

## Seminar

### **Forms and Geographies of Physical and Intellectual Non-Normativity in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries**

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In “The Tempest”, Trinculo calls Caliban ‘puppy-headed monster’, an expression which not only dehumanises the island native and reduces him to an object of ridicule, but also points at the early modern view of the non-normative body and intellect as two related and often coexisting manifestations of reality. The fool and the monster were similar figures: their deviation from the ‘norm/rule’ made them protagonists of analogue narratives of stigmatisation, rejection or subjugation. They were seen as social outcasts; they attracted comments on the extraordinariness of their aspect or behaviour; they prompted similar explanations for their coming to the world, for instance with the focus on sin as the main cause of their ‘deformity’; the fool’s body was very often described as an external projection of his intellectual capacity, therefore also characterised by visible peculiarities or utter monstrosity. Moreover, in an age of increasing contacts with foreigners, the characteristics of the monster and the fool were also exploited, in medicine and society alike, to describe the exotic and more in general what felt threatening or simply ‘different’ in terms of appearance, customs, language or political structure.

This seminar seeks to probe representations of intellectual or bodily difference in Shakespeare and his contemporaries or in adaptations of early modern plays. Possible topics might include:

Fools and/or human monsters in Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

The non-normative body and/or intellect in Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

Juxtaposition of physical and intellectual disability.

Fools or monsters and class, honour or gender.

Medical, legal, religious, social or political evaluations of folly and monstrosity.

The fool, the monster and the supernatural.

The fool, the monster and travel: between curiosity and xenophobia.

Border conflicts or crossings between normativity and non-normativity.

*Keywords:* fool, monster, disability, intellectual