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Recovering Disability in Early Modern England

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INTRODUCTION

Ethical Staring

Disabling the English Renaissance

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This is a book about difference, but more importantly, about how we stare at difference. As disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson remarks, “we don’t usually stare at people we know, but instead when unfamiliar people take us by surprise.”¹ *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* encourages us to stare at the extraordinary and to honor the surprise, discomfort, and bewilderment that come with noting the unfamiliar. Our book does not condone detached gazing but instead insists upon productive looking. The essays that follow play to our human penchant for “obsessive ocularity,”² asking readers to grapple with non-normative bodies and minds as well as the radically different social, historical, and literary contexts in which those bodies and minds were assigned and helped make meaning. This encounter with embodied difference and with a past that embodies that difference enables a reimagining of what we think we know about disability in an early modern context.

Toward this end, Garland-Thomson’s seminal rehabilitation of the staring encounter as a “conduit to knowledge” and “an opportunity to recognize one another in new ways”³ functions as a key logic shaping this collection. Following Garland-Thomson, we propose early modern disability studies, as exemplified by the essays assembled here, as a means for more ethical staring practices and hence robust and transformative scholarship. “Productive

interactions”⁴ with literary history and the representations produced therein require, in other words, new ways of looking. In its efforts to recover disability in early modern England, our collection suggests that we have not been staring hard or well enough at representations of disability right beneath our noses and, moreover, that the encounters we have had with those representations—the ways we stared upon finally recognizing them—should better reflect efforts toward ethical beholding. This *generous* stare at history, literature, and disability representation should, to borrow again from Garland-Thomson, “be understood as a potential act of be-holding, of holding the being of another particular individual in the eye of the beholder.”⁵

Certain social, cultural, and intellectual prohibitions, akin to those that police our daily staring practices, have made it difficult for early modernists to identify disability in their midst and, even more so, to acknowledge it as worthy of scholarly pursuit. *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, as it cements early modern disability studies as a field of inquiry, calls attention to what Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell have described as “the myriad ways that traditional fields have been willing to study their topic from a distance without embracing the ideas of disabled persons concerning their own predicament.”⁶ This collection invites readers to reflect on their own relationship to disability both now and in the English Renaissance and prods us to stare differently at disability, disability histories, and disability representations. It mandates that we stop refusing to look or that we, equally problematically, cease gawking unilaterally at the extraordinary; instead, it proposes engagement in a reciprocal interaction in which disability, disability histories, and disability representations stare back. This reciprocity and mutual recognition may cause unease in readers, but such is the price, and ultimate advantage, of ethical staring encounters.

As they practice ethical staring, these essays unapologetically make visible “urgent efforts to make the unknown known, to render legible something that seems at first glance incomprehensible.”⁷ They also, as good staring should, “[offer] an occasion to rethink the status quo,” presenting and corroborating Garland-Thomson’s insistence that “who we are can shift into focus by staring at who we think we are not.”⁸ This volume thus confirms that, as she puts it, “things happen when people stare.”⁹ In the case of *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, a proper beholding of the early modern English past in which we look ethically and with fresh eyes reveals a new disability history, a new early modern scholarship, and a new commitment to “redress the exclusion of disability and disabled people from our critical discourses, our scholarly imaginations, and our classrooms.”¹⁰

Disability Studies

In nearly all its iterations, our world is a place of compulsory able-bodiedness that insidiously excludes, stigmatizes, and devalues difference.¹¹ Disability studies and its attention to the non-normative uncloak this compulsory demand for ability and strive, as Snyder and Mitchell explain, “to operationalize some maneuverability for bodies deemed excessive, insufficient, or inappropriate on the basis of their impairments (actual or perceived).”¹² Disability studies also reveals how these “insufficient” bodies and persons, paradoxically, are made less visible the more they demand notice, or, as Tobin Siebers offers, “according to the logic of compulsory able-bodiedness, the more visible the disability, the greater the chance that the disabled person will be repressed from public view and forgotten.”¹³ As this collection uncovers narratives and representations of early modern disability, it first illuminates how normativity requires and rewards the repression or forgetting of disability difference. Second, the volume’s recovery work explores the potency of reading disability representation as a theoretical, practical, and political strategy for dismantling this ableist silence. Again, Siebers explains:

Narratives about disability identity are theoretical because they posit a different experience that clashes with how social existence is usually constructed and recorded. They are practical because they often contain solutions to problems experienced by disabled and nondisabled people alike. They are political because they offer a basis for identity politics, allowing people with different disabilities to tell a story about their common cause.¹⁴

Identifying and constructing new disability narratives in the English Renaissance unites the personal, political, and theoretical to unpack, and often to undermine, current cultural imaginations of disability. Together, the essays assembled here employ disability theory to read literary representations of non-normativity and, in doing so, expose ableist hegemony so as to resist and subvert its dominance.

With its interest in revealing the contingent and constructed nature of “normal,” disability studies appeals to professionals beyond the fields of medicine, rehabilitation, special education, social services, and civil rights. More pointedly, disability studies cultivates a wide-ranging audience in large part because of its interdisciplinary, intersectional, and strategically open theoretical nature. Historian Catherine Kudlick defines disability studies as “an interdisciplinary field dating from the mid-1980s that invites schol-

ars to think about disability not as an isolated, individual medical pathology but instead as a key defining social category on par with race, class, and gender.”¹⁵ As her definition makes clear, disability studies is invested in approaching disability “as a social category rather than as an individual characteristic”¹⁶ and theorizes difference through a complex, multivalent sense of what constitutes disability identity. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as its more recent amendments, leaves much room for interpreting disability and deliberately works against too narrowly defining the term: “The term ‘disability’ means, with respect to an individual: (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment.”¹⁷ While the ADA’s definition certainly addresses the “individual,” the looseness of its prescriptive categories (note the flexible language of “limit” and “regard,” for example) allows for broader theorizing about the nature of individual experience as it is situated in particular historical moments and cultural imaginaries.¹⁸

Since its inception, disability studies has theorized difference in a number of ways. As Simi Linton explains, “disability studies takes for its subject matter not simply the variations that exist in human behavior, appearance, functioning, sensory acuity, and cognitive processing but, more crucially, the meaning we make of those variations.”¹⁹ The field has defined and explained this meaning-making by responding, first, to a “medical model” of disability. This model, while instrumental in preventing disease and enabling human vitality, has been heavily critiqued for its pathologizing of difference. Under the medical model, individual impairment remains a personal matter that reduces disabled people to objects of medical scrutiny. It also assumes that disability needs to be “cured” and that pitiable, impaired “sufferers” crave the “health” and normativity that medicine might provide them.

Constructivist models of disability have resisted this pathologizing of difference by refusing to mark disability—and its associated impairments—biomedically. These models instead understand disability, and disabled people, as a sociopolitical category defined by common experience. Constructivist models are emblematic of New Disability Studies, whose goal, according to Garland-Thomson, is to “transfigure disability within the cultural imagination.”²⁰ “This new critical perspective,” she outlines, “conceptualizes disability as a representational system rather than a medical problem, a discursive construction rather than a personal misfortune or a bodily flaw, and a subject appropriate for wide-ranging cultural analysis within the humanities

instead of an applied field within medicine, rehabilitation, or social work.”²¹ Perhaps even more importantly, New Disability Studies makes visible the myriad ways that embodied difference “is part of a historically constructed discourse . . . [and] social process that intimately involves everyone who has a body and lives in the world of the senses.”²²

Two of the most dominant critical perspectives in New Disability Studies are the social and cultural models of disability.²³ As medieval disability scholar Joshua Eyler explains, these constructivist models “acknowledge both the specific, individual realities of people with disabilities and also the role played by society in constructing disability by imposing definitions of normativity and ability onto the social world, which consequently limits access, in all its forms, for people with physical and mental differences.”²⁴ The social model determinedly separates “impairment” from “disability,” suggesting that impairment connotes corporeal difference that becomes disability only when social obstruction denies access or accommodation for that difference. Lennard Davis clarifies this distinction: “Impairment is the physical fact of lacking an arm or a leg. Disability is the social process that turns an impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access.”²⁵

Contrastingly, the cultural model—sometimes described as the material model—reunites impairment and disability to “theorize [the] interactional space between embodiment and social ideology.”²⁶ This model attends to the ways lived particularity interacts with environment, and it especially understands the meanings and consequences of disability as determined by embodiment’s interface with cultural narratives, language, and representations. Materiality itself is a social process,²⁷ in other words, such that cultural narratives and representations of disability have the power to shape corporeal experience even as those narratives themselves are being shaped by the material realities of non-normative bodies and minds. This model responds to a certain dis-embodiment inherent in the social model by expanding “the social construction of reality toward a material-discursive understanding of phenomena and matter.”²⁸ The cultural model instead emphasizes the reciprocity between body and culture, between lived corporeal difference and social perception of that lived difference. It destigmatizes disability while still preserving individual, lived experience; as Eyler notes, it “allows us to take into account the entire spectrum of experience for people with disabilities and does not force us to focus on constructed perceptions of disability at the expense of real, bodily phenomena.”²⁹

As one might imagine, social and cultural models of disability are not the only concepts theorized in disability studies. Modern American literature

and disability scholar Michael Davidson, for example, conceives in his work of a “disability aesthetics.”³⁰ Interested in the formal nature of artistic works, he uses disability theory to articulate how disability shapes artistry and artistic production. For Davidson, the materiality of art depends on the materiality of the—often exceptional—body. His scholarship focuses on the “spectral body of the other that disability brings to the fore, reminding us of the contingent, interdependent nature of bodies and their situated relationship to physical ideals.”³¹ Davidson’s disability aesthetics foregrounds, in other words, “the extent to which the body becomes thinkable when its totality can no longer be taken for granted, when the social meanings attached to sensory and cognitive values cannot be assumed.”³² Following Davidson, who interrogates the crucial sense of defamiliarization and aesthetic distinctiveness embodied within, and prompted by, art, disability, and disability art, Tobin Siebers specifically theorizes the representation of disability in modern art to “return aesthetics forcefully to . . . the body and its affective sphere” and, moreover, to make “obvious” the relationship of aesthetic history to “the influence of disability.”³³ For Siebers, “disability aesthetics refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body—and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic”; this refusal forces reckoning with new perspectives and bodies that “test presuppositions dear to the history of aesthetics.”³⁴

Like these two scholars, Lennard Davis argues for a conception—and utility—of disability that moves beyond the social and cultural models. He argues, in *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*, for disability as the quintessential postmodern subject position. For Davis, all humans are “wounded” and disability is, therefore, the norm: “impairment is the rule, and normalcy is the fantasy.”³⁵ Furthermore, Davis understands disability as a provocatively unstable category that transcends identity politics.³⁶ Insofar as “disability” lacks internal coherence—people can fall in and out of disability (and disability identification) at various points in their lives, for example—it functions as hard evidence of the general instability of “identity politics” in postmodernity. The main problem with an identity group model, according to Davis, is its exclusivity, and disability’s inherent lack of fixity instead promotes a radical inclusivity that “create[s] a new category based on the partial, incomplete subject whose realization is not autonomy and independence but dependency and interdependence.”³⁷ For Davis, experiencing the body’s limitations provokes a usefully different universal, and this new “normal” “argues for a commonality of bodies within the notion of difference” and hence “create[s] a dismodernist approach to disability as a neoidentity.”³⁸

Disability Histories

Responding in part to Paul Longmore's call for "careful studies of disability-specific histories and contemporary experiences as the foundation for rigorous analysis of disability as a common category,"³⁹ *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* attempts to perform in early modern English studies what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have described as "a new historicism of disability representations."⁴⁰ Agreeing that the disabled body is indeed a "cultural artifact produced by material, discursive, and aesthetic practices that interpret bodily variation,"⁴¹ this book examines those variations as well as the various practices that constituted those "differences." Representations of non-normativity in the Renaissance serve for us as viable mechanisms for recreating, interpreting, and understanding a historically remote cultural imagination of disability. More specifically, this collection recovers disability in the English Renaissance by exploring the link between representation and embodiment. The essays in this volume undo the impulse to read early modern disability as predominately metaphorical, for example, and instead insist, as Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotić do, that "how experience is represented textually and how that representation is projected onto and via audiences are both central aspects of the experience itself. That is, the *representation* of disability does not exist separate from disability itself."⁴² Early modern representations of disability not only function toward metaphorical ends, in other words, but rather offer insights into the material, lived experiences of disabled individuals in the distant past.

As we have argued previously in a special issue of the open-access, online journal *Disability Studies Quarterly*, the notion of early modern disability is not anachronistic because human variation, though conceived of and responded to diversely, has always existed.⁴³ Careful excavation of this variation via representations from the early modern period requires sensitivity to how, as Lois Bragg clarifies, disability has been sequentially redefined over time⁴⁴ and hence how disability "looks" and "means" differently in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. "Disabled" was indeed an operational identity category in the English Renaissance, though it continues to be misidentified, or at the very least underexplored, in early modern scholarship. Many useful and important, though discursively and theoretically inflexible works, insist on inertly conceptualizing the marvelous, monstrous, and deformed, for instance, to describe early modern bodily difference. *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* resists limiting early modern disability as such. It encourages scholars who have been pursuing a kind of disability analysis, but overlooking the field's rich theoretical paradigm, to

explore the incisive ways disability methodologies might productively inform their work. In doing so, our book promotes an early modern disability studies that transcends static readings of disability in its premodern iterations—via stark categories such as “monster” or “fool,” for example—by recognizing how such iterations both explicitly and implicitly function in the theoretical context of contemporary disability studies.

To be clear, we are not advocating a wholesale appropriation of “modern” disability and its attendant language and ideas onto the Renaissance. Certainly, as Margaret Winzer points out, “the concept of exceptionality throughout history has not been static.”⁴⁵ We should, in other words, carefully contextualize even the notion of “extraordinariness” with which we began this introductory essay, acknowledging that the material conditions of everyday life in the early modern period support the assumption that impairments, especially physical ones, “were noticeably more prominent than they are today.”⁴⁶ Daily realities such as unchecked illness, unsanitary conditions, the perils of pregnancy and childbirth, and rampant war made the presence and visibility of disabled individuals in the Middle Ages and Renaissance more likely and hence, in certain ways, less exceptional. In his searching account of the history of western cultural responses to disability, Henri-Jacques Stiker clarifies that in medieval Europe, for instance, “normality was a hodgepodge, and no one was concerned with segregation, for it was natural that there should be malformations. . . . There was an acceptance, at times awkward, at times brutal, at times compassionate, a kind of indifferent, fatalistic integration.”⁴⁷ However, insofar as disabled individuals most often were “integrated” into medieval communities of the poor and indigent and, eventually, within early modern internment facilities for the “mad” and “incurable,” even less “exceptional” human variations in pre- and early modern societies came to be constructed, contained, and policed in very particular—and often notably disabling—ways.

We agree, that is, with Joshua Eyler on two counts: first, that early modernists, like medievalists, have too often relied on “easy stereotypes and one-dimensional paradigms as explanatory mechanisms” of disability;⁴⁸ and second, that an unthoughtful mapping of disability onto an early modern context is not necessarily a way out of this conundrum. Eyler suggests, and we concur, that we must innovate new models of disability studies that are historically specific and less broadly constructivist.⁴⁹ A historically oriented disability studies must, to echo Eyler, “scrutiniz[e] the very terms in which we talk about the subject in order to determine the degree to which such terms are relevant.”⁵⁰ This sort of ethical staring at disability representation has already begun in medieval studies, a field to which early modernists

might look for models of new disability history-making and intradiscipline dialogue.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, for example, initiates a critical reassessment of "'subjectivity' as something that occurs only in, through, and upon bodies, and only in somatic terms; and 'embodiment' as a corporeal process suspended in a psychical and social matrix."⁵¹ Cohen, we would argue, evidences an overt interest in disability matters; for instance, he discusses, in language that anticipates Garland-Thomson's *Staring*, the "visual and epistemological impossibility" of "comprehend[ing] simultaneously both the body of the giant and the human body as complex, totalized wholes."⁵² *Of Giants* never mentions disability, however, but rather strictly aligns itself with a psychoanalytically informed cultural theory. While we are not insisting that Cohen's book serve a disability purpose, we do want to draw attention to the fruitful conversation that occurs when this scholarship is augmented by a book such as David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg's *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity*. In an effort to elaborate the relationship between disability, deformity, and defect, Turner and Stagg's volume contextualizes "monstrosity" from within an early modern disability discourse. The chapters in *Social Histories* "set out to provide a more complex understanding of processes of devaluation associated with human anomaly in past societies" by exposing how "in the early modern period the concept of disability was subsumed under other categories, notably deformity and monstrosity."⁵³

As in Turner and Stagg's work, the ever-burgeoning field of medieval disability studies has fully embraced Lennard Davis's sense that the disabled body "is never a single thing so much as a series of attitudes toward it."⁵⁴ Scholars such as Lois Bragg, Joshua Eyler, Irina Metzler, Tory Vandeventer Pearman, and Edward Wheatley especially have worked to excavate, historicize, and understand those competing attitudes.⁵⁵ Valuably, these scholars productively disagree about the nature of disability in the medieval period as well as the discursive and methodological uses of contemporary disability studies in their field. For instance, Eyler and Metzler debate best practices around how medievalists should rely upon constructivist models of disability. In *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages*, Metzler employs a social model, starkly differentiating "impairment" from "disability" in order to make more visible the ways that physical difference is constructed as disability through social obstructions that deny access to non-normative bodies. Contrastingly, Eyler's *Disability in the Middle Ages: Rehabilitations, Reconsiderations, Reverberations* advocates for a cultural model of disability that acknowledges and unites

embodiment and corporeal difference. For Eyler, an ideal disability model is more broadly encompassing insofar as it fuses bodily experience and social perception.

Renaissance scholars should look to this compelling work in the medieval period as we forge our own early modern disability studies. As Metzler suggests, and the essays in this volume perform, our goal is not merely to “catalogue evidence of different impairments or ‘disabilities’ . . . , but to try and explain their meanings within a specific cultural context.”⁵⁶ Ideally, this new scholarship initiates an ethical staring encounter both across time and between disciplines. Renaissance scholarship should not single-mindedly benefit from disability studies, that is, but rather each discipline should generously behold the other. *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* is a book that holds appeal for both early modernists and contemporary disability scholars as it not only reveals the utility of disability studies to early modern scholarship but also advocates a thesis we have asserted elsewhere: “that Renaissance cultural representations of non-standard bodies might provide new models for theorizing disability that are simultaneously more inclusive and specific than those currently available.”⁵⁷

Like Kim F. Hall in the epilogue to her groundbreaking study *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, we worry that current tendencies to deem the study of Renaissance disability somehow anachronistic or to “impose absolute historical boundaries between early modern and contemporary constructions” of normativity provide us the unfortunate “luxury of *not* thinking” about such matters.⁵⁸ More precisely, these tendencies maintain and encourage ableist privilege especially in early modern studies as they dismissively mute—purportedly in the name of ahistoricity—socially responsible dialogue about anti-ableist politics and disability advocacy in both our work and classrooms. Forging alliances between disability and early modern studies, then, makes a number of important sparks fly, and it does so in a reciprocal manner across both disciplines. For example, new historicist impulses in Renaissance scholarship can shake up the now seemingly unspoken assumption in disability studies that the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries introduced “the systematized, divided structure of normal and abnormal bodies whose various disabilities are to be institutionalized, treated, and made into a semiology of metonymic meanings.”⁵⁹ Likewise, recent emphasis in early modern studies on gendered and raced bodies and their distinct corporeal materialities will enhance conversations in disability scholarship about how to attend more carefully to the deeply embodied nature of impairment. Conversely, employing disability studies contemporizes theoretically the processes of deep historicization engaged by Renaissance literary scholars and, perhaps more crucially, politi-

cizes work that might otherwise seem to function predominately as an apolitical reconstruction of the past and its modes of representation.

Early Modern Disability Histories

Our “Disabled Shakespeares” collection, published in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, set out to explore the unexamined ubiquity of Shakespearean disability representations. Those essays variously investigate the ways Shakespearean drama engages disability both on its own terms (via keen, new critical reading strategies, for example) and by squaring such non-normative psychophysiological representations within the sociopolitico-theological climates that furnished disabled selves with a range of cultural associations. Certainly, Shakespeare’s literary interest in staging disability begins early in his career, with numerous mutilated bodies in *Titus Andronicus* and the congenital deformity of Richard Gloucester in the first *Henriad*, and ranges through to his career’s end in the psychosomatic breakdown of Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale* and the extraordinary representation of the “savage and deformed native of the island,” Caliban, in *The Tempest*.⁶⁰ Between these book-ends, Shakespeare’s creative output encompasses a broad range of disabled selfhoods: it moves across a spectrum from bodily to metaphysical disfigurement, ranging from instances of blindness to limping, from alcoholism to excessive fat, from infertility to war wounds, from cognitive impairments to epilepsy, from senility to “madness,” and from feigned disability to actual. Our extension in this collection beyond Shakespeare into other early modern English disability representations similarly illustrates the cultural inheritance that pervasively defines ableist discourses and corporeal “norms” against disability and non-normativity. *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* thus takes as its impetus the ubiquity of early modern disability representations across the literary record, in canonical and noncanonical works alike.

Shakespeare’s consistent literary exploration of stigmatized, disabled otherness is, accordingly, not a singular fixation unique to his own characterological obsessions and literary output. Far from it: the humoral medical paradigm so important to Renaissance conceptions of the body, for example, sheds important light as we define early modern disability discourses. Early modern selfhood, in this somatic sense, can be construed as a historicized exploration of corporeal variation and difference that highlights the ubiquity of disability in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. After all, early modern theories of health and illness hinged upon the psychosomatic construct of embodied selfhood espoused by humoral theory, which flowered

in early modern England out of classical origins.⁶¹ It comes as no surprise to anyone interested in Renaissance literature and culture, of course, that illness, disease, and deformity serve as hallmark representations of the self during the period. But it is important to acknowledge that the fundamental concept of material embodiment as understood within humoral theory, in the relative mixture of the four principal humors (choler, sanguinity, melancholy, and phlegm), is implicitly based upon aberration, imperfection, and thus *corporeal difference*: excesses or deficiencies of these humoral components, early modern medical theorists insist, manifestly explain the very concepts of health and illness.⁶²

The normative states of flux and volatility that characterize early modern selfhood within humoral theory, further, center upon their involvement with a range of environmental stimuli—such as relative caloric and moisture registers—especially worthy of consideration in a disability context. Indeed, the very porousness by which humoral selves were conceived grants them what can best be understood as a receding horizon of normalcy. While the salubrious goal of individual health was an apparently rare humoral equipoise, such moments of humoral stasis were belied by the ostensible norms of humoral imbalance. The ubiquity of such imbalances, however, should not shield us from the stigmatizing otherness they facilitated, as Ben Jonson's grotesque humoral types reveal. At the same time, though, the dynamic, transformative representations of humoral selves in works by Shakespeare, among others, indicate the shifting and even volatile stuff of which the early modern self was composed. In this sense, early modern categories of disability must be perceived as far more labile than we today presume them to be.

Indeed, the diurnal and seasonal regimens prescribed by late medieval and early modern physicians—that of “purging” choler through bleeding, for example—indicate that before the discovery of the circulation of the blood by Englishman William Harvey was published in 1628 (Latin) and 1649 (English), and the gradual implementation of such observation-driven science over the latter half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the interactive flux of self and environment that constitutes early modern selfhood helps define embodied disability in the period. As Gail Kern Paster and John Sutton have shown, the transformation from humoral conceptions of the self to Cartesian modes of subjectivity, while far from immediate, was remarkable. With this shift, early modern theories of personhood changed from perceiving the self as humorally porous, and thus essentially unitary both in its integration of mind and body and its interaction with the environment, to an estranged concept of the self that stressed both its mind-body duality and its essential isolation from environmental situatedness.

This profound early modern shift in defining precisely what a self *is* becomes crucial to any understanding of early modern disability discourses. What Paster presents as the “semi-permeable irrigated container”⁶³ of the humoral self yields to the Cartesian self John Sutton describes as “a static, solid container, only barely breached, in principle autonomous from culture and environment, tampered with only by diseases and experts.”⁶⁴ Writing on the verge of this tectonic transformation from humoral to Enlightenment philosophies of mind, early modern English authors portray stigmatized illness, disease, and deformity—in a word, disability—by conceiving of it in ways that can simultaneously appear either entirely alien to current Western (that is, Cartesian) ways of thinking or, on the contrary, as utterly and even painfully familiar. Just as Erving Goffman and Lerita Coleman acknowledge that different cultures stigmatize differently, so too does humoral theory, as employed by English Renaissance physicians and artists, display hierarchies of value that stigmatize differences, both inward and outward.⁶⁵

Humoral theory thus offers one useful lens through which we might begin to engage the three rival methodologies most closely associated with disability studies. Each methodology, we would argue, responds differently to the material fabrics of embodiment as they are couched within humoral theory and other early modern philosophies of the self. For example, the first methodology, the medical model, quite literally medicalizes the humoral self as susceptible to various sorts of aberration and non-normativity—and such potentially stigmatizing medicalization can then serve as the narrative catalysts Mitchell and Snyder identify as narrative prostheses, or spurs to narrative. As they define the notion, stories frequently set forth disability as an aberration for which a narrative subsequently seeks to account by examining its origins and manifestation within the work. Ultimately, Mitchell and Snyder suggest, disability must be either rehabilitated or expunged: this “cure or kill” phenomenon thus medicalizes disability as it serves as an essentialist discourse that treats variation as pathology.⁶⁶

As we suggest above, two constructivist models have arisen within disability scholarship in reaction to this medical model: the social and the cultural. The social, particularly as it is taken up in our collection, identifies psychophysiological impairments (often tied to humoral aberrations) and suggests that those differences manifest within an early modern English cultural environment whose systemic barriers transformed impairment into disability. The rival constructivist model, the cultural, is represented as well in this volume and critiques the social model by accounting more deliberately for corporeality and embodiment, fusing lived materiality with social ideology and marking the ways disabled bodies and minds both shaped and were

shaped by their cultural environments. Subtending all three of these models as we present them here is the diminishment of disability framed merely as metaphor and, consequently, an escalating interest in early modern disability representations as embodied, early modern verisimilitude.

But against this burgeoning investment in such ostensible materialism, the tug of metaphor remains keen. Particularly in the theological realm, early modern disability depictions often present an explicitly figurative link whereby character disfigurements and impairments function, put simply, as penalties for sin.⁶⁷ This metaphorically driven discourse of disability is one Edward Wheatley has termed, using medieval examples, the “religious model” of disability, and it is traceable in medieval writers who Wheatley suggests generally script “exemplary texts featuring characters with disabilities [that] do not engage in what readers would call ‘characterization’ of them; [such characters] remain flat and emblematic, the site where God’s work can be made manifest.”⁶⁸ Wheatley proceeds to link, provocatively, medieval views on religion to modern medical views,⁶⁹ situating the two as adjuncts to the medical model of disability. Wheatley thus identifies “resemblances between [the] discursive power of religion in the Middle Ages and that of medicine in the modern world. At its most restrictive, medicine tends to view a disability as an absence of full health that requires a cure; similarly, medieval Christianity often constructed disability as a spiritually pathological site of absence of the divine.”⁷⁰ Where modern medicine, he continues, “holds out the possibility of cures through development in research[,] medieval Christianity held out the possibility of cure through freedom from sin and increased personal faith”; thus, in both schemas, “there is a tacit implication that somehow the disabled person is to blame for resisting a cure.”⁷¹

While the religious model certainly offers a useful groundwork for engaging premodern disability representations, Joshua Eyler rightly observes that medieval Christianity was surely far more multifaceted than this top-down approach allows.⁷² The tidiness of Wheatley’s religious model—similar to Metzler’s medieval social model, which, we would argue, too neatly demarcates “impairment” from “disability”—requires nuance and dynamism, especially as we approach the Renaissance era. We share in terms of our own historical focus, that is, Eyler’s call for disability “models that examine many different kinds of texts in an effort to determine how, precisely, medieval people viewed disability and how they rectified their religious views with the reality of corporeal difference.”⁷³ Such a pursuit, as it examines disability representations well beyond post-Reformation England, involves engaging a period of great cultural transition in which the turn from Roman Catholic

to Protestant ideologies—in all its fits and starts—produced a sea change in attitudes toward disability.

Lindsey Row-Heyveld's work notably takes up this radical shift and illuminates how an investigation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England requires that we complicate current medieval disability scholarship somewhat. More precisely, Row-Heyveld's work reveals that Wheatley and Metzler's assessments of medieval disability serve as but pieces of a decidedly more complex disability story in England ranging from the Middle Ages to the Reformation. "Disability in the Middle Ages was characterized by its important role in a system of spiritual exchange in which the non-standard body served as a conduit for God," explains Row-Heyveld; "this exchange granted people with non-normative bodies a level of subjectivity and spiritual agency that their early modern counterparts did not experience."⁷⁴ She clarifies:

In part due to the example of Francis of Assisi and the rise of the Franciscans in the thirteenth century, disabled people regularly engaged in a mutually beneficial exchange with the normative population. Able-bodied Christians gave them alms . . . and, in return, experienced an encounter with the divine facilitated by the disabled person. . . . In this capacity, people with physical impairments—commonly and ironically called "the limbs of God"—provided a necessary service to society. . . . This type of charity was not a one-sided act but a mutual exchange—salvation for alms, alms for salvation—with disability as the crux on which this commerce balanced.⁷⁵

While medieval theological doctrine initially integrated disabled individuals into a mutually beneficial exchange with able-bodied people, Protestant doctrinal focus upon human inner depravity and secularizing theological systems of charity led to a remarkable hierarchical disempowerment of disabled individuals over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As in so many other ways, that is, the English Reformation crucially transformed categories of sensory, somatic, and mental non-normativity. As Row-Heyveld has suggested, after the Reformation in England,

Prayers could no longer be purchased formally . . . and, therefore, disabled persons had no services to offer in exchange for the aid given to them. Without this tradition of spiritual commerce to frame an important mutuality between able-bodied and disabled Christians, their relationship quickly became solely hierarchical. . . . The goods and services that had

been traded in exchange for prayers or affirmations of salvation now simply became charity.⁷⁶

The cultural legacy we share regarding disability and disabled selves, in other words, has been preconditioned in part by these extraordinary shifts from premodern taxonomies of psychophysiological variation that facilitated mutuality toward an early modern, unilateral power hierarchy in which “persons with disabilities became objects to be acted upon rather than individuals to be interacted with.”⁷⁷ The essays in this collection, both implicitly and explicitly, confirm how the English Reformation foreclosed a more multivalent legacy of medieval Christian attitudes to disability and incited new challenges and complexities around disability—and the agency of disabled individuals—in the early modern era.

Disabling the English Renaissance

As they unsettle standard narratives about the English Renaissance and early modern subjectivities, the essays in *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* speak to one another across time, genre, methodology, and discipline. Sara van den Berg’s “Dwarf Aesthetics in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and the Early Modern Court” opens the volume by calling attention to often overlooked dwarf bodies in the Renaissance. Specifically, van den Berg examines the ways that Spenser’s fictional dwarfs compare with the lives of real dwarfs in the courts of early modern Europe. Spenser’s poem, in van den Berg’s account, “itself is a kind of court, where dwarfs play significant roles as characters and narrators” and hence, as a group, “chart the development of Spenser’s authorial narrator and the moral complexity of his allegorical fiction.” Like van den Berg, Emily Bowles rereads the stigmatized early modern body through an exploration of Restoration writer Aphra Behn’s fascination with the intersection of sexuality and disability. Drawing on Aristotelian and Galenic models of human sexuality, organs, and gendered traits, Bowles shows how Behn literalizes the relationship between defect and femaleness by satirizing contemporary social and scientific discourses that showcase “her awareness of the limitations that her contemporaries’ understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality placed on women’s bodies via representation of the slippages between desirability and disability.”

Interested in how cultural narratives of disability influenced early modern literary form, David M. Turner, Lindsey Row-Heyveld, and Rachel E. Hile all reimagine traditional literary genres from non-normative perspec-

tives. Turner examines English jest books and the ways disability humor “shaped meanings of embodied difference.” He argues that humor had the potential to “interrogate conventional wisdom about bodily norms,” and he redefines comic narratives of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as both evidencing and sculpting the English cultural imagination of disability and the social experiences of early modern disabled individuals. Similarly, Row-Heyveld reconceives genre but, in this case, with a focus upon the English stage. Her essay offers a new study of madness as disability as it reconsiders the role of “insanity” within the revenge tragedy tradition. She suggests that madness has an explicit narrative function in revenge plays, “making the morally ambiguous revenge tradition palatable for early modern audiences” and hence “facilitating the consumption of its ethically compromised but emotionally cathartic plot for audiences trained to condemn but hungry for vigilante justice.” Rachel E. Hile likewise examines genre and audience response but in the context of Spenserian readership. “Disabling Allegories in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*” illuminates how Spenser’s narrative mechanisms, allegory specifically, deploy disability. Arguing that reader response determines metaphorical meaning, Hile identifies the narrative ways Spenser calls on “his audience’s shared biases and preconceptions related to bodily differences” in order to achieve “desired moral interpretations.” According to Hile, Spenser’s impaired allegorical figures conjure disgust and rejection, leading readers to moral conclusions not through intellectual reasoning but emotional impulse.

In contrast, Simone Chess, Lauren Coker, and Marcela Kostihová focus squarely upon the materiality of bodily difference in the Renaissance. Chess’s essay, “Performing Blindness: Representing Disability in Early Modern Popular Performance and Print,” examines early modern interest and investment in medical knowledge and in lived experiences of the blind. Chess uncovers literary instances in which the metaphorical trappings of visual impairment fade in order to foreground blindness as an embodied physical condition that engages material, early modern disability concerns. Chess reads sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scientific texts, cheap-print ballads, and broadsides in order to explore “how examining these representations of blindness on the stage and in print (and, alongside them, representations of the adaptive technologies used by early modern blind individuals) can unsettle the relationship between seeing and knowing, disability and agency, blindness as metaphor and as experiential.” Similarly interested in embodied experience, Lauren Coker reads “disability drag” in Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* to stress how the metatheatrical staging of disability showcases the possibility of corporeal deceit via the disconnect between Volpone’s decision to appear ail-

ing while acknowledging his able-bodiedness to the audience. Coker argues that this metatheatrical imposture of disability accentuates Volpone's manipulation of social practices and institutions intended for the early modern ailing poor and likewise "undercuts the perception of disability as a material and lived bodily condition." Although the metatheatricity of Jonson's play reinforces social models of disability, Coker concludes that its deployment of disability drag provokes questions about embodiment and the "il/legitimacy" of disability that affect people of all social strata.

Marcela Kostihová, in "Richard Recast: Renaissance Disability in a Post-communist Culture," discusses the disability context of a recent, and "wildly popular," staging of Shakespeare's *Richard III* in the postcommunist Czech Republic. Kostihová pursues the ways in which a "particular case of disabling the Renaissance may feed off of—and feed into—contemporary political tensions surrounding the normative discourses of humanity, masculinity, and citizenship." As Kostihová explains, the major draw of the Czech production rested on the interpretation of Richard's famed "deformity" in casting disabled actor Jan Potměšil, a veteran of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, in the leading role. Kostihová observes the ways that Potměšil's performance "blurred the boundaries between the actor and character by foregrounding the actor's past in all promotional and evaluative materials, frequently as the defining feature of the production and of the entire collective." Kostihová outlines the cultural implications of fusing Richard's ambiguous "natural deformity" with Potměšil's accidental disability acquired in the process of political activism, suggesting that "this production's version of Renaissance disability, in its multivalent ambiguity, uneasily captures a postcommunist transitionality wherein (corpo)realities are in flux, the future multiple and uncertain, and the narratives of the past uncomfortably unsettled."

In essays by Mardy Phillipian, Jr., and Nancy J. Hirschmann, finally, we close by returning to narratives of the past to reconsider construction of the "individual" in Renaissance society. Phillipian's work engages the Book of Common Prayer as a "therapeutic" instance of textual accessibility in early modern England. He calls attention to a "methodological logocentrism" in the study of literary history, examining this devotional text as "a behavioral script that ushered those of atypical cognitive development into corporate religious and social life." More specifically, he argues that the Book of Common Prayer functioned in early modern England as an inclusive "textual apparatus" and "communicative mode" that uniquely made accessible to both disabled and nondisabled parishioners an emerging post-Reformation theological system of beliefs and practices. Nancy J. Hirschmann's "Freedom and (Dis)Ability in Early Modern Political Thought" likewise explores the

individual within the social body but through an analysis of Enlightenment conceptions of freedom in Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Hirschmann employs a disability perspective to reveal how early modern political philosophy defines freedom by depending on “a particular body with particular physical and mental capacities and orientations, a particular set of assumptions about what constitutes a human being, and a particular set of social relations that exclude disabled individuals from the role of political citizen.” She articulates, in other words, how for Hobbes and Locke “what the disabled body or mind can or cannot do shapes the parameters of what freedom can mean.” Aptly, Hirschmann’s work brings our volume’s historicism into the twenty-first century as it illuminates how these inherently ableist Enlightenment conceptions of freedom determine even our postmodern ideas about freedom and political citizenship.

Notes

1. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

2. *Ibid.*, 13.

3. *Ibid.*, 15.

4. *Ibid.*, 4.

5. *Ibid.*, 194.

6. Sharon Snyder and David T. Mitchell, “Afterword—Regulated Bodies: Disability Studies and the Controlling Professions,” in *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity*, ed. David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg (New York: Routledge, 2006), 179.

7. Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 15.

8. *Ibid.*, 6.

9. *Ibid.*, 4.

10. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Introduction: Integrating Disability into Teaching and Scholarship,” in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. Sharon Snyder, Brenda Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2002), 3.

11. See Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence,” in Snyder et al., *Disability Studies*, 88–99.

12. Snyder and Mitchell, “Regulated Bodies,” 179.

13. Tobin Siebers, “Disability as Masquerade,” *Literature and Medicine* 23, no. 1 (2004): 6.

14. *Ibid.*, 8.

15. Catherine J. Kudlick, “Disability History: Why We Need Another ‘Other,’” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (2003): 764.

16. *Ibid.*, 765.

17. See the U.S. Department of Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990: www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/pubs/ada.txt.

18. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (*Staring*, 1–2) clarifies how “disability encompasses physical, sensory, and mental impairments; illnesses; congenital and acquired differences thought of as disfigurements or deformities; psychological disabilities; stamina limitations due to disease or its treatment; developmental differences; and visible anomalies such as birthmarks, scarring, and the marks of aging,” which include “the naturally occurring or acquired bodily variations that accrue as we move through history and across cultures.”

19. Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 2.

20. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Beauty and the Freak,” in *Points of Contact: Disability, Art, and Culture*, ed. S. Crutchfield and M. Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 181.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), 2.

23. For further interdisciplinary and cross-continental conversation about disability models and representations, see the work of British scholars such as Colin Barnes, Len Barton, David Bolt, Mike Oliver, and Tom Shakespeare.

24. Joshua Eyler, *Disability in the Middle Ages: Rehabilitations, Reconsiderations, Reverberations* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 4.

25. Lennard J. Davis, *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 12.

26. Sharon Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 7.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept,” *Hypatia* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 593.

29. Eyler, *Disability*, 6.

30. Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 1.

31. *Ibid.*, 4.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 2 and 3, respectively. In *My Body Politic: A Memoir* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), Simi Linton mentions a number of such disability artists, including, for example, Homer Avila (194–212).

34. Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 3.

35. Davis, *Bending*, 31. In a world where humanist desires for completion and independence are outmoded modern goals, explains Davis, “the dismodernist subject is in fact disabled, only completed by technology and interventions” (30).

36. *Ibid.*, 23. Davis’s work responds to Jim Swan’s realization that “the accumulated stories of embodied subjects and voiced bodies cannot fail to problematize such [disability] categories and motivate a search for better ways to conceptualize disability”; see “Disabilities, Bodies, Voices” in Snyder et al., *Disability Studies*, 286.

37. Davis, *Bending*, 30.

38. *Ibid.*, 31, 26.

39. Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 11.
40. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 25.
41. Garland-Thomson, "Beauty and the Freak," 181.
42. Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotić, eds., *The Problem Body: Projecting Disability on Film* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), 4.
43. Allison Hobgood and David Houston Wood, Introduction, "Disabled Shakespeares," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2009): n.p. <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/991/1183>.
44. Lois Bragg, *Oedipus Borealis: The Aberrant Body in Old Icelandic Myth and Saga* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 167.
45. Margaret Winzer, "Disability and Society before the Eighteenth Century," in *Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 1997), 80.
46. *Ibid.*, 76.
47. Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 65. See also Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), chap. 1, esp. 7–8.
48. Eyler, *Disability*, 2.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 7.
51. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xvii.
52. *Ibid.*, xiii.
53. Turner and Stagg, *Social Histories*, 4.
54. Davis, *Bending*, 22.
55. In an early modern context and for a historiography of intellectual disability, see also C. F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and 'Intellectual Disability': The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).
56. Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking About Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400* (London: Routledge, 2006), 9.
57. Hobgood and Wood, "Introduction," *DSQ* (see n. 43).
58. Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 255.
59. Davis, *Bending*, 66.
60. See "Names of the Actors" for *The Tempest* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Andrew Gurr, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).
61. For primary sources engaging this topic, see, for example, medical texts by Philip Barrough, Timothy Bright, Robert Burton, and Thomas Wright.
62. The resurgent interest in early modern embodiment owes more to Gail Kern Paster's *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) than can be adequately stressed. Her *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 2004) and *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), coedited with Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, are equally significant studies for the ways in which they situate the complexities involved in engaging early modern humoral selfhood. Mark Breitenberg, too, in *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), present materialist readings of embodied selfhood that provide a crucial groundwork for the kinds of analyses that early modern disability studies will find indispensable in engaging early modern texts.

63. Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, 8.

64. John Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 41.

65. See Erving Goffman, "Selections from *Stigma*," and Lerita Coleman, "Stigma: an Enigma Demystified," in Davis, *Disability Studies Reader*, 203–15 and 216–31, respectively. Stigmatized humoral constitutions can be traced in the arc of Falstaff's shift from a jolly, ruddy, and sanguine disposition in *1 Henry IV*, to a melancholy, cold, and anemic one in *2 Henry IV*; Shakespeare provides a more immediate example in Hotspur's comical rage, identified as his "woman's mood" (1.3.237), against King Henry IV, at the beginning of *1 Henry IV*.

66. See Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*.

67. For more on this link in a contemporary context, see Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 69–75.

68. Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, 25.

69. According to Wheatley, "repeatedly in medieval literature, art, and religious teaching," in the religious model "impairment . . . functioned in ways largely structured by Jesus's miracles. . . . Indeed, proof that a potential saint had performed miracles while alive was integral to the canonization process, and paramount among those was the cure of impairments." *Ibid.*, 11.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*

72. Eyler, *Disability*, 7.

73. *Ibid.*

74. See Lindsey Row-Heyveld, "'The Lying'st Knave in Christendom': The Development of Disability in the False Miracle of Saint Albans," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2009): n.p. <http://www.dsquds.org/article/view/994/1178>.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*