level of awareness on the part of the playwrights of the dangers inherent in the theatrical understanding of 'madness' by making plain that, within its broad confines, even living up to a certain standard of eloquence and appearance is insufficient to protect one from charges of madness and the consequences accompanying them. Dekker's earlier collaboration, *The Honest Whore*, raises similar anxieties. The merchant Candido's behaviour is shown to be outside the confines of normalcy; his relentless patience in the face of adversity frustrates his wife and seemingly leaves him vulnerable to manipulation by his customers. But this abnormal quality is ultimately shown to make him a laudable member of society, as demonstrated in his entreaty to the duke upon his arrival at Bethlem, wherein he describes the same excessive patience for which his wife saw fit to incarcerate him as "the soul of peace/ Of all the virtues 'tis near'st kin to heaven/ It makes men look like God" (5: 2: 526-528). The ease with which Viola is able to capitalise upon such a positive quality to have her husband incarcerated speaks to an early anxiety regarding the power of pathologisation and the ways in which said power might be misused, at the same time that the play works to recuperate and even valorize the abnormal.

In the case of *Northward Ho!*, however, there is another level at work in the miscategorisation of Bellamont. Recalling Jackson's earlier point, it may be noted that the character is shown to be given to detached speculation, and his interest in viewing the inmates seems more voyeuristic than charitable. But while Jackson reads the fate of Bellamont as a rebuke aimed at early modern poets, I argue that the rebuke may just as easily be read as targeting Dekker and Webster's audience. This reading seems partially

supported by the way Bethlem is introduced into the text. En route to the town of Ware, the central cast happens to pass by the asylum, prompting Bellamont to suggest they visit:

BELLAMONT

Stay. Yonder's the Dolphin without Bishopsgate where our horses are at rack and manger, and we are going past it. Come, cross over. And what place is this?

MAYBERRY

Bedlam, is't not?

BELLAMONT

Where the madmen are. I never was among them. As you love me, gentlemen, let's see what Greeks are within.

GREENSHIELD

We shall stay too long.

BELLAMONT

Not a whit. Ware will stay for our coming, I warrant you. Come a spurt and sway.

Let's be mad once in our days. This is the door (4: 3: 21-28).

Bellamont presses for their detouring to Bethlem for no other reason than to gawk at charity show; in doing so, he behaves much like an early modern audience eager for the

theatrical spectacle of the psychologically disabled collective. But his attempts to derive pleasure from the sight of the disabled are thwarted, as he finds himself at risk of incarceration and made into an object of scrutiny in a Bethlem charity show. In this way, Bellamont's voyeurism indicts the hypocrisy of theatre-goers who derive pleasure from the sight of the mad groups, but would be horrified to find themselves counted among them.

Although these plays demonstrate contesting views of the most horrifying features of a plurality of psychologically disabled people, the greater trend is towards vilification. Said vilification is bound up in the spectacular nature of the mad group scene: while the threat posed to the stability and harmony of a community by characters such as Malvolio and Ignoramus is enhanced by the insidious nature of their invisible disabilities, as demonstrated in chapter two, in the case of the psychologically disabled collective, it is instead the extreme visibility of their disabilities that makes them monstrous.

Epilogue

Each of the aforementioned chapters showcases a particular way in which the early modern stage renders disability as an antagonistic force. Whether it manifests as a symbol of corruption and incompetence, as an indication of predatory sexuality, or simply as a horrifying spectacle, when disability appears in an early modern play, it often works in opposition to the play's moral logic.

This is not to discount the presence of admirable disabled protagonists on the early modern stage, such as the valiant Cripple of Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607). But the narrative distance between these characters and their disabilities lessens the impact of such figures as laudable representations of the disabled. That is to say, the impairments of villainous figures are intrinsically bound up in their villainy, while disabled heroes are heroic despite their impairments. An example of this contrast is Shakespeare's Duke of Gloucester in *Richard III* (1592) and his Caesar of *Julius Caesar* (1599). While Caesar's early death and the pre-eminence of the conspirators in the play makes his status as its central hero questionable, he is a far more admirable figure than the infanticidal Richard, so much so that Caesar's death is framed as a tragedy, rather than richly deserved retribution. Both rulers react to their disabilities differently. Caesar, as Allison Hobgood observes, denies the existence of his epilepsy,

maintaining a façade of abledness as his political opponents attempt to use his rumoured impairment against him (par. 25). In contrast, Richard - as noted in the introduction - frequently makes reference to his body and its perceived failings, relying on the strange shape of his arm to further his political goals when he uses it as evidence of Lord Hastings' having used witchcraft upon him. So while Caesar's stoicism is indicated by his denial of frailty, Richard's corrupt rise to power is advanced by his readiness to weaponise his disabilities.

The implication of this trend is that, to a greater or lesser extent, the basic ableist principles which Paul Longmore lays out in his influential text *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (2003) are, if not ahistorical, then at least not rooted in the contemporary era. Acknowledging this enables us to get a better idea of the lineage of current anti-disabled tropes and rhetoric. Of equal importance, however, is an acknowledgement of the disjointed nature of that lineage, for while there is a discernable pattern of playwrights linking disability to villainy, it is not consistent, monolithic, or even logical. In the plays examined, there are a number of competing models of the links between disability and villainy in operation. In some instances, disability leads to villainy; either the disability itself heightens a character's capacity for villainy, or else the resentment supposedly felt by the disabled towards their impaired bodies is shown to mutate into a desire to harm, murder and steal from the abled. But sometimes the inverse is true; the disadvantages conferred by disability may receive the most emphasis, as impairment and illness are brought upon those who have committed evil deeds in order to punish them.

Moreover, the exact mechanism whereby the disabled body or mind is made threatening is hard to pin down. Does it lie in the idea that disability can happen to anyone, even the politically and martially powerful, as in Ferdinand's case? Is it that disability is intrinsically linked to disorder and violence, as in the case of the mad masques? Or is it rather that disability can lead people, through ignorance or bitterness, to rebel against the natural social order, as in the cases of Ignoramus, De Flores and Richard? All of these ideas are put forward by early modern theatre, and even though all of them contribute to a general sense of horror of the disabled body and mind, none of them are entirely compatible; they are part of a complex, contradictory discourse on disability and villainy that nevertheless informed early modern audiences' perceptions of ability and its loss.

Lastly, although there is no cohesive vision of the disabled villain, the extent of the threat they pose, or the reason for the threat they pose, there is one recurring feature which bears notation. Examining these plays as a collective, it is apparent that disabled characters who are cast in a villainous light often covet something that is not rightfully theirs. Richard usurps the throne; Ferdinand desires his sister and her money; De Flores and Ignoramus lust for women above their station; one of the most oft-stated traits of the sickly Malfian court is a relentless hunger for social advancement and power. Disabled villainy is characterised by an excess of greed, or ambition, or lust; in essence, disabled villains want too much. Not only does the disabled villain want too much, but they want things - women, wealth or power - that rightfully belong to the abled. The disabled

villain's share is less than that of others - disability being figured as lack - and they act upon the desire to have more than their allotment by stealing from the abled.

In this way, the disabled villain is a social and economic menace. And just as it has been shown that disabled villainy is not a contemporary phenomenon, this notion of the disabled as socio-economically corrosive is one that Thomas Kiefer argues can be tracked back to Plato's conception of the ideal city. In *The Republic*, notes Kiefer, every inhabitant is suited for a specific function, which they are obliged to perform. In order to maintain order, an individual's consumption should never exceed the produce resulting from said function. Resultantly, Kiefer argues, those 'who are unable to perform their specialized function due to birth or accident both decrease productivity as well as embody a type of natural resistance to the internal logical consistency of an ideal city...' (par. 28). This seems in keeping with the early modern theatrical depictions of disability as a generator of disharmony that have been scrutinised. In fact, it is only when the disabled make up for their natural overconsumption by wanting literally nothing and being eager to offer their services to the abled for free that they are benevolent, as in the case of Heywood's Cripple.

So it may be concluded that the greatest threat implicit in the disabled villain and their intemperate wanting is a threat to a stable socioeconomic hierarchy, and that, resultantly, the disabled villain's primary role on stage is to connote and contain conflicts of class and rank. In essence, disability on the early modern stage becomes a way for

early modern culture to process greed and ambition in society, and the dangers to hierarchies that such greed and ambition produce.

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