Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, eds. *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*.

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What can disability studies teach us about the early modern period? With disability studies emerging rapidly as an important interdisciplinary paradigm, Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood's collection, *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, offers the first sustained engagement with this question. The essays that comprise the volume, they suggest, reveal "how normativity requires and rewards the repression or forgetting of disability difference" and test "the potency of reading disability representation as a theoretical, practical, and political strategy for dismantling this ableist silence" (3). Beginning with an overview of key

developments in disability studies — including the medical, social, and cultural models of disability — the introduction highlights historical frameworks, from humoral theory's medical conception of the self to the legacies of the Reformation's theological shifts, for interpreting early modern bodily difference.

The title's motivating action — "recovering" — works in (at least) three ways throughout the volume. In one sense, *recovering* means coordinating new constellations of texts to expand critical conceptions of early modern disability. Emily Bowles reads Aphra Behn's prose narrative "The Dumb Virgin" in conjunction with midwifery and maternal advice texts to argue that Behn's fiction satirizes the imaginative association of gender and defect. Putting scientific discussions of vision alongside the episode of Simpcox's pretended blindness in *2 Henry VI*, Simone Chess traces an interest in blindness as lived experience through sustained readings of the sixteenth-century play *The Historie of Jacob and Esau* and seventeenth-century ballads. David M. Turner analyzes the varied interpretations of physical deformity in jest books to demonstrate how, more than just comic mockery, disability humor had the "potential to interrogate conventional wisdom about bodily norms" (58).

Recovering, in a second sense, entails examining the representational complexity of disability in texts that foreground bodily and intellectual impairment. While Shakespeare's *Richard III* has been a prime premodern example for disability studies, Marcela Kostihová explores how the casting of a disabled actor in a popular postcommunist Czech production of the play activates "contemporary political tensions surrounding the normative discourses of humanity, masculinity, and citizenship" (137). Reading Jonson's *Volpone* alongside surgeon Ambrose Paré's accounts of exposing fraudulent beggars, Lauren Coker argues that Volpone's metatheatrical "disability drag" undermines "the perception of disability as a material and lived bodily condition" (123). Lindsey Row-Heyveld reconsiders madness in revenge tragedy, tracing how the genre relies upon the representation of mental and intellectual disability as a narrative device that facilitates the "technically unlawful yet potentially satisfying actions of revenge" (78).

A third mode of *recovering* explores how disability implicitly structures representational and social problems in foundational texts of the early modern period. Drawing on theories of cognition in Descartes and contemporary theory of mind, Mardy Phillippian Jr. reads the Book of Common Prayer as a "behavioral script" that could function as a "mechanism for wider social access for those with cognitive disabilities" (152). Rachel E. Hile rethinks Spenserian allegory by way of cognitive metaphor theory, to argue that "disabling allegories" (96) provoke not just intellectual interpretation, but emotional responses of stigmatizing disgust from the reader. Sara van den Berg develops what she provocatively terms "dwarf aesthetics" — through material bodies that "challenged humanist ideals of perspective, proportion, and stable form in art and politics" (25) — to situate acts of narration by the four dwarfs in *The Fairie Queene* within early modern court culture. Finally, Nancy J. Hirschmann's groundbreaking essay takes up notions of freedom articulated by Hobbes and Locke to show how the disabled body or mind constitutes a limit case, though differently for each thinker, for theories of liberty

that continue to underwrite the "embodied individual" (183) in contemporary political discourse. Hobgood and Wood conclude with a coda that models "disability pedagogy" (187) in a Shakespeare course to demonstrate the potential of early modern disability studies in the classroom.

Given the array of texts and methodologies, this valuable collection will be of interest to scholars working in disciplines across the early modern period, as well as scholars working in disability studies and cultural studies. At their best, these essays not only employ disability theory to illuminate new perspectives on the texts they consider, but also engage the rich examples the period offers to shape the paradigms of disability theory as they advance the field of early modern disability studies.

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