Richard's Body Politic: Disability and Ability in Shakespeare's Histories

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Richard III is Shakespeare's most famous disabled character, yet scholars cannot define his disability. Though he is hunchbacked, limps, and has a shriveled arm, he has no need for crutches, canes, or other prosthetics. Other than wanting a horse, he never shows any physical limitations, and, in battle, actually "enacts more wonders than a man" (*Richard III* 5.4.2).[1] His society does not suppress him either, despite the ableist slurs sometimes hurled at him. Richard thrives, in fact, overcoming his brothers and rapidly taking the throne. Even romantically, despite his insecurities, he triumphs; he admits he "[is] not made to court an amorous looking glass" (1.1.15), yet, in the following scene, Richard woos the widow of a man he murdered, over the corpse of her father-in-law, whom he's also murdered—an extraordinary accomplishment for even the best looking. His disabilities do not really disable him. For Abigail Comber, "this is why Richard is such a slippery character for disability studies to tackle…a hunchback, the text tells us, yes; but a disability, the text tells us, no."[2]

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Much scholarly ink has been spilled to explain this contradiction. The most popular readings frame Richard's disfigurement as immaterial, monstrous figuration, making the question of his impairment irrelevant. Dazzling the audience with spectacular freakishness, his body is only a symbol, externalizing both his personal immorality and the nation's decay. Richard becomes, then, what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call narrative prosthesis.[3] The term means that Richard's disability simply exists for narrative ease. Richard was born deformed, which portended evil to a medieval and early modern audience, giving Richard little choice to be anything but the villain, and necessitating the story crush his deviance. Though some readings, vested in Richard's humanity, partially attribute Richard's villainy to his society's stigma—because he's treated like a monster by his so*ciety, he becomes one, lashing out at his 'able' world*—Mitchell and Snyder claim this humanity is the result of narrative forces, not social ones; his disability is still immaterial, metaphorical, and necessary to prop up the narrative.[4] This Richard is cartoonish, simplistic, inhuman, and contrived. To question the reality of his impairments, then, is a red herring, invoking a humanity and reality that does not exist, and we have no reason to consider his bodily abnormality anymore.

When attempting to truly focus on Richard's disability, scholars attempt to justify his abilities. David Wood, for example, claims that Richard dominates his world through his ability to operate quickly, under the guise of the "tardiness" we would expect of a limping cripple.[5] Even Mitchell and Snyder, though seeing Richard as a relatively straightforward example of narrative prostheses, negotiate with Richard's power. They claim that Richard actually uses narrative prostheses for his own gain, redefining his deformities when convenient: "Richard's character fashions disability as a full-blown narrative device that accrues force for his own machinations."[6] Through accepting and using his body as a vehicle, he can make up tenors; his deformities

become 'evidence' for his own lies. For example, Richard accuses Hastings of having consorted with witches to curse him with a "blasted" arm, despite having directly referenced its congenital origin in an earlier play, and despite everyone onstage and in the audience knowing that.[7] Nevertheless, they execute Hastings as a traitor (*Richard III* 3.4). Katherine Schaap Williams, finally breaking down the restrictions between disability and ability that Richard defies, claims that Richard is a dismodern subject.[8] Dismodernism, a term invented by Lennard Davis, amplifies disability/ability's categorical malleability and uncertainty, and highlights every single body's dependence upon technology to function in a modern word.[9] Williams argues that Richard uses his bodily narratives as his own form of technology, enabling himself and allowing him to overpower others in his world. The other 'bodies' of the play lack the same technology, allowing Richard to overwhelm them. Though Williams admits she uses dismodernism with "deliberate anachronism," the term suits Richard's bizarre abilities, particularly when compared with the other bodies in his play.

We've moved completely from the discourse of disability to accommodate Richard. This gravitational effect pushes Jeffery Wilson to admit his "reluctance to embrace *disability* as a useful vocabulary for Shakespeare studies," not least because of his worries about anachronism.[10] He cites Davis as saying that "disability was not an operative category before the eighteenth century," and so was not a way in which Shakespeare thought about difference. Wilson argues that Williams, Comber, and other disability scholars can argue about the social stigmatization of physical difference, yet cannot acknowledge "the *identity* of the characters and people we identify as disabled" (my emphasis). Shakespeare's texts, in other words, cannot offer insight into disabled experience. Previous scholars' analyses of disability in Shakespeare can homogenize other forms of difference—like racial difference and even bastardy—with disability, an act that Wilson says

"can distort the concept of disability." The only thing to do, Wilson claims, is alter our framework to a theoretical one, which, "rather than using disability theory to read Shakespeare's texts…can use Shakespeare's texts to generate and support theories of disability." Wilson's subsequent theoretical argument focuses only on the uncertain creation and establishment of stigma—of those who are 'normal' and those who are not.

Wilson's suggestion of altering our analytical framework is a good one, but I think homogenizing disability with the language of stigma is too broad, and his theory doesn't test well on the complexity of Richard's world. Rather than continue analyzing the language of stigma, and maintaining the definitions that clearly demarcate Richard as an "other," I will expand upon William's dismodernist analysis by examining the bodies and texts that surround Richard. Disability-centric readings of Richard tend to treat all the bodies around him as if they're normal, and as if his body is abnormal. They also tend to focus almost entirely upon a single play: *The Tragedy of Richard III.* However, *Richard III* is not a stand-alone play, nor is Richard confined to a single play. *Richard III* is the last of the first tetralogy, and, when originally performed, these plays would have circulated in the repertory together; their boundaries are insecure. Characters spill over into various texts, and the plays are enmeshed in the same thematic projects; they blur together in our minds. As Jan Kott puts it, "when we read the Histories in their entirety, the faces of kings and usurpers become blurred, one after the other," showing the porousness of the plays' boundaries, their repetitive construction, and their unified thematic focus.[11] These histories all wrestle with the relationship of bodies, identity, and power. Both the plays' textual dependence upon one another and Richard's bizarre ability indicate that our focus should expand outward.

When looking at Richard exclusively, his deformities are inherently fluid and contradictory in their meanings. In this essay, though I consider why this is, I argue that Richard's

meanings crystallize into a nuanced bodily theory when we expand our view to look at the bodies and identities that surround him. These bodies follow the plays' primogenitary logic, and Richard, rather than deviating from those norms, perfectly demonstrates the history plays' primogenitary bodily ideal. Through his perfect demonstration, he becomes emblematic of the flaws of primogenitary patriarchy and its hypermasculinity. As part of his representation of that inherently flawed logic, Richard finally resembles both masculinity and femininity and female reproduction, and this gendered perspective reveals the uncanny "disability" of masculine, primogenitary monarchy.

Shakespeare's first tetralogy—comprising the first, second, and third parts of *Henry VI*—dramatizes the War of the Roses and its catastrophic effects on England. These plays are about the competition for power, and, because power transitions through monarchic succession, they are about primogeniture. Primogeniture stipulates the inheritance of property or title from fathers to first-born sons. Though it governed all the political relationships in early modern England, Shakespeare's treatment of power takes primogeniture to a patriarchal extreme. Royalty pass on identity, not merely power. Son's identities collapse with their father's; they're supposed to. The history plays trace out the logic of primogeniture, experimenting with the indistinguishable identities of fathers and sons, and creating masculine history and a particular bodily theory.

The paradigmatic template of this unity between fathers and sons occurs long before Richard III even appears, in the first part of *Henry VI*. John Talbot is a legendary English war hero; the mere sound of his name frightens away French soldiers, and his honor and heroism become a masculine foil to Joan la Pucelle's notoriety.[12] Talbot's masculine and violent legend repeats itself in Talbot's son (whom Shakespeare calls "Young Talbot"). They, fittingly, meet at the site of a battle the English are certain to lose, and immediately attempt to convince each other to flee.

Young Talbot: If death be so apparent, then both fly.
Talbot: And leave my followers here to fight and die?
My age was never tainted with such shame.
Young Talbot: And shall my youth be guilty of such blame?
No more can I be severed from your side
Than can yourself your self in twain divide.
Stay, go, do what you will: the like do I,
For live I will not if my father die. (*I Henry VI* 4.5.44-51)

All the Talbots' exchanges illustrate sameness. The meaning of what they say simply doesn't shift depending on who speaks; they invoke militaristic honor, pleading with one another. They complete each other's rhymes, and follow similar linguistic structures, as in their rhetorical questions and extraordinarily regular iambic meter. Their physical bodies are as repetitive as their language: "yourself your self." Just as a body "in twain dividing" cannot survive, both of them have to live, or die. They die. They can't live, because Talbot's honor forbids them from running. The Talbots become a perfect litmus test of masculinity and patriarchal primogeniture. Their inevitable self-destruction is perhaps a tragic stipulation of their hegemony, or, as the later plays show, a necessary result or construction. They establish a bodily theory of repetition and identity formation, even as that formation, crucially, impairs them. Yet Shakespeare's world founds its "logocentric, masculine historical record," as Phyllis Rackin calls it on the idea of them and their repeatable bodies.[13]

1 *Henry VI* also introduces a crucial problem with this system: the problem of women. Beyond Joan la Pucelle's threat to the Talbots' militaristic power, she contrasts primogeniture and the repetition of masculine identity. As the English lead Joan away to be burned at the stake, her father, a shepherd, appears. Though initially crying, "sweet daughter Joan, I'll die with thee" (5.6.6), within thirty lines, he tells the English to "burn her, burn her! Hanging is too good" (5.6.33). She denies that he is her father, calling him a "decrepit miser,

base ignoble wretch, / I am descended of a gentler blood" (5.6.7–8). Their identities do not intermingle in the ways the Talbots' do, obviously; instead, they despise each other. They very clearly have distinct identities. Their mutual rejection shows the devaluation of daughters in primogenitary systems, allowing them to be easily and unapologetically disposed of. However, this ostracization perhaps gives women the ability to alter their positions and move through this primogenitary world in ways the men cannot. Joan of Arc does not repeat the identity of her shepherd father, and so becomes a legendary individual, even if a demonic one. As an exception to primogeniture, she both suffers from it and circumvents it.

The plays that follow continue to test the "logic" of primogeniture, and we see precisely what occurs when primogenitary fathers and sons are separated. If Talbot and Young Talbot establish a template, wherein fathers and sons cannot exist without the other, the example of the similarly named Clifford and Young Clifford show us what happens when a father does die. Richard Duke of York (Richard III's father) kills Clifford, and Young Clifford has no purpose other than to avenge his father. He doesn't mourn—he just kills prolifically; "In cruelty I will seek out my fame" (2 *Henry VI* 5.3.60), he claims, and Shakespeare builds his character around this one trait. Even when Rutland, a child, begs for his life, pointing out that he himself has done nothing wrong, Clifford says, "Thy father slew my father, therefore die" (1.3.47). Through Clifford's logic, and, indeed, the norm of primogeniture, the child is his guilty father. We can see how awful and cruel Clifford is, but in terms of a primogenitary system, he acts logically. The Talbots and Cliffords show us how cruelly destructive a primogenitary system is to the bodies within it. *This* is the plays' normal way to speak about identity, bodies, and, seemingly, everything else.

Primogeniture is everywhere in these plays, even in the small comforts characters offer one another. When Richard's brother, Edward, dies, another character comforts his mother

by saying, "Drown desperate sorrow in dead Edward's grave / And plant your joys in living Edward's throne" (*Richard III* 2.2.99-100). One Edward might be dead, but another lives, and that living body can simply replace the one that came before. This system of patrilineality dominates the play, and identity is projected into the future rather than having inherent or individuated selfhood. But even beyond the system of bodily repetition, "plant your joys in living Edward's throne" represents emotions as living things, in the sense that they can be drowned or planted. "Planting joys" implies that joys are a living thing can have an endless growth; joy can affirm and reaffirm itself, growing outward, like a genealogical tree. Emotions, along with human identity, are metaphorically tied to outward growth. They repeat their branches over and over again to survive. So too do legends and truth. Richard's nephew, (living) Edward, tells him, "Methinks the truth should live from age to age, / As 'twere retailed to all posterity, / Even to the general all-ending day" (3.1.76-78). Edward claims that the recollection of a story can only repeat itself through its own kind of genealogical repetition. A person repeats a story to a young person, and that young person will repeat that story to their young person, et cetera. Such a relationship of stories through time gestures also to the continuity of history itself. Bodies and history are thought of in the same manner, and Shakespeare's depiction of history is considered quite negative. "Feudal history is like a great staircase on which there treads a constant procession of kings," Kott writes, highlighting the inherent generational turnover of this history.[14] Peter Smith calls this history "ruthless logic."[15]

Shakespeare's depiction of bodies repeating themselves expresses that negativity and ruthlessness, highlighting the plays' imperatives of reproduction. In *Richard III,* after killing his stepsister's children, Richard attempts to marry her remaining daughter. He says, "in your daughter's womb I bury [your dead children], / Where, in that nest of spicery,

they will breed / Selves of themselves, to your recomforture" (4.4.423-425). Though her former children's bodies might be dead, primogeniture makes their identity continue, and living bodies can simply replace the ones that came before. All the names of the male family members represent this bodily process, in fact: Henry IV is Henry V is Henry VI, Richards are Richards, Edwards are Edwards. This repetition makes the boundaries between living and dying insecure. Bodies are expendable and replaceable because they exist simply to propagate and repeat themselves. These characters live for the past and the future, and the present is lost; they care more about lineages over time than about individuals, so individuals can fall into destructive patterns.

Richard, though pointing out this problem, is not the exception to the 'norm' of primogeniture. Rather, he's the culmination of the royal family's patriarchal influences. He is hypermasculine in the Talbots' destructive, warlike sense, and brutally kills both fathers and sons, like Clifford. The masculine members of the royal family, across the War of the Roses' "sides," resemble one another; they all descend from the same patriarch. And, oddly enough or not oddly at all, Richard greatly resembles his own father, sharing his name and his key attributes.

Richard Duke of York is Richard's father. Richard III's performativity and rhetorical excellence germinates from Richard Duke of York's speeches, and we can interpret a lot from the fact that Richard is York's third son, not his first. This is not simply a violation of how primogeniture 'should' operate. Richard Duke of York began the War of the Roses in the first place, attempting to replace Henry VI. A younger brother challenging an 'older' male relative is Richard III's story also; he crushes his two older brothers to become king. Richard III seems to simply take Richard Duke of York's Machiavellian tendencies to an extreme. Before he's killed by the Lancastrians, Richard Duke of York says, "My ashes, as the phoenix, may bring forth / A bird that will revenge

upon you all" (*III Henry VI* 1.4.36–37). "A bird that will revenge upon you all" is Richard III—he eventually wipes out a majority of both the Lancastrians and, ironically, the Yorks. Richard Duke of York's curse creates this bird, and, crucially, he creates the bird from himself. Phoenixes are the exact same bird, repeated endlessly through time.

When finally ascending to the throne, Richard is said to physically resemble Richard Duke of York. Further, Richard's tyranny follows his father's pattern: before killing Richard Duke of York, Young Clifford says, "Now Phaëton hath tumbled from his car, / And made an evening at noontide prick" (1.4.34–35). The tendency for members of the royal family to rapidly self-destruct after brilliant action is not unheard of in this family. Richard III, like his father, and even like his Lancastrian enemy, Clifford, blazes out extremely quickly and destructively. Richard rules for only about two acts of his play before he's usurped. Richard's traits are not original to him.

Physically, Richard resembles his father, pushing his body into the plays' bodily normalcy. When announcing Richard's kingship, Buckingham claims, "Withal I did infer your lineaments, / Being the right idea of your father / Both in your form and nobleness of mind" in order to convince the public of his fitness to rule and of his similarity to his father (*Richard III* 3.7.12–14). The likening of Richard to Richard through physical form and nobility glosses away his bodily difference. Their likeness serves a propagandistic purpose and normalizes Richard, turning his body into a symbol of patriarchal lineage—a bit like the other male bodies that surround him.

If Richard so perfectly presents primogeniture, what to make of Richard's deformities becomes still trickier. The point of Richard's body seems to precisely be that he doesn't look like his father, or any other previous generation of the Yorks. He seems to contrast primogeniture's bodily repetition and its backwards/forwards focus. When he says his infamous

line—"Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York" (*Richard III* 1.1.1–2)—he shifts the plays' temporality. No longer are we focusing on the repetitive history of part one, part two, part three of *Henry VI*, or the future of a lineage, but the temporal "now." He needs no introduction—his body seems to give him individuality and uniqueness—he's cruel and awful, but he's kind of refreshing. His performativity alleviates a playgoer's discontent with the previous three plays with, finally, something enticing. He is self-centered; he's alive. To combat primogeniture's paradigm, he scours away entire lineages, killing children and his family, and claiming to "have no father" and be "like no father" (5.6.80). He desires to be an individual, closed off from the family and world around him, maintaining his body as his *own* figure.

Today, the idea that our bodies are neat containers closed off from the world that surrounds us is not bizarre. However, early modern conceptions of health and bodies generally saw physicality as more porous, their humors influenced and mediated by environment. The body was a "semipermeable, irrigated container."[16] The abject horror of bodies' permeability, invoked by the permeation of our bodies by outside influences, is a frequent aspect of modern horror stories, as outlined by Julia Kristeva.[17] Richard's character seems to feel that horror in this way—a way familiar to our contemporary sensibilities—and wishes to separate himself from the influences of his family. The rest of Richard III's royal family does not seem to hold the same fear of the abject that Richard does. If he is indeed disabled, this is perhaps why—he desires a wholly individuated selfhood, but he is the complete expression of the opposite, expressing perfectly the primogenitary ties to both his father and the other male members of his family.

Richard also seems to understand the innate dependence of primogeniture upon reproduction, and so primogeniture's dependence upon women. Ian Moulton claims that, in

Richard III, "masculine aggression runs rampant in the figure of Richard" as he "refuses to subordinate himself to traditional patriarchal power structures and lines of succession;" Moulton defines Richard's monstrosity and deformities around that masculinity.[18] Though I would contest the uniqueness Moulton grants Richard, there is no doubt that Richard resents women, calling Margaret a "withered hag" (*Richard III* 1.3.235), resenting the injustice of "when men are ruled by women" (1.1.62), and calling Edward's wife a "monstrous witch" (3.4.70), blaming her for his deformities. Richard's hatred of women is perhaps exacerbated by his mother's connection to his deformities; in early modern times it was thought that pregnant women's imagination or posture could warp and deform their fetuses.[19] Richard's deformity is perhaps the innate expression of the femininity primogeniture depends upon. Women are a "corruption" and a problem to this system, and Richard might externalize that innate problem within the patriarchy.

Despite his blatant misogyny and his hypermasculinity, however, Richard resembles women. The multitude of scenes where women speak with one another, lamenting the loss of their husbands and sons, speaks simultaneously to the simple truth that a patrilineal system is inherently dependent on female subjects to exist, which can introduce 'corruptions' to the male copies, and to the mysterious identities of these women. Margaret, who lives for four plays and sees her entire family killed around her, has a ghostly return to *Richard III*. For roughly fifty lines of dialogue in Act 1, Scene 3, she enters, speaks in asides and is unnoticed by the men onstage. In the periphery, she curses them and their family, and when she reveals herself, Richard says, "Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?" (1.3.164). She responds, "But repetition of what thou hast marred" (165). Her curses can only follow in the strain of what has occurred to her own family; this repetition is an indication of the prevalence of patrilineal thought. However, her body onstage, despite

her irrelevance in a patrilineal system, offers an immediate critique of the system, like Richard's uniqueness does. Garland-Thomson writes, "the exceptional body…exists in a realm of hyper-representation."[20] What renders a body "exceptional" is the institutions in which it is contained, and we cannot separate ourselves from Richard's exceptionality, despite the evidence which encourages us to think otherwise. Garland-Thomson's work on the similarities between feminist and disability theory help explain why Richard's soliloquys and Margaret's asides seem to offer an extraordinary bodily contrast to the accepted patrilineal method, even as women necessarily participate within it. Female bodies, further, are accented in their deviance as Richard progressively wipes out more and more of the male lines. In 4.4, Margaret, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York all discuss their killed families until Richard enters the scene as one of the last remaining men in the family. Those who remain after the violence have uniquely female and/or deformed bodies, and so come to somewhat resemble one another.

Richard resembles femininity in other ways. In 3 *Henry VI*, he decides, "I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall" (3.2.186). The combination of the simultaneously nonhuman and feminine body of mermaids and their ability to convince men to drown themselves, speaks to Richard's own unusual body, but also his ability to entice and convince others to follow him blindly. Hastings expresses confidence in Richard's affection; "I thank his grace. I know he loves me well" (3.4.14). In the same scene, Richard calls Hastings a traitor, and demands that he be executed (3.4.75-76). Hastings then laments, "Who builds his hope in air of your good looks / Lives like a drunken sailor on a mast, Ready with every nod to tumble down / Into the fatal bowels of the deep" (3.4.98-101). A wild misreading of Richard's "good looks" towards him results in Hastings dying or drowning. This repetition of the metaphor speaks to Richard's enticing bodily power.

Richard both dissolves and resembles the reproductive aspects of primogeniture. As Williams argues, Richard enables himself through propagandistically reframing the narratives attached to his body and the stories of those who surround him, using his body as political technology.[21] The interplay of his body and his treatment of history is likened to the sea and drowning; he contains the history and bodies that preceded him, which perhaps explains his body's "deep bosom" (*Richard III* 1.1.4). George, Richard's brother, has a nightmare in which

> [Richard] stumbled, and in falling
> Struck me (That thought to stay him) overboard
> Into the tumbling billows of the main.
> O Lord, methought what pain it was to drown…
> What sights of ugly death within mine eyes.
> Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wracks,
> A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon…
> (*Richard III* 1.4.18–21, 23–25)

George, seeing so many strewn bodies across the seabed, sees Richard. Richard, who likens himself to the god of the sea and the sea itself at times, consumes and drowns the bodies that he has killed, including his brothers'. Richard's body, then, is a demonstration of all the bodies that are within him, and all of the bodies that had to build up for him to become powerful in the first place. The bodies of his direct family and the "thousands" that have died in the War of Roses reside within him, like a container, or like the wombs/tombs of the women in his family. Rackin describes women as the "anti-historians" of the history plays; they "threaten to obstruct those [masculine historical] projects," and "historiography itself becomes problematic…[that is] always subject to erasure."[22] Richard does the exact same work that Rackin's anti-historians—Shakespeare's women—do, erasing and eradicating both history and historiography.

Yet, before Richard dies, the plays that precede *Richard III* are spat out again. The ghosts of the people he's killed—Henry VI, his brothers, his brothers' children—

return to haunt him, cursing him to "despair and die" over and over again. When he wakes, afraid, his identity becomes muddled, de-individuated: "What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by. / Richard loves Richard; that is, I and I. / Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am. / Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why— / Lest I revenge, What myself upon myself?" (5.3.183–188). The distinction between himself and the people he's betrayed, and his father, leads him into this confusing dialogue with himself, pushing us to understand that he is indistinguishable from the family that he's betrayed. They're all within him, in his body—"breeding selves of themselves." Richard then becomes an expression of patriarchy, primogeniture, reproduction, and femininity; traits that seem to contradict one another, but which are married together within Richard's figuration and character. This deconstructive symbolism damages the theory of bodily wholeness and patriarchy that the Talbots initially outline.

Most disability scholars seem to accept that Richmond cleans the stage of Richard, correcting his abnormality, and ridding the narrative of its prosthetic. However, the point that Richard has made through his figuration and ability is not so easily wiped offstage. Richard's uniqueness among his family tree, as his family's scourge and yet also their reflection, still stands out as individual and dangerous; he was a comment and commenter upon a normative system, and a family's self-examination. If carrying on kingship through children was never a motive for Richard to begin with, this play was perhaps the ultimate example of non-normative success. Richard is a dominating, enabled force throughout this play, and his character is more enticing, unique, and brief than the ones that came before him. Shakespeare's text cannot perhaps be separated from its dependence upon narrative prosthesis, but it can offer this strange idea of success, and offer a unique bodily metaphor that reflects a very flawed family and a very flawed way of thinking about bodies.

We reflexively place Richard on the "disabled" side of an "disable/able" dichotomy, and all the aesthetically 'normal' bodies on the other. The appearance of bodily difference deceives us. Richard encapsulates and demonstrates the powers and traits of his own father and his family, and becomes the expression of primogeniture's poetics. He can't rebel against that norm, because he is the most extreme form, the culmination, of the history plays' definition of normal (and able) bodies and minds. He's a monster because he warps the natural principle to display the monstrosity of the principle to itself. (The term "monster" comes from the root "montre", which means to show—it shares a root with the word "demonstrate".) If Richard is disabled, it's not because he differs from the norm, but rather because he embodies it and, more importantly, demonstrates it, even though he doesn't want to. This is precisely Shakespeare's point; the poetic completion of primogeniture is horrific. This tetralogy is a devolution or evolution into primogeniture's logical conclusion, and that is Richard. The fact that this looks monstrous expresses the monstrosity of the hegemonic principle.

Notes

1. All references to these plays use *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare,* ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

2. Abigail Comber, "A Medieval King 'Disabled' by an Early Modern Construct: A Contextual Examination of *Richard III,*" in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua R. Eyler (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 191.

3. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

4. See Mitchell and Snyder, Abigail Comber, and Katherine Schaap Williams for some of these. Also see Stephen Greenblatt's *Tyrant*; his propagation of this idea to a nonacademic audience speaks to the broad acceptance of this idea about Richard's body.

5. David Wood, "New Directions: 'Some Tardy Cripple': Timing Disability in Richard III," in *Richard III: A Critical Reader, ed. Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2013), 91–107.

6. Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis,* 103.

7. "Love foreswore me in my mother's womb…She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe / To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub" (*III Henry VI* 3.2.153, 155-156).

8. Katherine Schaap Williams, "Enabling Richard: The Rhetoric of Disability in Richard III," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29.4 (2009).

9. Lennard Davis, *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

10. Jeffery Wilson, "The Trouble with Disability in Shakespeare Studies," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37.2 (2017).

11. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary,* trans. Boleslaw Toborski (United States: Double & Company, 1965),7.

12. English soldier: "The cry of 'Talbot' serves me for a sword, / For I have loaden me with many spoils / Using no other weapon but his name" (2.1.81–83).

13. Phyllis Rackin, "Anti-historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories," *Theatre Journal* 37.3 (1985): 329.

14. Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary,* 8.

15. Peter Smith, "The Critical Backstory," in *Richard III: A Critical Reader, ed. Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2013), 37.

16. John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne,* ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols (Berkeley and Los Angeles, U of California Press, 1959), 4.337.

17. Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection," trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

18. Ian Moulton, "'A Monster Great Deformed': The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.3 (1996): 255.

19. See Ambroise Pare, *On Monsters and Marvels,* trans. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-5 and 38-42.

20. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.

21. Williams, "Enabling Richard."

22. Rackin, "Anti-historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories," 330.