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Patterning Straightness: Unraveling Compulsory Hetero-Ableism in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*

ABSTRACT

The anonymously published 1607 city comedy *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* regulates the production of normative intimacies and embodiments through fabric patterns. Using Hobgood and Wood's material model of disability (2013), I examine how the disabled patternmaker in the marketplace, named Cripple, reveals figurative and physical patterns to be an imitation designed to move the characters toward the straight line. The straight line—which encompasses both heterosexual desire lines and the straight lines of the nondisabled body—relies on the movement of Cripple's crutches/needle to facilitate the reproduction of normative bodies and desires. Thinking alongside Sara Ahmed's "straightening devices" (2006) and Genevieve Love's "prosthetic doubling" (2018), I consider disability disguise as a subversion of normative patterning. The able-bodied character Frank Golding's imitation of Cripple's movements offers a variation on the repetition that undergirds the straight line pattern, making space for queer and crip intimacy. *Fair Maid* asserts its straight lines in the end, but offers the potential for contemporary readers to explore queercrip variations to the straight line and the alternative modes of intimacy and embodiment that such variations could create.

Keywords: *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*, compulsory able-bodiedness, compulsory heterosexuality, textiles, pattern, disability.

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The Fair Maid of the Exchange, published anonymously in 1607, uses fabric patterns to illuminate the impact that figural constructions of disability and sexuality have on the material world. The enduring throughline in this early modern city comedy is that of textile work. The plot is primarily concerned with interpersonal dynamics, and yet these dynamics always occur in proximity to fabric: the inciting incident transpires when the fair maid Phyllis Flower attempts to deliver her sewn handiwork, the locus of the drama is the patternmaker's workspace where he prepares garments for embroidery, and the deception plot hinges on sartorial confusion. The fact that *Fair Maid* continually brushes up against clothing—cloth, textiles, material—is not incidental. The narrative is a pattern: one that deliberately attempts to orient desires and embodiments toward the straight line. The pattern draws a connection between the expectation of heterosexuality (straightness) and the assumption that normative bodies produce straight lines, or stand straight. Through textile metaphor, *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* attempts, perhaps unsuccessfully, to disrupt the production of straight lines that pattern the societal enforcement of a heteronormative and ableist culture.

The drama follows a character named Cripple, whose name metonymically connects him to his disability, as he orchestrates several love plots and corrects failed business ventures. Cripple is a successful patternmaker in the city marketplace; he creates patterns that are embroidered by the local seamstresses, Phyllis Flower and Moll Berry. The play begins with Phyllis and her assistant Ursula delivering their embroidered garments, only to be attacked by thieves. Cripple hears their shouts for help and rescues them, winning Phyllis's eternal love and gratitude. The thieves return and, this time, attack Cripple. The young and wealthy Frank Golding rescues Cripple, winning *his* eternal love and gratitude. Phyllis asserts that she loves and wants to marry Cripple, while Frank (along with his two brothers, Anthony and Ferdinand) desperately wants to marry Phyllis. Cripple feels indebted to Frank, and thus helps Frank win Phyllis's hand by suggesting that Frank disguise himself as Cripple to woo Phyllis as Cripple's exact likeness. Frank complies, but casts off the disguise at the last minute and marries Phyllis as himself. Cripple, who has up until the end acted as the onstage director of the play, is suddenly silent as he witnesses the final moments of Frank and Phyllis's (reluctant) union.

Cripple's job as the patternmaker is central to the plot of *Fair Maid*. His patterns are used by the seamstresses, Phyllis and Moll, and his expertise is unparalleled within the city marketplace. Cripple creates the patterns by repetitively poking a needle into fabric, making a charcoal-dust outline that can be embroidered or sewn over, after which the charcoal gets washed

away.[1] Cripple's workshop does not simply provide a backdrop for the drama, but microcosmically performs the regulatory actions of compulsory hetero-ableism by tracing a line for the other characters to follow. Cripple's patterns demonstrate—through the repetitive motion of his needle poking the fabric—the repetition that creates a straight line pattern. At the same time, the normative world that Cripple finds himself in is indelibly changed by his patterns. Cripple's patternmaking demonstrates what Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood designate as the material model of disability, wherein "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" (5). The material model attends to the linguistic and societal forces that impact lived experience, with the knowledge that, paradoxically, lived experience is simultaneously impacting language and culture. When Cripple creates his patterns, he elucidates the function of compulsory hetero-ableism while also providing a template for fashioning alternatives.

To examine the various straight lines which prescribe a pattern of heterosexual able-bodiedness, there are multiple threads that I will weave together: bloodlines, hemlines, and stage lines. *Bloodlines* investigates the familial attachments to straightness that reproduce normative patterns and describes how Cripple, as the patternmaker, queers such reproduction. *Hemlines* demonstrates the repetitive movements that imitate the pattern through fabric while illuminating imitation's reliance on queer and crip desires. *Stage lines* examines metatheatrical languaging as the strongest enforcer of the pattern, and one that must be addressed in order to embrace the queercrip potential of the play. While *Fair Maid*'s use of textile metaphor decries compulsory hetero-ableism, the final moments of the play attempt to erase such efforts in favor of the expected city comedy ending. *Fair Maid of the Exchange* reveals the material and figural pattern that enforces both straight lines of the body and straight desire lines through repetitive actions that are counterfeited to remain visible only as the default. Through an exploration of imitation as the source of normative patterning, the play gestures to a world beyond a fabricated conception of normative bodies and intimacies.

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[1] This technique, called "pricking and pouncing" was an early modern method for copying patterns both onto textiles and print material (Learner). An image would be outlined by poking a needle through cloth or parchment, at which point colored charcoal (called "pounce") would be sprinkled over, leaving an outline on the fabric to be embroidered (Cennini 87).

BLOODLINES

The setting of *Fair Maid* is the Exchange, a proto-capitalist marketplace that (re)produces economic status through the interchange of goods. The Exchange refers to the marketplace where Cripple and Phyllis work, yet exchange has an additional significance here: the exchange of Phyllis to a suitable husband is the primary directive of the plot. Katherine Schaap Williams explains, "Phyllis is a property, like land, and since she may be won, marriage is yet another competitive financial transaction" (109). Master and Mistress Flower treat Phyllis's betrothal as a transaction because the objective of her marriage is to reproduce their family wealth. Yet the propriety of a potential marriage to the Golding family hinges upon each brother's perceived ability. Phyllis must follow the pattern toward straightness, wherein compulsory heterosexuality is contingent upon compulsory able-bodiedness. Cripple disrupts the pattern by using the same mechanisms that enforce heterosexual relations to "reproduce" queerly, and in doing so offers an alternative to the straight line.

The appellation of the titular fair maid Phyllis Flower—the daughter of Master Flower—clearly delineates her role in the Exchange. Master Flower's servant introduces Phyllis through her connection to her father and to the activity of exchange: "I serve a gentleman. That gentleman is father to this gentlewoman. / This gentlewoman is a maid. This maid is fair. And this fair maid belongeth to the Exchange" (3.2.154–55). Phyllis does not get to be her own person, but is rather named through her father and through the capitalist activity that labels her a commodity; she is "the flower of the Exchange" (3.2.163). Like all of the names in *Fair Maid*, Phyllis's surname, Flower, outlines her anticipated contribution to the narrative. As the Flower of her father, she is expected to sow the seed of her family line through the reproduction and consolidation of her family's economic assets. Phyllis Flower is defined by her virginity (the fairness of her flower), which identifies her as nothing more than an item of exchange in marriage.

In the world of the Exchange, Phyllis's marriage must benefit the family, reproducing their wealth through a connection with the Golding brothers, whose surname verifies their affluence. Master Flower wants Phyllis to marry Ferdinand Golding and Mistress Flower has insisted that Phyllis marry Ferdinand's brother Anthony. Phyllis, who has her heart set on Cripple, decides to trick both her parents into thinking that she will marry the Golding they desire for her. She says to her mother, "I could not be so much unnatural / As to refuse the love you proffer me" (4.1.143–44). For Phyllis, making a decision outside of the pattern set for her would be

"unnatural," strange, or queer.[2] She has already been given a desire line to follow, just as in her embroidery she must sew along the patterned line that Cripple provides for her. Sara Ahmed argues that heterosexuality is maintained through repetitive movements that orient bodies toward the straight line, which are repeated so that the mechanisms that mandate straightness fall away: "Think of tracing paper: when the lines on the tracing paper are aligned with the lines of the paper that has been traced, then the lines of the tracing paper disappear: you can simply see one set of lines" (66). The tracing paper, in this case, is the fabric that Phyllis embroiders, which illustrates her constraints in choosing a husband. Fabric patterns exemplify the regulations of desire in the narrative, which must follow the pre-patterned line or else be considered unnatural.

However, it is not only compulsory heterosexuality that pushes Phyllis toward the straight line of marriage, but the expectation that her husband be able-bodied. Crip theorist Robert McRuer has already identified the imperative to read heteronormative and ableist structures concurrently: "the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly *interwoven* with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness" (2, emphasis mine). If pre-conditioned societal patterns orient Phyllis toward the straight (heterosexual) line, what would it mean to consider straight lines of the body as another mandated mechanism through which society patterns normativity? Master Flower wants to give Phyllis to Ferdinand, claiming that his "jointure" will add to "the gentleman's good parts" (4.1.12). "Jointure" refers to Phyllis's dowry, but also a joining together, or the imagery of a joint. The financial incentives of their marriage become physicalized through the body. Ferdinand's "good parts" are his wealth and morality, but also his physical body parts, with the implication that he will perform in the marriage bed and offer children. Master Flower identifies Ferdinand as a worthy match based on his economic status, which is intricately linked linguistically with his physical ability, i.e. his ability to reproduce. Phyllis's ideal husband follows the straight line of heterosexuality through his able-bodiedness, demonstrating the reliance of heterosexual patterning on physical straight lines.

Compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness combine to enforce an ideology of straightness. In employing the term "straight" with reference to heterosexuality, I do not mean to be reductively anachronistic, but rather to trace a lineage of thought that connected the word "straight" with heterosexual acts long before said identities or

[2] While Phyllis's desire for Cripple is heterosexual, I use the term "queer" broadly throughout to refer to desires that destabilize the straight line pattern.

terminologies existed. Being straight, as in being a good or moral person, was of common usage in the early modern period prior to the introduction of the term "heterosexual."[3] In 1607, the word would have signified a body part stretched to elongation, in addition to being in alignment with the correct or moral way of living ("Straight"). When Master Flower describes Ferdinand as a man of "good carriage," he melds the two definitions of straightness, describing his preferred match for Phyllis as honest (straight) and an *upstanding* citizen (implying he has a straight spine) (4.1.2). The word "straight" linguistically performs the linkage between compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness that places both structures within the anticipated norm or pattern.

The pattern of heterosexuality, in the case of *Fair Maid*, is a physical one: Cripple, Phyllis, and Moll create and embroider garments that secure courtships. When Bowdler and Moll get engaged, Bowdler says: "We'll to the drawer / There to dispatch what I further intend" (4.2.236–37). Cripple, as the drawer, creates a copy of an original image for Phyllis and Moll to embroider: in other words, Cripple's patterns reproduce images onto fabric, performing the work of reproduction. These patterns are tools used in the process of courtship, wherein love itself becomes a copy: "For what is he, loving a thing in heart, / Loves not the counterfeit, though made by art?" (1.2.15–16). The goal of patternmaking is to create a copy or reproduction of an original, described here as a "counterfeit." In 1607, counterfeit simultaneously meant "a false imitation" and "fashioned, made to a pattern" ("Counterfeit"). Heterosexuality uses reproduction to repetitively imitate normative intimacies such that they become the default. What patterning unveils then is the extent to which this reproduction of heterosexuality is nothing but a counterfeit.

Cripple, as the disabled patternmaker, critiques the counterfeit of heterosexual reproduction by using the same patterning mechanisms to reproduce along a queer line. Cripple and Frank, while supposedly being very different in their relation to able-bodiedness and heterosexuality, often remark on their likeness to one another. In one of their scenes together—in which Cripple and Frank are conspiring to make Phyllis fall in love with Frank—Frank addresses Cripple with reference to their intense bond: "Mirror of kindness, extremity's best friend / While I breathe, sweet blood, I am thine" (4.2.1–2). Frank sees in Cripple a mirror, specifically of "kindness," meaning likeness (to be of the same kind) as

[3] Etymologically, the term "straight" emerged around 1225, and was initially used to describe something stretched or elongated. The term bore a deep connection to the body: for instance, to straighten one's arm. A new interpretation emerged in the mid-16th century, after a revised reading of the biblical strait became reference to the honest and moral path—or the straight and narrow ("Straight").

well as good favor. Their homoerotic connection is forged both through similarity and a crip gain perspective of the complementary nature of their different embodiments. Yet after Phyllis has declared her love for Cripple, Cripple—who feels both unworthy of Phyllis's love and ambiguous about it—suggests to Frank that he disguise himself as Cripple to trick Phyllis into marrying him instead.[4] When Frank imitates Cripple by replicating his movements, he becomes a copy of him; the characters in the play cannot tell the difference between them. In other words, Cripple reproduces through another man. Cripple's queer reproduction, while still serving the heterosexual marriage plot, attempts to create lines outside of the straight pattern that dictates normative intimacies.

HEMLINES

The patterns of *Fair Maid* are created through the repetition of Cripple's needle outlining an image, which institutes fabric as a larger site of imitation, a "habit" that repeats normativity through movement. Drawing on Genevieve Love's analysis of the connection between Cripple's locomotion and his craftsmanship, I explore the impact of the fusion of Cripple's crutches with his needle on the pre-patterned lines of ability and desire ("Standing" 51). The repetitive movement exemplified by Cripple's needle regulates straightness by creating an image of desire and embodiment that follows the straight line. While the pattern allows for a certain level of non-straight imitation, *Fair Maid*'s hemlines truly begin to unravel the moment that such imitation becomes visible. Using fabric as a nexus of imitation expands possibilities for exploring the fiction of compulsory able-bodiedness and the potential methods of queer and crip subversion.

Fair Maid enacts the counterfeit of compulsory hetero-ableist thought within and through tangible cloth patterns. Using fabric as a metaphor and a physical tool, *Fair Maid*'s language straightens Phyllis's body and desires through the pattern of her dress. When Phyllis is propositioned by a gentleman named Gardiner in her shop, he compliments her attire, musing how "a garment made by cunning arts-men's skill / Hides all defects that Nature's swerving hand / Hath done amiss, and makes the shape

[4] Cripple's ambiguity with regards to Phyllis stems from both internalized ableism ("knowing my unworthy self / Too foul for such a beauty") and also from a deep dislike of marriage: "fancy shall never marry me to woe" (4.2.25–26; 2.2.251). Cripple is the most eroticized figure in the play ("yet I am hourly solicited," 2.2.242) and also seemingly devoid of any romantic interest, which speaks to Anna Mollow's read of the ableist conception of disability as "both sexual excess and sexual lack" (286).

seem pure. / If then it grace such lame deformity / It adds a greater grace to purity" (3.1.80-84). Gardiner reveals the curvature of Phyllis's body, created by "Nature's swerving hand," to be undesirable. Thus, Gardiner uses the pattern of the fabric to make Phyllis's body more straight. The garment changes "lame deformity"—aligning deformity with a word that pejoratively describes a mobility impairment—into purity, or the heteropatriarchal ideal of female virginity. Yet rather than able-bodiedness being considered the default, Gardiner suggests that Phyllis's body was not straight to begin with. The pattern of Phyllis's dress must hide any curvature and align Phyllis with a straight line that did not previously exist.

The able-bodied and heterosexual norm is a fiction that is carefully constructed through non-straight embodiments. Fabric lines rely on a kinesthetic repetition of the straight line, exemplified through Cripple's movement on his crutches. When Cripple suggests the disability disguise scheme, he specifically mentions to Frank that he should borrow Cripple's clothes: "Wherefore I will immediately you take / My crooked habit, and in that disguise / Court her, yea, win her, for she will be won" (4.2.30–32). Here, "habit" simultaneously means Cripple's clothing and his repetitive behavior (the movements he performs habitually). Schaap Williams similarly notes the multiple definitions of "habit," yet cannot decide if Cripple's habit is a "property of the body or a property on the body" (108). I read Cripple's habit as both; when he describes his clothing as his habit, Cripple is deliberately connecting his textile work with his movement through space. Cripple's movement on his crutches, much like the movement of his needle, creates patterns that result from a straight vertical line (the crutches/the needle) creating a point upon a horizontal surface (the ground/the fabric). Repetitive movements of the crutches or the needle result in a habit that creates the outward appearance of straightness. What keeps lines tracing the same pattern, according to Ahmed, is what she calls "straightening devices" (66).[5] In this case, the straightening devices are Cripple's crutches, which reveal the difference between the straight line crutch and the ability for the body to mimic straightness. Cripple's habit demonstrates a reliance on non-straight—or disabled—bodies to "prop up" the illusion of able-bodiedness. The act of creating patterns on fabric,

[5] Ahmed states that orientations (such as sexual orientation) are produced through repetition, such that "bodies . . . acquire orientation through the repetitions of some actions over others" (58). Repetitive actions shape the body on an abstract level, but also on a physical one (she uses repetitive stress injuries as an example). This argument rests entirely upon an ableist assumption of the normative body, seen here as the neutral place from which all humans begin. If non-straight orientation in this case is associated not just with queerness, but with disability, Ahmed erases the crip critique that she leans on to expose the mechanisms that create heterosexuality as straight.

when paralleled with the movement of crutches against the ground, serves to demonstrate the impossibility of a natural straightness.

If Cripple's needlework patterns love, and his crutches direct the movement of his needle, how does this crip interpretation of his textile work impact the physical patterns themselves? To turn directly to the patterns described in the text, the images that Cripple is instructed to prick into fabric are nearly all flowers: Moll wants "the peascod and the blossom" (early modern imagery for sexual organs), while Phyllis asks for "a springing laurel tree / Circled about with a ring of poesy" (1.2.4; 2.2.228–29). These flowery outlines hold sexual connotations and are not formed by straight lines. Aside from Cupid's arrow, the patterns are all curved: the initials CC and SS, a gillyflower, and a rose (1.1.25; 1.2.6). Even as heterosexual courtships and expectations surrounding Phyllis's match are pushed toward the straight line, Cripple's handiwork reveals Phyllis and Moll's desires to be crip and queer. Although Cripple's stated goal is to convince the fair maid Phyllis to marry the honest (straight) Frank Golding, the patterns that *Fair Maid* produces are not so straight after all.

Frank's imitation of the patternmaker himself performs non-straight desire on a larger scale. At the beginning of the play, Frank is adamantly opposed to falling in love, and scoffs at both of his brothers who have already declared their desire for Phyllis. Yet when he meets the fair maid, he immediately falls for her, and describes his longing using disability metaphor, calling himself "sick with love" (3.2.204). In his pursuit of Phyllis, Frank leans on disability to actualize his desire. Love finds Cripple's skill with his prosthetics to be requisite to Frank's theatrical personation in the sense that "Cripple does not just shape patterns; he serves as one" ("Standing" 51). And while it is certainly true that Cripple provides the habit for Frank to assume, when Frank dons Cripple's attire, he is not worried about his ability to act disabled. On the contrary, when he first puts on Cripple's clothes, he describes himself as being at home: "And you shall run through fire, / Before you touch one part of my desire. / Am I not like myself in this disguise?" (4.2.51-53). My question is, does Frank desire Phyllis, or disability? Not only does Frank find a certain euphoria in dressing as disabled ("am I not like myself in this disguise?"), but he also names a desire that can only be reached *through* a disabling act ("you shall run through fire," most likely to cause severe burns that would, if not permanently, at least temporarily cause impairment).[6] When Frank dresses

[6] While Frank's melancholia surrounding his able-bodiedness is notable, desire for disability does not, in and of itself, subvert the ableist system. As Kristen Harmon writes, "desiring disability renders unintelligible our constructs of the normate body and its pleasures," and thus, the question becomes "whether or not such desires are transformative, or reiterative, and of which norms" (356).

as Cripple, he is embodying an identity that feels much more true to him. *Fair Maid* is a play built around imitation. Yet Frank's imitation does not occur in the moment that he dresses as Cripple, but in his moments of being Frank.

Frank's counterfeit of Cripple, which illuminates his queercrip desire, fails in the moment that it is revealed to be a counterfeit. Phyllis—who has fallen for Frank's disguise—is suddenly disgusted the moment she realizes that someone is pretending to be disabled. Frank-as-Cripple has just secured Master Flower's permission to marry Phyllis when Cripple enters the stage alongside Frank and chaos ensues:

> CRIPPLE. Gentlemen, sweet bloods, or brethren of familiarity,
> I would speak with Phyllis. Shall I have audience?
> PHYLLIS. Help me, dear father! Oh, help me, gentlemen!
> This is some spirit! Drive him from my sight!
> FRANK. Were he the devil, thou shalt not budge a foot.
> BOWDLER. Zounds, two cripples! Two dogs, two curs! 'Tis wonderful!
> FRANK. Fear not, dear heart.
> PHYLLIS. Hence, foul deformity!
> Nor thou, nor he shall my companion be.
> If cripples dead the living seem to haunt,
> I'll neither of either. Therefore, I say, avaunt!
> Help me, father. (5.1.281–92)

Phyllis initially fears the two Cripples because she sees two people who look (to her) exactly the same. The verisimilitude of Frank's disguise is facilitated through the clothing that Cripple offers to him; Cripple and Frank are cut from the same cloth. This shock of seeing two men looking so alike does not abate, and, furthermore, Phyllis is not interested in discovering which one is the real Cripple; the fact that one of them must be false is enough for her to reject them both outright. Cripple and Frank have used imitation differently from what is expected: if patterning is reproduction, Cripple has just reproduced through another man. In a world that sublimates the imitation it relies upon to create heterosexual bonds, the visible appearance of Frank (the copy) alongside Cripple (the original), attacks the very notion of patterning itself.

In *Fair Maid*, imitation, copying, and reproduction invisibly mandate heterosexual intimacies and the illusion of able-bodiedness in line with strict regulations. When the imitation becomes visible, the mechanisms that have thus far patterned the plot begin to break down. Susan M. Schweik writes of the "unsightly beggar" image in the cultural imaginary, specifically in the context of public indecency laws, which simultaneously target both cross-dressers and people with visible disabilities: the "emphasis on

exposure (don't show, don't peep) can be understood, borrowing from the register of gay discourse, as a ban on *flaming* disability" (163). Cripple and Frank, whose homoerotic connection makes them so similar as to be interchangeable, stand together against the sublimation of disability into an ableist pattern. Phyllis is not used to imitation that embraces its origins as such, and instead sees the two Cripples as a threat. As Love astutely points out, acting—imitation—is a haunted experience: a theatrical impersonation is a doubling of two bodies into one, such that either the actor or the character must, to some degree, disappear (Introduction 30). This fear of doubling, of impersonation, causes Phyllis to insist that she sees "some spirit," and to imagine Cripple as a ghost that has come to haunt her.[7] In a desperate attempt to restore the invisible nature of the pattern, Phyllis attempts to silence both Cripples just as one would blow the chalk dust off the fabric, ensuring the pattern remains hidden.

STAGE LINES

Metatheatrically, the very act of staging a play requires imitation: actors imitate characters, preemptively blurring the line between reality and pretend. This brings me to my final reading of lines: an actor's dialogue—their lines—direct the plot, or the pattern, of the narrative. Straight lines are maintained through repetitive actions, but also through language. In the context of the theater, where the actor's lines are repeated each night, the dialogue of a play creates the pattern of the play itself. After Phyllis's rejection, Frank uses his language to push the anxiety of fraudulent imitation onto disability, while reifying his own heterosexuality and able-bodiedness through his supposed honesty and decency. The linguistic conflation of disability with dishonesty silences Cripple, while allowing Frank, as the so-called honest gentleman, to attempt to assert his own straightness. Without Cripple to pattern the ending, the audience must decide whether *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* follows the straight line in the end.

The moment that Cripple steps into the same scene as his copy (Frank), he is stripped of his authorial power. Cripple's final line is, "I would speak with Phyllis. Shall I have audience?" (5.1.283). His question is never answered; Phyllis sees the two Cripples and begs them

[7] In this case, not only is Frank acting as Cripple, but Frank himself is also an actor. If Frank-as-Cripple is a doubling of two bodies into one, then actor-as-Frank-as-Cripple is a tripling of three bodies into one. Frank's excess of bodies recalls Cripple's crutches, which are described throughout the narrative as extra limbs (four legs instead of two). The visible excess of Frank's bodies and Cripple's limbs offers up their imitation as a valuable example of crip gain.

both to leave. Cripple does not exit, instead letting the audience watch while the play resolves around him. While Lindsey Row-Heyveld reads Cripple's character as ultimately asserting power at the end of *Fair Maid* by countering the stereotype of disabled people as dishonest (191), I read the ending as unequivocally disquieting. Cripple is a central character with the most dialogue, but also—as Love argues—his role as the patternmaker "establishes his skill at the process of manipulating characters into proper arrangements," making him an onstage stand-in for both author and director ("Standing" 51). Cripple uses this power to reproduce outside of the lines of the pattern, by creating his own image in Frank. But when Cripple goes a step too far, revealing Frank to be a copy, he is no longer able to intervene in the plot, or manipulate its lines. Instead, the narrative is left directionless as the Flowers and the Goldings scramble to revert towards the straight line pattern.

After Cripple is silenced, Frank straightens himself through his stage lines by declaring himself no longer a counterfeit. For Frank to reveal himself as nondisabled, he must take off the clothes that patterned him as Cripple. To return to the image of the unsightly beggar, who is feared to be "uncovering the body and displaying its forbidden part(s) for antisocial ends," Frank exposes himself for the distinctly *social* end of heterosexual marriage (Schweik 160). In other words, Frank exposes himself for the sake of decency. When Phyllis calls for the men to be driven from her sight, Frank removes the garments that disguised himself as Cripple to assure her: "Dear heart, revoke these words. / Here are no spirits, nor deformities. / I am a counterfeit cripple now no more, / But young Frank Golding, as I was before" (5.1.292–95). As he drops the crutches and moves very deliberately onto the straight line, Frank proves that he can stand straight by being nondisabled and, to further the metaphor, sexually potent.[8] Having counter-identified with Cripple, Frank declares himself young, honest, and able to procreate within the lines of heterosexuality. Phyllis halfheartedly accepts his proposal. Frank appropriates disability for his own gain, showing no investment in the reality of disability, only how the removal of his disabled disguise can be used to reify himself as both heterosexual and able-bodied.

Frank can verbally demonstrate his straightness because honesty and decency follow the straight line; in being honest, Frank becomes decent. Ahmed observes that in the movement toward the straight line, "straightness gets attached to other values including *decent*, conventional, direct, and *honest*" (70, emphasis mine). *Fair Maid* grapples with the

[8] Standing straight as a double entendre for the ability to become erect casts the straight line as a phallic symbol; patrilineality relies on the reinscription of straight lines.

common early modern theatrical trope of disability as dishonest, reified continuously through disability disguise narratives. Row-Heyveld argues that Cripple must work hard to resist the notion "that disability is always inherently fraudulent" (2). When Cripple no longer has control over the pattern of the play, *Fair Maid* reverts to a world in which disability can be used and discarded where convenient. At the end of his short soliloquy, Frank confesses why he feels so drawn to Cripple: "Am I not like myself in this disguise? / Crooked in shape, and crooked in my thoughts? / Then am I a cripple right" (4.2.53-55). Frank reinforces the straight line in his brazen conflation of disability with dishonesty, which assures the audience that all that is needed for him to no longer be disabled (or "crooked") is to be honest.

Frank is able to achieve heterosexual marriage by being honest, therefore ostensibly proving his straightness. Yet there is a catch: heterosexual marriage was only ever achieved through Frank's dishonest counterfeit of Cripple. The professedly able-bodied characters need Cripple, the disabled character reduced linguistically to his disability, to facilitate their imitation through patternmaking. Love argues that the repetition of Cripple's embodiment is crucial in securing heterosexual courtship (especially and most literally in the case of Frank):

> The union of prosthetic disability with artisanal skill, and in particular the intimation that prosthetic embodiment and locomotion is itself a skill (requiring nimbleness and facility with tools), suggests, alongside Cripple's especial expertise at patterning, that disabled embodiment is not only a skill but a model, a standard that the able-bodied need to copy to achieve their ends. ("Standing" 54)

Love reads Cripple's body as the site of imitation, that which is to be imitated *upon*. To further Love's argument, rather than disability being the failed copy of able-bodiedness, able-bodiedness becomes the failed copy of disability. Previous scholarship on *Fair Maid* has identified Cripple as the one character in a play built around imitation that *cannot* imitate. Schaap Williams considers Cripple as the facilitator of imitation, but believes him to be barred from it himself: "Cripple supplies theatrical prosthetics that are uniquely individual, and therefore make his identity particularly available for imitation, but the play marks his body as specifically unable to adopt another form or play another role" (113). However, understanding fabric patterns as the primary/sole facilitator of impersonation—as the grounds of the counterfeit that enables Frank to change his embodiment—shifts the narrative around Cripple's supposed inability to impersonate. While Frank can successfully trick others into believing he is Cripple, he

specifically mentions that he is not able to do Cripple's work. Frank chides himself, "Now frame thy hands to draw: A worser workman never any saw" (4.2.57–58). Love describes the "prosthetic doubleness" of Cripple's crutches and the "linkage of [his] tools of locomotion to artisanal work," i.e. Cripple's patternmaking ("Standing" 57; 52). If patterns are an imitation, Cripple *is* able to imitate; and in fact—given Frank's uselessness at drawing patterns—Cripple is the only one who can.

Cripple's unique embodiment provides him with a skill, one that is often exploited, but one that, through an understanding of the mechanisms of the straight line pattern, offers an opportunity for critique (and perhaps, interference). Rather than disability being the fraud in this disability disguise narrative, it is able-bodiedness that becomes more suspect. Frank's name as a synonym for honesty is complicated by the fact that he is the most dishonest character in the play; he spends half the plot pretending to be a porter before he puts on his final disguise. Frank did not think that he could win Phyllis by being honest. He worries, "if I had wooed her in my proper shape, / I do believe she never would have liked me" (5.1.95-96). Cripple, as the patternmaker and onstage director, has created a world in which Frank is anxious that his able body is somehow lacking, where the only way to get to a straight line is through a rather curved one. It is only through Cripple's forced silence that the play uneasily reverts toward the straight line. Able-bodiedness, McRuer argues, like heterosexuality, is an identity built on the illusion of attainability, for "the ideal able-bodied identity can never, once and for all, be achieved" (9). As the actors play out the marriage of the fair maid to the honest gentleman, the fraudulent performance of able-bodiedness has never been more apparent.

Fair Maid concludes as Phyllis and Frank scramble for stable ground, attempting hastily to repeat what the audience might expect of a city comedy: a reinstatement of Frank's true identity (which never did feel very true to begin with) and a (seemingly) heterosexual able-bodied marriage. Out of all of the moments of the drama, this is the one that seems the most fabricated. Phyllis pledges herself to whichever Golding brother wants her the most (who, in predictable fashion, is Frank), while Cripple stands by and watches it all without saying a single word. This is not the play that has been previously presented to the audience in which Cripple directs the action, Phyllis defies her parents' wishes at every turn, and Frank can never make up his mind who, exactly, he wants to be. Instead, each character reverts to the trope that patterns them. Without Cripple's verbal guidance, the audience members become the patternmakers who must either accept the marriage ending or understand the queercrip possibility that Cripple leaves behind. In fact, the prologue of the play puts the impetus for creating the straight line in the hands of the audience: "Meanwhile shore up our

tender pamping twig, / That yet on humble ground doth lowly lie" (9–10). The play envisions itself as disabled, in need of being propped upright by a straight line that only the audience can provide. It is up to the viewer/reader to choose whether to interpret *Fair Maid* along the straight line, to either accept the given conclusion or imagine the alternatives that allow for queer and crip intimacy to flourish.

CONCLUSION

The Fair Maid of the Exchange uses fabric patterns to imitate heterosexuality and able-bodiedness along the straight line, even as Cripple, the only disabled character in the play, attempts to work outside such regulations. Phyllis must marry a Golding brother to follow the pre-patterned betrothal her parents offer her, which will reproduce straightness through heterosexual and able-bodied marriage. The hetero-ableist norm is physicalized through textile work, in which repeated imitated movements pattern an invisible straight line. This imitation, or counterfeit, fabricates heterosexual courtship along the straight and nondisabled line by asserting its own honesty and decency, even in the midst of dishonesty. Material patterns act as straightening devices for Phyllis and Frank, who show a certain level of desire for Cripple and his embodiment, yet are ultimately not allowed to live in or express that desire. Frank's imitation of Cripple is denied, even as it is what allows the marriage plot to succeed. The repetition that undergirds *Fair Maid* is not used to bolster a crip critique, but instead is washed away, just as Cripple's patterned charcoal lines are washed off to reveal nothing but stitches on cloth. It is then up to the audience to follow the straight line or to think differently about the patterns presented in the drama.

Ultimately, *Fair Maid* reinstates the original pattern, which begs the question of whether there is any possibility of moving outside the omnipresent straight line. Judith Butler asks this very question: if heterosexuality (and, in this case, able-bodiedness) only exists through a series of performative actions repeated such that they are seen as natural, where lies the possibility for subversion? Butler writes, "all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; 'agency' then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition" (185).[9] *Fair Maid* offers such a variation as well, one that may otherwise go unnoticed: Cripple and Frank are patterning themselves to favor disability rather than able-bodiedness; to create *more* disability rather than less.

[9] Butler offers drag as an example: drag's imitation of a gendered identity performs the imitation that secretly underlies the production of gender itself (175).

The play is gesturing toward queer and crip intimacy and embodiment by varying from the expected pattern. Phyllis's initial variation (to choose Cripple over any of the Golding brothers) changes the outcome of the repetition to center disability rather than sideline it. Cripple's final moments of silence, should the audience choose to listen, cultivate an uneasiness surrounding the able-bodied appropriation of crip tools and perspectives. What *Fair Maid* offers is not a new pattern, but a variation on an existing pattern that performs, for early modern and contemporary audiences alike, the radical possibilities of uncovering new ways to imitate.

Reading *Fair Maid* along the straight line will lead to an ableist and conformist interpretation of a play that, though written in the 17th century, offers valuable insight into the interplay between sexuality and ability today. *Fair Maid* provides a fabricated realm in which actors and audiences can enact repetitions that might not otherwise be available in everyday life. Yet, as the ending of the play demonstrates, fiction also does its part in reinforcing normative patterning, especially when dramatic narratives begin to fall into predictable shapes. Viewers expect a city comedy to end in marriage and may not read beyond the confirmation of the trope to consider how *Fair Maid* fights such standardization. An audience's task then is not to see outside the pattern, for that may well be impossible, but to see within the pattern, to understand its workings and its possibilities for disruption. Attention to patterning teaches audiences not to assume at the beginning that the fair maid Phyllis Flower will marry the young gentleman Frank Golding, nor to discount an early modern play that deals with disability as being automatically less adept at handling crip critique. *Fair Maid* establishes that the patterns that govern everyday lives often go unnoticed; thus, it is entirely possible to read *Fair Maid* without considering the sartorial setting. And that is precisely the problem, because in doing so, the reader misses the very mechanism that allows the play to direct and, ultimately, discard the possibilities of queer and crip intimacies. Audiences can all too easily follow the straight line, never stopping to consider what has patterned this line, and what alternative patterns may be possible.

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