

Teaching Disabled Shakespeares: Re-thinking Colonial Politics through Shakespeare Scholarship

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This study critically engages with the possibility, and the implications of adopting a disability focused approach to study and teach Shakespearian dramas, thereby centralising on their portrayals of nonhegemonic bodies. Written during the late 16th century, Shakespearian dramas aptly capture the transition of England from medievalism to early modernism, during which it emerged as the main cartographer in world politics in the centuries to come. Colonial undertones in Shakespearian dramas have been researched extensively, but rarely was it approached through a disability perspective. Thus, by using the dramas *Othello* and *The Tempest*, this study first defines disability from a broader perspective: as encounters that disable us, liberating it from its corporeal constraints. I opt to look at disability more as a subaltern identity, a standpoint that will allow us to interrogate the new power hierarchies that emerged during the early modern period. Furthermore, the study also argues for the importance of adopting such an approach when teaching Shakespearian dramas, especially in the global south. Both *Othello* and *The Tempest* are recommended dramas for students who study English for their Advanced Level examination, which is the national examination of Sri Lanka to gain entrance to state universities. Through an analysis of the national curriculum, this study critiques the hegemonic ableist approaches usually adopted when teaching those texts, which then leads us to gloss over alternative narratives that the subaltern characters bring in. Thus, it contends for the important role a disability perspective can play when liberating such texts from hegemonic assumptions, allowing the teachers and the students to create meaning in a more holistic manner. This may also reinscribe the literature classroom as a space of liberation, where the histories of oppression and subjugation that antecede most of the stereotypes that we take for granted are deconstructed.

Keywords: Shakespearian dramas, early modernism, disability, colonialism, teaching drama