The Stage Presence of the Gimp:  
A Study of the Complexities of Putting Disabled Actors Onstage

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

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2014

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Abstract

I examine the obstacles, both practical and theoretical, that keep gimp actors from finding work. In the first chapter, I reveal core concepts about what is considered “good” theatre, and how the ready acceptance of those standards works against gimp actors. In the second and third chapters, I apply a phenomenological lens to contemporary productions with gimp characters, played by either norms or gimps. In the fourth chapter, I provide examples of how gimp stand up comedians can make self-deprecating comedy. In the fifth chapter, I show how these techniques become more complex for a gimp character in a dark comedy, using *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*. In the epilogue, I remind any discouraged theatre makers that the frustrating “truths” discussed throughout are fluid.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mum, Rhonda Summerville, who taught me I never have to color inside the lines, and Robert Shimko, who challenges my intellect as fiercely as he safeguards my sense of humor and my heart.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to:
My grandma, Bea Summerville, for believing I'm never too old for comfort food or warm hugs. My grampy, Al Summerville, whom I know is reading this from the best seat in the sky. My committee members, Jen Schlueter, Joy Reilly, and Beth Kattelman, for keeping my feet on the ground as well as in wheelchair footrests. The teachers who gave me wisdom and wings: Andy Ballugher, Nick Dekker, Aaron Lampman, Helen Richardson, Howard Russ, and Louise Smith. My creative havens: Evolution Theatre, Get Quirky, Mental Shoes, Solstice Theatre, The Lab Series, and Wild Goose Creative. My wicked sensitive Antioch crew, especially Rani Deighe Crowe, Vee “the Monsoon” Levene, Bridgette Kreuz, Nic Ruley, Chris Schultz, and Desiree Stark. My Angels in America: Allison Brogan, Cat Cryan Erney, Ken Erney, Chris and Allison Hill, Brett King, Max McConnell, Rachael Redolfi, Andrew Sawtelle, and Colton Wendell Weiss. My students, for being their wonderful selves.
Vita

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Major Field: Theatre Studies
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In 2006, I graduated from Antioch College with a BA in Dance/Theatre. A graduation is a moment of triumph, if only because you are not yet unemployed and your mother has made a cake for you. Yet every artist's graduation is marred by the question, “So...What are you going to do with that?” I always replied that I was going to act, although I was at least sensible enough to add that I probably wouldn't make any money. A well-meaning relative would inevitably try to comfort me. “Ooh, I know this play you could be in...It's a famous play...I don't know the name of it, but it has this retarded girl in it...” This conversation was repeated so often I eventually memorized my part. “Laura Wingfield. In The Glass Menagerie.”

“Right! You could play her!”

“No, I couldn't. Laura has a limp. You can't limp in a wheelchair.”

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1 Since we will be discussing the visual medium of the theatre, I should properly introduce myself. I have cerebral palsy, specifically spastic diplegia. I ambulate using either a manual wheelchair or quad canes, though as an actor
When I recounted these encounters to my friend, Nic - mostly so he could enjoy the visual of my becoming America's Retarded Sweetheart - he said, “Laura won't have a limp when you play her.”

Though I didn't realize it at the time, the scenario that played out over and over again at my college graduation contained all of the elements barring those whom I gleefully call gimp actors from finding work.

Before we address the conundrums facing actors with disabilities, we should come to an understanding about the language we use to discuss them. I use the word “gimp” for three reasons. First, I wish to complicate the social construction model for disability. According to this model, “disability is a mutable category [created] by self consciously crafting a new disability identity” (Auslander and Sandahl 8). I recognize that perceptions of disability are fluid, but I think it's important to acknowledge that a disability marks the body as well as consigning social status. A gimp is someone who has difficulty walking, can't walk, or can't walk without assistance. This physical difference exists regardless of how she is treated by others. The second reason is related to the first. An actor

I exclusively use my wheelchair.
is extremely visible by nature of her profession. An actor who happens to be gimpy will have to be comfortable with the increased visibility of her condition. As there is no reason she shouldn't be, I've chosen vocabulary that emphasizes her body instead of obscuring it. For the purposes of my dissertation, the counterpart to “gimp” is “norm.” When I'm writing of disability in a broader context, I'll use “disabled” and “able-bodied.” Lastly, I use “gimp” in my personal life partially because it's transgressive. I emphasize the ridiculousness of viewing the stage as someplace I'm not “supposed” to be by making a claim to it in language I'm not “supposed” to use.

Admittedly, this isn't the terminology currently favored in Disabilities Studies departments, and I'd never advocate that a person with a disability use any terminology in her daily life other than that with which she's most comfortable. However, we won't be closely observing the daily lives of gimps. We'll be seeking to understand how gimpy characters and gimp performers are perceived while onstage. The very decision to take the stage, with or without the aid of a mobility device, signifies a willingness to call attention to one's body. The word “gimp,” like the decision to go onstage, dares both the gimp
and her audience to openly admit all the physical and social vulnerabilities that may come with her condition. On other hand, if I were to say, “Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a person with a disability,” that would reveal neither the fact that he used a wheelchair due to polio nor how much effort he put into hiding his gimpiness in his public life. In order to accurately discuss performers in the visual medium of the stage, it's necessary to show both how they deliberately present themselves and how an audience may perceive them. Language that foregrounds the presence of the gimpy body more easily allows us to do that. Now that we know how we'll discuss them, let's return to considering the obstacles I faced when I introduced myself as a gimp actor at my college graduation party.

First, there is the automatic assumption that any character I play should have personality traits that complement the qualities that are commonly associated with my wheelchair and the disability it indicates. If disabled characters are sometimes hard for other characters to love - the frankest admission of this arguably being Peter Nichols' 1967 play A Day in the Death of Joe Egg - does it not follow that it will be hard for an audience to love them, should they be played by disabled actors? After all, part of what
makes Laura Wingfield's misery bearable and perhaps even pleasurable to watch is an audience's knowledge that her suffering is not real. If, however, Laura is portrayed by a genuinely gimpy actress, audience members must consider the possibility that her suffering is real, insofar as the hardships she faces onstage may also be present in her daily life. Further, any onstage event that belies those "real" hardships, such as a kiss from Jim (were that not motivated by his pity for her) may seem unconvincing because it isn't consistent with the perceived sexual undesirability of gimps.

The second difficulty my brief conversation revealed is the idea that, in most cases, casting a gimpy actor is not honoring a playwright's intent. Able-bodiedness is often assumed in society, and it is also assumed onstage. Unless a character's stage direction explicitly reads, "She enters, wheeling," that character is able-bodied. Of course, the playwright Charles Mee encourages what is commonly called body blind casting:

In my plays, as in life itself, the female romantic lead can be played by a woman in a wheelchair [...] There is not a single role in any one of my plays that must be played by a
physically intact white person. ("The Re-Making Project: A Note on Casting")

However, Mee is an unusually permissive playwright. His decision to make all of his plays available online, essentially putting them in the public domain, allows directors to freely adapt them without risking a copyright violation. Since Mee is a gimp himself, he has a special interest in making body blind casting as feasible as possible.

Thirdly, though there are many literary studies of disabled characters and many performance studies of how gimps function in the world, a gimp who wants to perform onstage must currently rely on the ingenuity of individual directors and castmates. I realize I am incredibly lucky to have someone like my friend, Nic, who takes it for granted that I will play a nonlimping Laura Wingfield and he will direct me. There are far too many gimp actors who do not

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have my good fortune. I am motivated by a desire to provide gimp actors and those who would direct them with case studies that will help them to understand the particular obstacles they face, and how to best overcome them. I will not constrain the Nics of the world, or at least the theatre world, with an inflexible template for how they ought to think or act. Rather, I seek to vindicate these visionaries by exposing what an enormous task putting a gimp onstage actually is, and hopefully showing that it is still a worthwhile challenge to undertake. In my dissertation, I will consider gimpy characters (and sometimes gimps) onstage in order to better understand the challenges that come with choosing to embody the presence of the gimp in live theatrical performance.

While I agree with Phillip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl's joint assertion in *Bodies in Commotion* (2005) that “to think of disabled people as a minoritarian culture entails considering how that identity is performed both in everyday life and in theatrically framed events that contribute to the self-conscious expression of that identity,” I will leave the exploration of how disability is performed, deliberately or unconsciously, in life to respected scholars such as Petra Kuppers, Carrie Sandahl,
and Rosemarie Garland-Thompson\(^3\) (Auslander and Sandahl 9). I wish, instead, to concern myself with the one place where every event is theatrically framed and self-conscious: the stage. Though I will certainly explore the possible readings that stereotypes commonly associated with gimps may have for an audience when staged, I am far more interested in how a gimp actor fits into theatrical culture than I am in how a gimp fits into either disability culture or norm culture in the real world.

To privilege my interest in gimps in the theatre, I will exclusively examine performances that are designed to take place onstage. In the first chapter of my dissertation, I will clarify the unique place that a wheelchair occupies in the theatrical world. It can be a prop or a metaphor for all of the negative qualities associated with gimpiness in the real world. I also contend that a wheelchair could be added to Bert O. States’ list of the five things that are never fully integrated into an onstage world, because it always retains its real world function of providing mobility.

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\(^3\) Kuppers: *Encountering Paralysis: Disability, Trauma, and Narrative*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004.


to its user. Because a wheelchair is an extension of its user's body, she too cannot be fully integrated into the onstage world of which she is a part. This causes difficulties for a gimp actor who is expected to “disappear” into her role.

In the second chapter of my dissertation, I will consider plays with characters in wheelchairs who are portrayed by norm actors, such as Julia in *Fefu and Her Friends* (1978), Pooty in *Reckless* (1988 and 2010), and The Storyteller in *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* (2006). In these case studies, I will show the effects of casting an able-bodied actor as a character who, in some respects at least, confirms negative real world perceptions about gimpiness which the actor does not share. Although all of these characters are paraplegics who use manual wheelchairs, Julia walks and the actors who play Pooty and The Storyteller double as norm characters. When these actors reveal themselves as norms, they immediately shed the unfavorable qualities associated with gimps.

In the third chapter of my dissertation, I will examine cases where gimp actors are cast as gimp characters: Ann Stocking in John Belluso's *Gretty Good Time* (1999), Nabil Shaban as Hamm in Robert Rae's production of Samuel
Beckett's *Endgame* (2005), and Neil Marcus in his own play, *Storm Reading* (1996). All of these productions complicate gimp-related stereotypes by dismantling the assumption that the character's physical condition bears no relation to the actor's. Ann Stocking is a gimp, but she does not have the partial paralysis due to polio that Gretty has. Nabil Shaban is a gimp who uses a manual wheelchair, but he is completely immobile when he plays Hamm. Garry Robson, who plays Clov, usually uses crutches instead of the manual wheelchair he uses for this play. Neil Marcus' play is re-presentation of his life as a gimp with dystonia. In the first two examples, the actors' gimpiness-as-staged adds unscripted nuances to their characters' gimpiness-as-written. In Marcus's case, his self-presentation adds complexity to how his gimpiness is presented in the real world. Sometimes the decision to cast a gimp actor as a gimpy character enriches the play and sometimes it results in a reductive or disability-centered presentation of a complex script.

In the fourth chapter of my dissertation, I will focus on the stand up routines of three gimp comedians: Geri Jewell, Josh Blue, and Greg Walloch. All of the comedians I am focusing on are capable of walking, albeit with
difficulty. Thus they truly stand up as comedians and their physicality can be integrated into the onstage world. However, this is not necessarily because they “disappear” behind the personas they have created more effectively than gimp actors do. Rather, it's because stand up is naturally suited to what Bert States calls the self-expressive mode. Admittedly, a stand up comedian creates a persona, but he is not expected to adopt the specific, scripted characteristics of another, fictional person in the same way that an actor would. Rather, we see his particular way of doing his role - his rhythm, intonation, and inflection, what subjects he chooses to discuss, his relationship to the audience and the microphone. Stand up is a form wherein a performer's persona can be deliberately crafted to support his particular way of doing his role.

In the fifth chapter of my dissertation, I'll return to the theatre and examine a dark comedy where the gimp character has none of the advantages a gimp doing stand up would have. In Peter Nichols’ *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, Joe is severely physically and cognitively disabled. Yet the other characters in this dark comedy make jokes about her. I'll discover how it's possible to make a comedy about gimpiness when the gimp isn't controlling her self-
presentation. Whether for comedy or not, how can gimp actors also acknowledge the elements of their physicality that can't be altered through actor training - and the stereotypes that are often associated with that physicality - while still embodying complex characters and personas?

“I KNOW WHAT IT’S LIKE TO HAVE SOMEONE STARE AT YOU.”

One possibility is to at least temporarily privilege the unique experiences a gimp actor gains as a member of disability culture. As gimp actor Ann Stocking says

[Casting directors] say we're just as good as other actors. In reality, we're better. Given our experiences, we have stared death in the face. We bring powerful experiences to draw on and we can bring that experience to roles. I know what it's like to have someone stare at you for thirty years. In plays[...]characters are usually in trouble and are trying to turn their lives around. Who knows that more? We have something to offer unequaled in American society (“Ann Stocking Is Paving The Way For Actors With Disabilities”).

In my dissertation, I will resist Stocking's assertion that, due to the hardships they face in their personal lives, what
gimp actors have to offer cannot be equaled. Her claim encourages a troubling essentializing of various experiences of minority oppression, not to mention an adroit smoothing of the fissures embedded in disability culture. Certainly, not every type of disability brings one to a more acute awareness of the presence of death. And though Stocking's privileging disabled oppression over other sorts is troubling, for the moment I want to pay particular attention to what she says about the intersection of the disabled experience and acting. If life experience is a prerequisite for being able to play a role convincingly, then Stocking should never be cast as a norm character, or even a character who expresses herself using a norm's lexicon. Should she refuse a role as a romantic lead who has to say, “You've swept me off my feet,” because she does not have the proper lived experience to enrich the line? This way of thinking guarantees that gimps earn roles that are written for them, but it also bars them from playing any of the countless presumptively norm characters who populate the stage.

One of the major experiences Stocking says she can bring to a role is thirty years' worth of experience with encountering strangers' stares. The trouble with this
particular strength, of course, is that it isn't a strength. Every actor encounters stares. The more skilled she is, the more noticeable the stares become. I absolutely do not mean to imply that Stocking herself isn't skilled. She may handle audience members' fascination with enviable aplomb. Regardless, I think it is instructive to differentiate the stares of audience members in the theatre from the stares of curious onlookers on the street. The difference is not in the intensity of the stares, but in their intent. Actor, musician, and freak show performer Mat Fraser says that he wants to make people uncomfortable because of the way he presents himself onstage, “but it's all about doing it with charm” (“Interview With DadaFest's Mat Fraser”).

Unlike a gimp in the real world, a gimp actor - like any other actor - is deliberately courting an audience's attention. Though Richard Tomlinson is right when he points out that the real world power dynamics of the able/disabled binary are reversed when a gimp performs for a norm audience, there is another key difference between the stage and the street (Tomlinson 10-11). Even in situations where an actor does not directly address the audience, both parties tacitly acknowledge the inherent voyeurism of the theatrical form. If audiences were not being invited to
stare, why would actors' blocking be designed to allow for maximum visibility? A gimp actor returning a fascinated audience member's stare is not committing an act of defiance, as might be the case in daily life. Instead, she is admitting a mutual vulnerability. *I know you ought not to be staring at me,* she is saying to her audience, *but you know I am inviting you to do so.* A gaze is forced upon its recipient, but a stare is the result of a contract. In that case, how can a gimp actor most effectively make use of the attention she has arrested?

Every "truth" presented onstage is admittedly illusive. A gimp actor need not inhabit roles that either reflect or refute the stereotypes ascribed to her in the real world. Instead, she can present "truths" so startling that they cause her audience to question the very notion of veracity. Like a person who travels through a house of mirrors, she can successively present a number of self-images that are all true, but not quite real. Only by displaying all she could be will she cause an audience to reevaluate what she is. Before we discover how a gimp actor can develop an effective stage presence in a variety of

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4 I will use the feminine pronoun when referring to a hypothetical gimp actor. This is mostly to ensure clarity, but I also wish to combat the sociocultural invisibility of gimp women.
plays, we will have to subject her to particularly intense scrutiny, even for someone who is used to encountering an audience. We will have to create a fissure in her “body” with the same merciless exactitude that da Vinci used while segmenting the limbs of his Vitruvian man. To put this more simply, we will have to temporarily separate her from her wheelchair.

THE WHEELCHAIR AS A PROP

In their article, “The Social and Technological History of Wheelchairs,” Brian Woods and Nick Watson contend that the perception of the wheelchair as a medical device belongs to contemporary culture. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, wheeled chairs were a luxurious mode of conveyance for the wealthy as well an aid to the sick, but by the twentieth century the wheelchair was “a sign of failure. With its concentration on the cure or alleviation of impairment, the traditional technologies of rehabilitation were the orthoses, the prosthesis, the caliper, the brace, or a crutch--the material forms of the idea that you could replace or augment what was lost”\(^5\)

\(^5\) When I'm discussing a hypothetical gimp actor, assume she uses a manual wheelchair she can wheel herself. When I'm discussing specific characters in specific plays, I'll clarify whether a manual or a motorized wheelchair is being
(Woods and Watson 407). In its current sociocultural context, the wheelchair is not only a mobility device. Its very presence evokes the absence of agility that makes it necessary.

Further, unlike a crutch, a wheelchair doesn't restore the appearance of being physically intact. It causes one to move while stationary, without using any of the muscles associated with bipedal locomotion. A cane and a wheelchair may restore independence, but only the former restores the image of natural movement. In the real world, where a mobility device primarily serves a utilitarian function, this distinction is of little importance. Let us not forget, however, that we are particularly concerned with the wheelchair's place in the world of the theatre. How does this object which signifies the presence of a body - it belongs to someone, after all - and the physical abilities that body lacks fare as a prop?

According to Andrew Sofer, a prop accumulates three types of significance while onstage. First, it acquires temporal significance in real time and stage time. Second, it acquires spatial significance as it moves from scene to used.
scene. Third, it acquires expressive significance depending upon how it is manipulated by a particular actor in a particular role (Sofer 2). In order to more clearly illustrate Sofer's points, let us consider the example of Miss Prism's handbag in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. We learn courtesy of exposition that the handbag was long ago left at Victoria station with a baby, Jack Worthing, inside of it. The orphaned, penniless Worthing, who now possesses the handbag, returns it to its rightful owner in the last scene of the play. When she learns that Worthing has the handbag, Miss Prism is able to tell him the secret of his parentage. She was his nanny, and he is the wealthy nephew of Lady Bracknell. As he has a respectable parentage, he is now eligible to marry Lady Bracknell's daughter, Gwendolyn Fairfax.

In this case, the handbag moves from past to present in stage time, and its presence, both invoked and actual, is key to revealing the climactic plot. Further, a contemporary production of *Importance* may also remind a savvy audience of similar prop-related plot convolutions in Joe Orton's *What The Butler Saw* and Ben Elton's *Silly Cow*, both inspired by Wilde. The handbag's journey through the stage space is a brief one, as it merely moves from Worthing's possession to
Miss Prism's. However, it has considerable dramatic significance by the time the audience actually sees it, dramatic significance that is heightened by the exaggerated solemnity which the actors playing Jack Worthing and Miss Prism handle it. This prop, then, has the temporal, spatial, and expressive significance Sofer says a prop needs to be used effectively.

How is a wheelchair different from Miss Prism's handbag, or any other stage prop? To fully appreciate the implications of a wheelchair's unique position onstage, we must first repair the fissure we have made. Whatever the wheelchair's dramatic function in a particular play may be, its primary function is to provide mobility. Before it can do that, it must have a person inside of it to whom it could belong. After all, we are interested in the real world associations that a wheelchair carries with it while onstage. A nineteenth century wheeled chair, for example, doesn't come from the world that a contemporary audience inhabits. Therefore, it's unlikely to carry with it the qualities that are currently associated with disability. Further, while the actor playing E.B.B. in Rudolf Besier's *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* may be a gimp in real life, an audience will not consider the possibility that the
wheeled chair she has to use is her own. The way she
deployed it will reveal neither her disability nor
her character's, as wheelchairs were not designed to be
deployed independently until the twentieth century. If we are
to discover how a wheelchair exists onstage as a prop, a
real world object, and an extension of its user's body, we
must examine it in a contemporary context.

Like Miss Prism's handbag, a contemporary, occupied
wheelchair accrues temporal significance according to the
narrative of the play of which it is a part. However, it
also exists in a context drawn from the real world. After
all, there is always the chance that its presence is, not a
dramatic choice, but a practical necessity. If so, its
spatial significance may not be entirely the result of a
director's or a playwright's intentions. For example,
perhaps a gimpy character is wheeled by someone else because
the actor can't actually wheel herself. Most importantly,
Sofer contends that a prop accrues significance based on how
an actor handles it. A gimp actor may certainly make
dramatic choices about how to wheel her wheelchair, but she
may also make practical choices based on the stage space and
her own physical ability. Once we place a gimp in a
wheelchair, then, it ceases to be solely a prop with
temporal, spatial, and personalized qualities that denote the desires of a director, actor, or playwright. Now it potentially signifies gimpiness, which may or may not be an acknowledged element in the play of which it is a part. In some cases, a wheelchair is a prop that doesn't belong onstage.

In *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, Bert O. States says that some objects are never fully integrated into the theatrical world of a play. They always retain the quality of being themselves, as opposed to dramatic representations of themselves. A dog onstage, for example, will behave as he would normally behave. He knows neither that he is onstage nor that the stage is a place where behavior is predetermined. Therefore, in a production where a dog is used, spectators will find themselves viewing the dog’s actual behavior in an imaginary environment. Says States, let us begin at rock bottom with some instances of things that resist being either signs or images [...] I have chosen a few things that have abnormal durability and might illustrate the idea that stage images do not always or entirely surrender their objective nature to the sign/image function. (States 29)
Aside from animals, States lists clocks, fire, running water, and children as examples of such objects (States 30-34).

I would add wheelchairs to States’ list, because a wheelchair onstage still retains its utilitarian function (its “role” of providing mobility). It is “behaving naturally” as it would in the real world. However, a wheelchair does not usually exist alone onstage. In most cases, someone is using it. Thus, a wheelchair would quite literally be in the middle of States’ list. Like clocks, fire, and running water, a wheelchair is a thing, and its onstage “behavior” may arrest an audience’s attention because of the similarity to its “behavior” in the real world. Yet, crucially, the person who is using the wheelchair is more comparable, in States’ system, to an animal or a child. She behaves in a certain way, not because she does not understand that her actions are determined by a script, but because they are also partially determined by her disability. For example, although her speed and direction can be altered, it will be impossible for her to ambulate in a manual wheelchair without performing the motion of wheeling. An occupied wheelchair, then, is a physical embodiment of a schism in States’ list; his list of
“things” is actually a list of inanimate objects and living creatures: all things, but not the same sort of things.

Crutches, canes, and other mobility devices could also be placed on States' list as well. After all, they perform the same real world function as a wheelchair - that of providing mobility - and they will retain that function when placed onstage, in the same way a clock retains the function of keeping real time. Why, then, should we fixate on wheelchairs? What differentiates a wheelchair from other mobility devices isn't so much what it does as how it makes its user look while doing it. As we've noted, a wheelchair changes the alignment of the body, as sitting is now a prerequisite for movement. As Brian Woods and Nick Watson say in their history of wheelchairs, a wheelchair doesn't restore or augment the use of gimpy limbs the way, for example, a crutch does. This makes little difference in the real world, but it's a considerable distinction in the visual medium of the theatre. If, as Woods and Watson contest, a contemporary mobility device is regarded as a sign of failure, a wheelchair is an especially grave example, therefore, focusing on wheelchairs will allow us to explore especially complex examples of what it means to put a mobility device onstage. However, what we learn can also
be used to enrich plays where characters walk with difficulty or with assistance, such as The Cripple of Innishman or The Fair Maid of the Exchange.

Consider the implications that placing wheelchairs on States' list has for putting them onstage. If a character is written as being in a wheelchair, then the wheelchair has to be integrated into the dramatic context of the play, as does its user. In order for this to be possible, qualities that are often associated with wheelchairs may be taken into account and made inseparable from the character. Illness, infantilization, desexualization, physical weakness and mental retardation are just a few examples of the symbolic associations that might be linked with a wheelchair. If a character isn't written as being in a wheelchair, its presence may complicate an audience's understanding of her. To paraphrase Peter Handke, a

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wheelchair onstage is always a theatre wheelchair...but it is never solely a theatre wheelchair. Like any other object onstage, it is a prop. However, it is also an extension of its user's body and an object that can't be fully integrated into the dramatic world it inhabits. Due to its unique position, the wheelchair itself makes body blind casting impossible.

The term “body blind casting” implies that a politically correct director should overlook any physical evidence of a gimp actor's disability, as he would overlook race and ethnicity, and instead cast based on her suitability for a role. However, wheelchairs belong on States' list precisely because they cannot be overlooked. They are always simultaneously visible as props and real world indicators of disability. Further, these two qualities are linked to the actors who use them, as a wheelchair is also an extension of the body. Even if a director casts a gimp actor without considering her disability, he can't retain that “blindness” throughout the rehearsal process. Blocking and character analysis will be affected by the presence of the wheelchair, as well as the negative qualities associated with disability for which it is a

Handke: “A chair onstage is always a theatre chair” (Sofer 1).
constant metaphor. More importantly, an audience won't necessarily be able to overlook a gimp actor's disability just because a director does. Since the norm body is privileged in the able/disabled binary, its presence onstage is considered...normal. An audience shouldn't be asked to ignore an unexpected physical presence in the visual medium of the theatre. Even if an audience member is implicitly asked to overlook a performer's body, she seldom does. Consider Nancy Wozny's anguished confession about becoming obsessed with the circumference of a ballet dancer's thighs in her review, "My Eyes, Your Body:"

"Watch the dance, not the legs," I silently yelled at my brain. What’s wrong with me? And me, of all people, a thick-thighed somatic educator, who spent two decades teaching people to accept their bodies. This can’t be true. At war with my own attention, I missed the performance entirely by trying not to be bothered by a pair of less-than-perfect legs. Too distracted by so-called imperfection, I became a victim of my own learned blindness (Dance/USA).

Wozny is a compassionate audience member. A choreographer and teacher, she encourages her students to accept their own
bodies. She desperately wants to accept the body of the ballerina before her. Unfortunately, her situation is made more difficult because she isn't in her own classroom; as an audience member, she consumes information instead of shaping it. Also, an audience member who has a strong reaction to what she sees is bound to be subject to scrutiny by her fellows. For Wozny, the worst part of her reaction is that she is ashamed of herself, disappointed by her own failure to be body blind. In fact, she is so consumed with her own reaction to the performance that she misses the performance itself. Missing the show is arguably a more egregious affront than being unable to accept the presence of a single dancer. Yet both of these undesired outcomes stem from a very admirable impulse, her struggle to interpret what she is given even when it isn't what she expects to see.

As this example makes clear, what is commonly called body blind casting is actually body aware casting. This is true in two senses. First, the cast and crew of a play with a gimp actor must be aware of how her presence will affect staging choices. Second, the audience will be more aware of a gimp actor's body - or any body with a physical appearance that's unexpected in a given context - than a norm actor's.
In this dissertation, I will explore how best to address both of these aspects of body aware casting. How can an audience member be challenged by a gimp actor without losing the pleasure of being immersed in a dramatic world?

Currently, the most common practice is to foreground the presence of a gimp actor by presenting her within the context of a disabled\(^8\) theatre company. There are benefits to this approach. As August Wilson points out in his essay, “The Ground On Which I Stand,” exclusive companies allow minorities to offer audiences a powerful reminder of those who are marginalized outside the confines of the theatre. Wilson says minority solidarity provides “the ground [for] the affirmation of the value of one being, an affirmation of the value of his worth in the face of society's urgent and sometimes profound denial” (Wilson 5). Exclusive theatre companies solidify a minority identity that the dominant culture often tries to subsume. More practically, they provide a haven for theatre practitioners who would

\(^8\) A disabled theatre or dance company is a company that employs only disabled performers. A mixed-ability theatre or dance company is one wherein able-bodied and disabled performers collaborate. There are a number of successful, if marginalized, mixed-ability dance companies—Candoco, Dancing Wheels, and The Axis Dance Company to name a few. However, there is not presently a major mixed ability theatre company where theatre is considered a craft, as opposed to a therapeutic tool.
otherwise be kept from their craft due to a dearth of opportunity. However, as Wilson mentions, the work is often marginalized even when the practitioners are not. Minority theatre companies have consistent difficulties receiving recognition and funding.

Not unlike the freak shows of the early twentieth century, disabled theatre companies are fascinating to able-bodied audiences due to their novelty. This is one reason for their success, but it is also a liability. After all, a repeated novelty ceases to be novel. Perhaps this is best illustrated in Susan Elkin's celebratory article about England's first disabled theatre company, "The First Line of Defense: Susan Elkin Meets the Talents Behind Graeae as the Company Celebrates 21 Years of Showing Mainstream Theatre a Thing or Two" (2002). Elkin quotes Theatre and Dance reviewer Steve Tims: “There’s nothing dull [...] about Graeae’s output. Indeed, [its] work is frequently more daring and edgy than that produced by many so-called mainstream companies” (The Stage). Tims' accolades, though effusive, aren't especially complimentary; he tacitly suggests that Graeae's productions aren't as dull as one might expect. More importantly, he is incapable of evaluating them based on their own merit. His greatest
praise is that some of Graeae's productions are superior to those of some able-bodied theatre companies. But to which companies is he referring, and by what criteria is he judging a show's success? Tims elides specificity with political correctness, thus acknowledging the company's effort without entirely endorsing its works.

August Wilson is correct when he says that the lack of a critical lens through which to evaluate a particular minority's work is an indication of a pernicious perpetuation of sociocultural inequality:

[A]s the theatre changes, the critic has an important responsibility to develop and encourage that growth. However, in the discharge of [his] duties, it may be necessary for [him] to also grow and develop. A stagnant body of critics [...] makes for a stagnant theatre without the fresh and abiding influence of contemporary ideas (Wilson 45).

Privileging existing dictums for theatre leads critics and audiences to devalue any productions that don't adhere to those arbitrarily privileged standards. This is precisely why Wilson opposes colorblind casting, which frequently
leads to black actors being cast in canonical plays that affirm a white power structure.

What I call “body aware” casting posits the same risk. Like a black actor, a gimp actor frequently has to make a choice between taking a role that emphasizes her physical identity and taking one that negates it. However, there is a key difference between the black actor's experience and that of the gimp actor. Wilson repeatedly references common cultural experiences amongst blacks: slavery, racial discrimination in the deep south, and the healing reclamation of African spiritual and performative rituals. Of course, the experience of being black in America also varies depending upon socioeconomic class. Wilson acknowledges this, but he also calls upon black theatre practitioners to represent their common cultural memories. There are unarguably historical touchstones within the narrative of what it means to be disabled – perhaps the Holocaust is the most harrowing example. However, individuals' experiences of living with a disability frequently have few commonalities. My disability – cerebral palsy – has a wide spectrum of symptoms. Further, my struggles for muscular control are in no way comparable to the steady decline in fine and gross motor skills.
experienced by someone who has muscular dystrophy, and the two conditions won't be perceived in the same way. Someone who has cerebral palsy may still be treated differently than I based on the severity of our respective physical conditions. Even in a disabled theatre company then, a gimp can only represent herself. A co-performer who has the same mobility device may move and speak very differently, and she and he won't necessarily have an experiential kinship.

Dancer and choreographer Bill “The Crutchmaster” Shannon uses the terms “The Cream of Cripples” and “The Drool Factor” to describe the continuum of able-bodied perceptions of the disabled. Someone who is The Cream of Cripples is “more palatable to media and audiences and has more common ground with the able-bodied” while someone with The Drool Factor is more severely disabled, and thus more unnerving to onlookers (“Disability: Personal, Political, Cultural”). The continuum is admittedly fluid. Someone who is The Cream of Cripples in one situation may have The Drool
Factor in another. In one respect, disabled theatre companies de-emphasize the power of this binary. Usually a disabled person's designation in the continuum is determined because she is being tacitly compared to an able-bodied counterpart. Someone who is The Cream of Cripples is, in a sense, “more able-bodied” than someone who has The Drool Factor. There is no able-bodied ideal in a disabled theatre company, which means no actor can easily be judged The Cream of Cripples. Yet the separatist model also poses risks. Audience members may not know how to interpret a disabled actor's physical and vocal skill. In that case, she will be reduced to “performing” her disability, though

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9 I know that a comparable continuum exists in the world of colorblind casting. Like disability, skin color is an identifying physical quality that varies greatly amongst individuals. However, August Wilson is addressing a very specific group throughout his essay. He wants to establish black theatres for those who identify as black and can be identified that way by others.

10 Sarah Perry illustrates this in her online review of The Graeae Theatre Company's 2006 production of Sarah Kane's Blasted for Soho OMH. After noting that, “all of the actors are disabled in some way” she writes that actor and dancer David Toole “moves about the stage on his hands, thus adding to his considerable stage presence.” Though slanting the stage to Toole's advantage was a dramatic decision, his style of movement was not. Toole is missing the lower half of his body. Though he sometimes uses a manual wheelchair in his personal life, he always performs without it. By focusing (however favorably) on an aspect of his physicality that he can't alter, Perry shortchanges any deliberate acting choices he may have made.
perhaps with less difficulty than expected. If all she is
given credit for doing is being disabled with surprising
resilience, then how is her work to be evaluated?

Before we answer this question in regard to gimp
actors, we need to redress a wrong. In our attempt to
empathize with the gimp actor, we have dehumanized (or at
least essentialized) her norm audience. Until now, we have
imagined an audience with roughly the same qualities August
Wilson bequeaths upon Robert Brustein. In this view, norms
are a naive group of people who wish to pity a gimp actor
while imposing aesthetic standards that reinforce their own
entrenched privilege. Admittedly, this is sometimes the
case. But let's remember that Nancy Wozny, the audience
member who initially led us to question whether body blind
casting was actually possible, is neither uninformed nor
indifferent. Her worst character flaw is an inability to

"As Rosemarie Garland Thompson points out in "Dares to
Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists and the Dynamics
of Staring," (Auslander and Sandahl 30-40), it is often
incorrect to assume that an audience that is viewing a gimp
performer represents a norm gaze, since some audience
members could be gimpy themselves. I take her point; I refer
to a norm audience only because, in examining the
able/disabled binary, it is simpler to refer to hypothetical
audience members as though they are all on the side of the
binary to which most of them will probably belong. However,
I realize that this approach allows me to overlook the gimpy
gaze, which doubtless also impacts an analysis of a gimp
actor's work.
accept a dancer whose thighs she considers too thick for ballet. In her defense, she is more disappointed in her own ideological inflexibility than she is in the dancer's performance. To put her dilemma in theatrical terms, she is unable to suspend her disbelief.

In the theatre, the willing suspension of disbelief is usually defined as an audience's ability to collectively agree that whatever is represented onstage reveals the world as it is by accepting “truths” offered within the context of the production. What is required of an audience varies with each play. In Henry V, the audience is asked to see horses where there are none. In True West, it is asked to see a kitchen with cupboards instead of a stage space with set pieces. In Mother Courage and Her Children, it is asked to see that Courage could have made different choices even though the outcome of the play is predetermined. It's easy to see how the idea of body blind casting springs from this understanding of the willing suspension of disbelief. If an audience can enrich some aspects of a given dramatic world, why can't it ignore others? We have seen, however, that body blind casting is in fact body aware casting, because it actually heightens an audience's awareness of the unexpected
presence of a gimpy body. The concept of the willing
suspension of disbelief also deserves reexamination.

As Michael Tomko explains in his essay, “Politics,
Performance, and Coleridge's 'Suspension of Disbelief,'”
poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined the now famous phrase
in an 1817 account of the inspiration for the poetry
collection, *Lyrical Ballads*, which he coauthored with William
Wordsworth:

[I]t was agreed, that my endeavours should be
directed to persons and characters supernatural,
or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from
our inward nature a human interest and a semblance
of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows
of imagination *that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith*. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand,
was to propose himself as his object, to give the
charm of novelty to things of every day, and to
excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by
awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy
of custom. (Tomko 242)

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The phrase itself is far more famous than its origin story. Tomko writes that Richard Holmes recorded seven unattributed uses of it in newspaper articles and radio shows during one week in 1997 (Tomko 241).
Though Coleridge only writes of the willing suspension of disbelief in reference to his own poetry, it's significant that neither Wordsworth nor he wishes to present to readers a representation of the world they actually inhabit. Coleridge wants to endow supernatural creatures with human emotional responses so that his readers will intuitively understand them. Wordsworth wants to re-present seemingly ordinary experiences so that his readers will perceive them differently. Both men are seeking to write "truthfully," which proves how subjective even generally accepted truths are. Neither is seeking to create the kind of experience that is usually associated with the willing suspension of disbelief. First, they don't expect their readers to entirely forget that their poems don't depict the world as it is. Building a bridge between the real and the fantastical that readers desire to cross is what will prove their poetic prowess. Second, Coleridge and Wordsworth don't place the burden of accepting a poetic world solely on the reader. Each man has a specific method for helping readers to interpret narratives as he presents them, and Coleridge considers both approaches equally valid. Third, readers aren't expected to (at least temporarily) view the world the way the poets do because it is their duty. Ideally, they
will do it because the contrast between the “truths” they think they know and the “truths” being offered to them is pleasurable to explore. In other words, neither poet would have considered Nancy Wozny's distress an ideal response.

In Wozny's defense, Coleridge's version of the willing suspension of disbelief – which I'm taking the liberty of applying to Wordsworth as well – is more easily achieved while reading poetry than while watching a production. A reader is limited only by his unwillingness to use his own imagination to enrich what he reads. An audience member is actively encountering a product of others' imaginations, and what they perceive in their work may strongly contradict what she perceives. Of course, a reader may not perceive Coleridge's work in precisely the way he does either, but his vision isn't being embodied in physical space. A reader can counter Coleridge's Kubla Khan with her own, but a set designer's Kubla Khan will be hard for an audience member to circumnavigate. She can certainly reject it, but she will have a hard time imagining her way out of it. There may be something, a wheelchair for example, that she simply does not want to see in the dramatic world of which she has agreed to be a part. In that case, what can be done for her?

A wheelchair is a particularly difficult object to
encounter since, as we discussed earlier, it is an object that is never fully integrated into the onstage world. It carries with it the negative qualities that are associated with disability in the real world, thus working against the sort of immersion in an imaginary world that Coleridge advocates. Let's not forget, however, that we aren't just considering the presence of the wheelchair. We are considering the presence of the gimp. A gimp actor embodies both Coleridge's and Wordsworth's strategies for reaching an audience. Like Coleridge, she has to imbue a creature who is regarded as other (herself) with behaviors that audience members can recognize as similar to their own. However, she also particularizes her own experience as Wordsworth does, since the presence of her wheelchair forces an audience to reevaluate even an act as simple as crossing the stage. She seeks to represent her audience members while constantly demonstrating that she is unlike them. As a result, they have to decide which of two possible “truths” they disbelieve: Is she someone who may speak for them despite not being one of them, or is she someone whose very existence causes them to reassess what they consider “normal?” Of course, if Coleridge and Wordsworth are correct, struggling with either challenge could bring an
audience pleasure if our gimp actor's work were compelling. In that case, it is necessary for us to ask which qualities would make an audience want to watch her. In other words, what would she have to do be thought “good?”

According to an article in the 1985 issue of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* entitled, “An Experimental Study of the Emotionality of Theater College Students”, “The emotional reactions of an actor that resemble those experienced by the character he is portraying serve as an index of the artist's penetration into the sphere of the needs (motives) of that dramatic character [and], an indicator of the naturalness, verisimilitude, and accuracy of the behavior of that character, which is the most important condition for fruitful creativity in the theater (Alekseev, N.P. 6).

Further, “the ability to transform [...] is an extremely important aspect of an actor's talent and also of his

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The fact that this study appears in a psychological journal reveals an aesthetic bias. The writers are clearly defining skillful acting using Konstantin Stanislavsky's tenets for psychological realism. Many theatre practitioners—Michael Checkov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Jerzy Grotowski, for example—have revised or reacted against Stanislavsky's techniques. A gimp actor could certainly study and utilize various acting methods. I am considering how she will be judged by audiences or theatre critics who, like the authors of this article, privilege Stanislavsky's techniques when judging an actor's effectiveness.
professionalism" (Alekseev N.P. 2). A good actor, then, should become inseparable from his character in two ways. First, he should have visible emotional reactions that are consistent with the psychological state and personality of his character. Second, he should transform his physicality so that his own patterns of speech and movement are no longer evident to an audience. By these standards, a performance is an act of erasure. The actor ensures an audience's willing suspension of disbelief by concealing his own mannerisms so completely that it becomes unnecessary. Coleridge and Wordsworth were interested in making readers wish the worlds they created existed. By contrast, the ideal contemporary actor's job is to present the onstage world as it is and make it impossible for his audience to doubt he lives there.

How does this affect our gimp actor? As we noted earlier, she represents her audience insofar as she behaves in familiar ways despite her status as other. However, she is also visibly different from it, insofar as her physicality is not comparable. If an actor's prowess — and even his level of professionalism, according to the study cited above — is largely dependent upon his ability to “become” his character an actor who does not have complete
control over her own body will not fare very well. As Carrie Sandahl writes in her essay for *Bodies In Commotion*, “The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training,” a technique that privileges “the neutral body” is doubly humiliating to a disabled actor. First, she is doomed to be perceived as a failure when she cannot “become” her character. Second, she is re-experiencing the degradation she faces in the real world, where a norm’s more flexible body is regarded as more desirable than hers (Sadahl 22).

Apart from being unable to entirely transform her physicality, a *gimp* actor faces an additional difficulty. Her wheelchair is an object that can never be fully integrated into the onstage world and, since it is an extension of her body, it lends the same quality to her. If she attempts to “become” her character, her wheelchair will belie her efforts. Even if the wheelchair is fulfilling a role that has been written for it, her relationship to it (the position of her body as she sits, the strength and speed of her wheeling, the amount of time she takes to move across the stage) will be identifiable as hers. The wheelchair is an expression of herself, not her character. More damaging still to her “transformation,” her wheelchair is a metaphor for the negative qualities that are associated
with disability in the real world. If she plays a character who complicates any of these qualities, she ceases to be “believable” because she contradicts herself. Rather, she contradicts her wheelchair, which is an extension of her own body.

By these standards, the phrase “gimp actor” is an oxymoron. A gimp onstage is, at best, a props mistress who skillfully handles a particularly challenging prop. However, since we have taken such trouble to give our gimp actor a spotlight, we would be unjust if we immediately forced her to relinquish it. We have established that, due to the singular place a wheelchair occupies in the theatre, she never “becomes” any character she plays. To figure out what she does do we will again rely on Bert O. States, whose list of five things that always remain themselves while onstage initially prompted us to give wheelchairs our attention.

According to States, some actors work in what he calls the self expressive mode. Unlike an actor who “becomes” his character, a self-expressive actor awakens “our awareness of the artist in the actor [and…] reacting to the actor’s particular way of doing his role” (States 165). A self-expressive actor does not submerge himself in the roles he plays. Rather, he adopts the character as a “mask”
underneath which the actor is always visible. States says an audience is doubly pleased by a skillful actor working in the self-expressive mode, enjoying both the quality of his performance and the moments when he lets his “mask” slip and reveals his own magnetism (States 165). A gimp actor is inherently self-expressive, because she is constantly revealing her gimpiness and any physical qualities associated with it. However, unlike the actors that States lists as examples—Kean, Olivier, and Bernhardt—a gimp actor is not letting audiences glimpse either her famous persona or her personal charisma. Unfortunately, the wheelchair that makes her self-expressive also separates her from other actors who work in that mode. They are appealing because they reveal the skilled actors beneath their characters, while she is appealing despite doing so.\footnote{Able-bodied actors who play disabled characters do not face a comparable conundrum. As Joshua Engel points out while answering the question, “What is stage presence?” on the “knowledge sharing community” Quora, tackling the challenge of embodying the physicality of someone who has a disability is “a very good way to keep [an audience's] interest.” For an able-bodied actor disability is not self-expressive. It is a particularly challenging opportunity to “become” a character.}

As Steve Tims' praise for the actors of the Graeae Theatre Company makes clear, an audience often decides a gimp actor's most impressive skill is having any skill at all.
Ideally, the pleasure of watching a self-expressive actor comes from the feeling that he is extraordinary, as opposed to being less disappointing than expected. If she is to fully take advantage of the self-expressive mode, a gimp actor has to find a way to successfully showcase her stage presence.

British actor Simon Callow says that what creates stage presence is “not disguise, but the revelation of alternative possibilities” (Rundle 342). A gimp actor's very presence is an alternative possibility, a simultaneous acknowledgment and refutation of the expected presence of the norm. Since the collective imagination of the audience does not effortlessly conjure her, she truly requires a willing suspension of disbelief. If a norm actor can obey Chekov's dictum and allow an audience to assume that a loaded gun that appears in the first act must go off in the second, a gimp actor has to persuade each audience member to personally pull the trigger. She has to take advantage of her self-expressiveness by showcasing that she is not whom she pretends to be so irresistibly that nobody wishes she were. An audience that agrees with gimp actress Ann Stocking who claims the very act of being disabled provides a
dramatic skill set, will readily grant that a gimp inherently has stage presence because we stare at her. However, the labeling of a gimp as other is not the sort of alternative possibility Simon Callow believes entrances audiences. It is merely a reflection of how gimps are viewed in the real world. I have demonstrated that a gimp who tries to convince an audience that she and the dramatic world she inhabits are what they appear to be will not be very successful. However, perhaps we should examine, not just our gimp actor, but the particular characteristics of the space she inhabits.

In his essay, “Of Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault introduces the concept of heterotopias. Unlike utopias, which are fundamentally unreal spaces that could not actually exist, heterotopias can be found in the real world. Heterotopias are spaces that can exist in the real world without being bound by the strictures of the society of which they are a part. Foucault says:

There are [...] in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the
real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously, represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 24)

For example, a theatre audience at a domestic tragedy may be able to rapidly witness a woman’s relationship with her domineering boss, her dutiful husband, and her delinquent daughter. The theatrical form supports, perhaps even encourages, the presentation of several different and possibly conflicting facets of a character. These facets are then externalized (embodied) by the actor’s manipulations of his physical and vocal energy. Some of the heterotopias that Foucault mentions are boarding schools, mental institutions, prisons, cemeteries, museums, libraries, boats and, most importantly for our purposes, the theatre (Foucault 24-25, 27). According to Foucault, the theatre is a heterotopia because it allows for the representation of several spaces (the locations indicated in different scenes of a play) in one real world location (the stage) (Foucault 25). The fluidity that Foucault attributes to the locations embodied
in a theatre space could also be extended to the actors who are embodying characters in that space. In other words, in the heterotopia of the theatre, many real world "performances" can be shown in close succession. The theatrical form supports, perhaps even encourages, the presentation of several different and possibly conflicting facets of a character. An audience can then contrast, though perhaps not reconcile, them. Thus, the theatre is a place where real world "performances" are shown to be extremely fluid.

How a heterotopia functions depends upon what it has been designed to do.

The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all of the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory [...] Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy,
ill-constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia not of illusion, but of compensation [.] (Foucault 27)

The approach to body aware casting that Ann Stocking advocates, wherein gimps are temporarily privileged, makes a heterotopia of compensation. Ideally, she wants to use her time onstage to reverse the standards of the able/disabled binary as they appear in the real world. If gimps are fragile, Stocking intimidates death. If gimps are naive, Stocking offers unequaled personal experiences. If a gimp's body is usually a norm's burden, Stocking's stage presence is an asset to her audience. The disadvantage of placing a gimp actor in a heterotopia of compensation is that representing a world designed to favor her requires an audience's willing suspension of disbelief, just as representing the real world onstage would. The difference between the two approaches is one of perspective, not technique. In the real world, the able/disabled binary is presented as a norm experiences it, while Stocking's heterotopia of compensation shows a gimp's point of view. However, we have seen a gimp will have a difficult time encouraging an audience's willing suspension of disbelief, because she is never quite whom she claims to be. This is
still true in a heterotopia of compensation. Repeatedly insisting that she is strong, for example, will not make her appear that way to an audience whose understanding of gimpiness is rooted in the able/disabled binary. The greatest advantage of her position as a self-expressive actor is that, because she is a wheeling contradiction herself, she can expose the stage as a heterotopia of illusion where real world “truths” are represented, contested, and inverted. In that case, we have shown that she can be an actress. However, we have only addressed a part of our original concern. Remember, we did not only pose the question of whether or not a gimp can be an actress, self-expressive or otherwise. We asked what she would have to do to be called a good actress.

Yes, an actor may have stage presence even if she does not “become” her character. That admission alone assists us very little, as stage presence is an elusive quality. Why, precisely, do audiences enjoy watching actors? Silvia Carli says that according to Aristotle, “the product of the poet's [playwright's] activity is a story in which the reasons of the dramatic characters' happiness or unhappiness appear with incomparable clarity” (303). In other words, an
audience is pleased when an actor enacts experiences that are familiar, albeit tempered by poetic justice.

Unfortunately, a self-expressive gimp actor who is using the theatre as a heterotopia of illusion is not showing an audience what is familiar. Instead, she is flaunting theatrical elements that an audience is usually asked to willfully ignore: the design of the stage, which she may have trouble navigating, the presence of the actor beneath the character, and the moments when that presence disrupts the “truth” being told. If this is the case then, at least according to Aristotle’s aesthetic, a gimp actor will never be pleasing to an audience.

Yet Simon Callow says that a worthy actor reveals, not accepted truths, but alternative possibilities. In other words, a gimp actor’s job is not to convince her audience members that what she says and does is true. Instead, she asks them to flirt with the possibility that it could be. In Against Love: A Polemic, Laura Kipnis says of flirting,

In his essay, “Flirtation,” the quirky German sociologist Georg Simmel (a contemporary of Freud’s) notes that love has a tendency to expire with the fulfillment of its yearning. If love lies on a path from not having to having, Simmel says,
invoking Plato, then possessing what you wanted changes the nature of the enterprise – and along with it, the pleasure in it. (Once you have something how can you want it?) Hence the evolution of flirting, a way of being suspended between having and not having, and keeping possibilities open. Being suspended between consent and refusal is the path to freedom (224).

If Kipnis is right about human nature, then an audience member enjoys experiencing the tension between what he has and what he wants that a gimp actor embodies. In fact, the bolder the choice to consent or refuse to suspend his disbelief becomes, the more he will relish it. Further, if the gimp actor and he openly acknowledge his misgivings, she may openly display her virtuosity in an attempt to captivate him. Our gimp actor is constantly wheeling a tightrope stung up between who she is and who she could be. The fascinating question that holds her audience's attention is not how she manages to do it – she climbed on to the tightrope herself, after all – but how she manages to do it gracefully.

While we are discussing flirtation, I should admit that I have been flirting with you myself. All this time, I have entertained the possibility that a gimp actor could be
playing the role of a gimp character, hoping to make the
scenario intriguing enough to be desirable. If we choose to
be practical, we will readily admit that there is a much
simpler solution to portraying gimpy characters than the one
I have proposed. All we have to do is revoke the
wheelchair's status as an object that always remains itself
while onstage. We have to make it nothing more than a prop
that can be entirely controlled by an actor who can escape
its symbolism whenever she chooses. We have to acknowledge
that, in certain cases, a wheelchair is a prop that an actor
leaves behind when she stands and bows for curtain call. To
put this more succinctly, the wheelchair needs to have a
norm in it.
Chapter Two: The Presence of the Norm

Since “good” acting requires a mastery of the body, actors are often lauded—or decried—by critics for how well they control their physicality. In “Players and Painted Stage: Nineteenth Century Acting” (1946), Alan S. Downer includes a pan of Fanny Kemble by a reviewer for The Spectator. The reviewer says, “in expressing dignity or high resolve, we think her particularly unhappy. She uniformly points her toe, in what dancing masters call the fourth position, and throws back her head, till her attitude presents a perilous deviation from the perpendicular” (Downer 528). According to her reviewer, Kemble’s footwork is too precise, and the placement of her head is not precise enough. She should be “perpendicular,” but we are not told whether this placement is in relation to the stage, the audience, or a fellow actor. Though there is no reason for an actor to answer to the will of a single critic, Kemble could alter all of these aspects of her physicality if she wished. She could even add additional vocal or physical qualities, perhaps tempering her rich voice with a lisp.
A norm actor who is playing a gimp character is in a position similar to Fanny Kemble's. Her physicality places her at a disadvantage, but it is one that she has the power to accentuate or de-emphasize whenever she wishes. She is representing disability, but she can use her own physical prowess to ensure that the negative qualities associated with gimpiness only appear in ways that support her director's interpretation of the script.

Most importantly, the symbolism of the wheelchair she uses has been effectively quarantined. It's a symbol of gimpiness, but a norm actor is only as gimpy as she wants to be. It is an extension of a gimpy body, but she can reveal that it isn't an extension of her body whenever she chooses. If the wheelchair's symbolism can be entirely controlled, then it is no longer an object that always remains itself while onstage. It is solely an object used to enhance the dramatic world of which it is a part. In other words, it is a prop. Of course, even an actor who skillfully controls a prop can't completely control how an audience perceives it. If a norm actor never leaves her wheelchair, an audience may think she is actually gimpy. However, she will escape all of the negative qualities associated with gimpiness as soon as she stands for her curtain call. Further, there are scripts
that require a norm actor playing a gimp character to reveal herself as a norm within the play, either through double casting or through requiring a physical action that would be impossible for someone who actually had the character's disability to perform. The tension that comes from privileging the former end of the able/disabled binary is made especially palpable when a gimp character is revealed to be played by a norm actor. Colleen Worthmann was cast as the gimpy Storyteller and a norm chorus member in Alex Timbers and Michael Friedman's *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* at the Public Theatre (2010). Welker White was cast as paraplegic Pooty and norm Dr. Helen Caroll in Craig Lucas' *Reckless* at the Circle Reparatory Theatre (1988). Margaret Harrington plays paraplegic Julia, who walks in another character's hallucination, in Maria Irene Fornes' *Fefu and Her Friends* at American Place Theatre (1978). While casting norm actors as gimp characters unquestionably simplifies blocking and set design choices by making physical adaptations unnecessary, it also complicates how gimpiness is represented onstage.

"SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO SHOOT THE STORYTELLER IN THE NECK"

In 2010, the year Lucy Prebble's short-lived *Enron* closed after fifteen performances (PBS News Hour), Alex
Timbers and Michael Friedman's *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* slithered its way to The Public Theatre in tight leather pants. Unlike *Enron*, wherein Prebble strove to explain free market capitalism as clearly and accurately as possible, *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* places audience members in a world that is gleefully anachronistic. The musical genre Friedman is working in to write the score immediately gives this away. Emo rock is “something of an offshoot of hardcore rock with a mix of punk, marked by overwrought lyrics often speaking of teen angst” (Suskin). These nineteenth century characters are raucous embodiments of Oscar Wilde's wry assertion that “America's youth is their oldest tradition” (Wilde 436). Because their musical shows an America that's in an angst-ridden, rebellious, perpetual adolescence, Timbers and Friedman repeatedly stress that the cast should be comprised of actors who sing, not actors who are used to working in the style of musical theatre, and the entire cast should be under thirty-five (Timbers and Friedman iii-iv)...with one possible exception. The gimpy character, The Storyteller, is described as

Late 30s to late 60s. Female. Wears a Puff the Magic Dragon style sweater, thick glasses, and her

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15 *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* came to the Public Theatre as a series of musical numbers in 2009. However, I'm analyzing the 2010 version of the production.
hair in a bun. Loves history, loves Jackson, and loves telling the audience about both. Being in this show might be the most exciting moment in her life. If played by a younger actress, can double with other roles (Timbers and Friedman 6).^{16}

In an onstage world where the nineteenth century characters' anachronisms help express their personalities – Jackson's charisma appealed to the populace, and so he is rendered as a rock star with a sexual swagger – The Storyteller's bulky sweater and skirt signify that even her contemporaneity and her knowledge of Jackson don't give her a place here. She has neither the beauty nor the physical grace of the others. Her poodle skirt reveals her legs, but it doesn't emphasize her sexiness in the way that the other women's corsets, skirts, and boots emphasize theirs. Further, she is the only person onstage – the only person in the theatre, since he also approaches audience members – who doesn't have a sexualized relationship with Andrew Jackson. Though she is obviously besotted by him, she will never be seduced by him.

^{16} Though younger actors are cast to support the director's concept, this is yet another instance of ageism in theatre casting. The dearth of roles for actors over thirty-five is a cause for concern, but so is the lack of attention given to it. In his history and analysis of nontraditional casting, for *Backstage West* “Inside The Box:Nontraditional Casting Has Long Been The Norm – At Least In The Minds Of Casting Directors,” Raymond Gerard mentions neither ageism nor ableism as forms of discrimination.
The only personal anecdote she shares is prompted by Jackson's first meeting with his wife, Rachel. Talking about her college sweetheart, The Storyteller uses the pronoun “she.” Though she is obviously drawn to Jackson's sexual magnetism, it won't be directed toward her. (Timbers and Friedman 12).

Even her presence as an observer is a privilege, since this may be the most exciting day of her life. In the opening song, “Populism, Yea, Yea”, Jackson's coterie identify themselves as “People who make things happen” (Youtube), people who move. Apart from The Storyteller, all of the women onstage have loose, long hair that they frequently whip around. The jumps and kicks in their choreography display their flexibility and their desirability. By contrast, The Storyteller “painfully heaves one leg over the other to create a more conversational appearance” (Timbers and Friedman 8) before she tells us she “personally can't imagine what it would've been like to join a ragtag band” (Timbers and Friedman 8). Crossing her legs actually decreases her sexual allure, since it's a belabored action for her. It also emphasizes her motorized wheelchair, since that places her feet in an unnatural position in relation to the footrests. Yes, she lacks sexual
desirability. More importantly, her physical struggle shows she also lacks the quality that's most desirable in the world of Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson: fluidity.

Apart from being mentioned in the title, the word “blood,” or some derivative, is mentioned eighteen times in the script. Five scenes contain stage blood. By the end of the play stage blood splatters the walls of the set, and it's streaked across the front of Jackson's white shirt. Blood is a symbol of the violent way Jackson moves through the world, always leaving much carnage behind him. Yet it's also an indication of how Jackson and his populists want their society to operate. As Jackson sings in “I'm Not That Guy,” “the blood will bleed out” (Youtube). Blood is a visible marker of pain and distress that alters the body and the body politic with its presence. Most importantly for these reformers, blood only flows forward from the body and spreads in all directions. It goes everywhere and changes everything it touches, leaving permanent stains. The Storyteller eventually does bleed when an irate Andrew Jackson shoots her in the throat (Timbers and Friedman 16), but in her case the fluid doesn't grant the fluidity she needs to navigate this world. She reappears twice after she is shot in order to deliver narration. The first time she
comes from the wings, “drag[ging] herself onstage using the strength from her upper arms, blood spilling forth from her neck” (Timbers and Friedman 29). The second time she actually has wings, although they apparently leave her as immobile as she was while alive. She's an angel who carries a lyre, but she still has to be “awkwardly cranked on from offstage” (Timbers and Friedman 84). While her actions confirm the real world stereotype of disability-as-immobility - the only time she is able to maneuver gracefully around the other characters in her motorized wheelchair is when they are frozen in tableau (Timbers and Friedman 12) - she also shows how physically unfit she is for the role she does play in this world: The Angel of History.

In his 1940 essay, “On The Concept Of History,” philosopher Walter Benjamin describes an approach to studying history that he calls historical materialism. Benjamin:

> Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over
both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes (Part VI).

Jackson and his populists are afraid of becoming tools of the ruling class of elite New England congressmen. Timbers and Friedman are historical materialists, insofar as they have singled out a particular moment that crystallizes a particular historical dilemma: whether the populists will be oppressed by their representatives in Congress, who in fact don't represent them at all. Timbers and Friedman also show the historical materialist's distrust for positivist teleology. They are far more interested in their own sociopolitical climate than Jackson's, though they do consider Jackson's impact on its creation. As soon as Jackson agrees to lead the frontiersmen who are combating the Native Americans and gains authority as a result, he faces a new dilemma. Even an audience member who doesn't know her history well enough to realize Jackson becomes America's fifth president could use the rules of play structure to determine his path. He's now in more danger of becoming a member of the ruling elite than he is of becoming one of its tools. Jackson's story has already been made contemporary, but if he is to be one of the rulers who determines how that story is evaluated, he needs to secure
his legacy. In order to do that, he needs his own Angel of History.

Benjamin takes his image of the Angel of History from a painting by Paul Klee.

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay [...] and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward (IX).

Jackson shoots The Storyteller because he becomes frustrated with her narration. The populists, after all, are people who make things happen. The Storyteller, who has none of the sexual allure, flexibility, and fluidity the dramatic world requires, is only useful insofar as she can lend historical significance to Jackson's actions. Unfortunately, she is only interested in reciting the sorts of litanies
that are found in grade school history books. When he shoots her, Jackson gives her a chance to become his Angel of History instead. When she is thrown back by the blast of his gunshot, her knowledge of history will frame and give credence to this anachronistic, personalized version of events. From the future, her present, she will validate his reading of his present, which has passed for her. Like the blood he so frequently spills, she will finally have freedom of movement and consequently the ability to influence the play. However, she fails to fulfill this role, as the force of a gunshot can't move her body backward if she is sitting in a wheelchair. Since it's motorized, the wheelchair won't move either, as it's heavy and the wheels don't roll of their own volition. Deprived of his Angel, Jackson decides to construct his own narrative. His last words to The Storyteller are, "I think I can take it from here" (Timbers and Friedman 16). The populists support his decision, casually stating in "I'm So That Guy" that, “Sometimes you have to shoot the storyteller in the neck” (Youtube).

According to the stage directions she is shot in the throat, but the characters consistently refer to her as having been shot in the neck. This variation has metaphorical implications as well as visual ones. Now even the character
who has the most historical knowledge and the least direct involvement has lost her ability to gain a sense of perspective.

Though she does suffer at Jackson's hands, The Storyteller's marginalization is not to be our primary concern. Timbers and Friedman state in their foreword to the script that for them, the play isn't just about Jackson's legacy. Stymied as Jackson and his populists often feel, this play is an exploration of the legacy of sickness and suffering their actions brought to another marginalized group; the Native Americans. Jackson's desire to redefine his behavior toward the Native Americans as compassionate is his primary motivation for wanting to write his own story. He takes Red Eagle's lands even though President James Monroe has issued an order not to relocate the Creeks (Timbers and Friedman 18-20). In perhaps the saddest scene of the play, he denies mercy to his friend, Black Fox, who, after betraying countless tribes for Jackson, finally tries to start an insurrection to protect his own (Timbers and Friedman 75). It isn't, Jackson explains to Black Fox, that he doesn't empathize with the Native Americans. There's just no place for them in his America.
I wish you'd built symphonies in cities, man, and put on plays, and showed yourselves to be a little more essential. And yeah, you totally were here first, absolutely, but we don't give a shit and we never will. Because the day we arrived, we saw [land], we wanted it and frankly it was easier to believe it was ours (Timbers and Friedman 81).

If Black Fox agrees to relocate his tribe now, Jackson promises, the two men will be regarded as heroes for uniting the country. The song “Ten Little Indians,” a macabre emo nursery rhyme about ten violent and humiliating fates that befall the title characters, reveals the reality behind Jackson's promise with the haunting refrain, “goodnight” (Youtube). The frontiersman from Tennessee may feel disenfranchised even while taking centerstage, and The Storyteller may be driven offstage, but only the Native Americans will be entirely consigned to darkness.

The double casting in the play ensures that the Native Americans will be played by whites. This serves the play in three key ways. First, the double casting allows audience members to compare the hardships faced by the Native American characters with those faced by the white ones. The most striking example of this is the double casting of the
actor who plays Henry Clay and Black Fox. Henry Clay is one of the politicians whose secret plotting undoes Jackson's initial presidential bid. Clay betrays Jackson to consolidate his political power. Black Fox betrays Jackson to save his own life. Though both are played by the same actor, they clearly aren't equally privileged. Second, though we are not expected to see the Native Americans as Jackson does, it is his perspective that most powerfully shapes the dramatic world. As his words to Black Fox show, Jackson views the Native Americans' culture as a lesser attempt at white culture. He thinks they are trying to be white and failing pitifully. Third, though the Native Americans earn our sympathy, they don't have sufficient depth to accurately represent a Native American's experience. If a Native American were to embody one of these characters, he would trivialize the actual lived experience of his minority group.

Though the play itself moves from satire to dark comedy, the double casting ensures that most actors don't have enough time onstage as a single character to make sure each character becomes more emotionally complex as the play does. The undeserved marginalization of The Storyteller and the Native Americans may gain an audience's sympathy, but
only an increasingly less cocksure Andrew Jackson displays enough emotional in enough stage time depth to draw empathy. Further, actor Benjamin Walker brings audiences closer to Jackson by embodying what he wasn't. This Jackson behaves nothing like the historical figure, but he doesn't need to do that. Like any emo rock star, he makes his audience feel closer to him even as he claims to be misunderstood by everyone. The Storyteller and the Native Americans, by contrast, represent stereotypical notions about what their minority groups are in the public imagination. Actors from those minority groups who were cast in these roles wouldn't be given an opportunity to critique stereotypes by satirically representing them. Instead of taking advantage of how the actor-audience relationship can subvert real world power dynamics, they would reenforce real world stereotypes. Because The Storyteller and the Native Americans aren't given sufficient depth to complicate the stereotypes associated with each respective minority group, a gimp actor and Native American actors can't play the parts written to represent them. Casting a norm actor and white Native Americans spares members of each minority group the humiliation of becoming a caricature, but this also means
Timbers and Friedman risk undermining the very groups they seek to represent.

Despite his constant sense of exclusion, the white boy from Tennessee fares better than either The Storyteller or the Native Americans. His country eventually deigns to credit him with a knowledge of his own culture he hasn't displayed. In the last scene of the play, he's receiving an honorary degree from Harvard (Timbers and Friedman 87). However, by then he knows that his actions will cost him. When The Storyteller comes back as a bloody angel and recounts his bloody deeds, a frightened Jackson says he thought he would be vindicated by history and called a hero. Making eye contact with him for the first time since he shot her, she says, “You can't shoot history in the neck” (Timbers and Friedman 85). She fails Jackson as an Angel of History, because she isn't supposed to help him write his own story. She writes the story of America's bloody legacy. She fails as an Angel of History only to succeed as a Greek deus ex machina. Her original machine¹ is gone, but she has

¹ Deus ex machina means “god from the machine.” The Storyteller fits this definition in two senses, because she comes from and is expelled from a machine. First, she's in a motorized wheelchair that's a more mechanized extension of her body than a manual wheelchair would be. She comes from a machine, and she is expelled from the same machine when Jackson shoots her. When she reappears, she does have to propel herself manually. When she returns once again as an angel, she comes from another machine, the pulley.
been cranked onstage and lowered on a pulley to deliver a judgment. If she is neither a historian nor a historical materialist, it is because neither approach to history provides an entirely accurate perspective. As Timbers and Friedman put it, “One of our intentions [...] was to explore our collective national responsibility towards a genocide that most Americans seem to forget, ignore, or perhaps worst, have collectively come to peace with” (Timbers and Friedman v). What that responsibility constitutes no historian of any kind can entirely decide. Each audience member has to do that for herself.

In *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson*, The Storyteller's motorized wheelchair is a metaphor for the involuntary movement of Benjamin's Angel of History and the machines from which gods in Greek tragedies delivered judgments. However, we must not forget that we are not solely concerned with the significance of a wheelchair in a particular play. We are also concerned with the consequences of its onstage presence. Though we have been exploring what the wheelchair in Timbers and Friedman's play means, we must now return our attention to what it does and who is in it.

First, we should note that Colleen Worthmann, who originated the role of The Storyteller, is a norm. For her,
the motorized wheelchair is a prop aiding the illusion that she lacks physical strength and muscular control. Not only does she seem to have less fine and gross motor precision than a norm, she seems to have less than a gimp who uses a manual wheelchair. In this play, which mostly resists the style of psychological realism, The Storyteller's wheelchair functions as a shorthand form of character development. Simply through how she moves, or doesn't, the audience knows she is at a disadvantage in this world, and she lacks influence. The Storyteller's disability is never specifically mentioned, although her movements suggest paraplegia. Regardless of what it is, Worthmann's need to act as though she has any disability at all ensures that, even though the play isn't written in a way that requires psychological realism, her work can be evaluated using the tenets of that acting style. Worthmann, who isn't gimpy, is given an opportunity to show how convincingly she "becomes" her character, who is. Since she is young enough to play a chorus member as well as The Storyteller, her own physical flexibility is also showcased.

Because of the timing of The Storyteller's posthumous reappearances, the actress who plays her can only join the chorus for one dance number, "The Corrupt Bargain." In his
interview with Need To Know's Jon Meacham, director Alex Timbers describes it this way: "This idea of older, conspiring men setting Jackson up for failure, it's such a male-dominated political world at that time. We thought it would be great to get some perspective by adding some women to the mix, who could give us a little, sort of, objectivity" (Youtube). The women in this chorus certainly have a stronger presence in this moment of major political decision making than any woman of the nineteenth century would have. Yet their presence is defined by the world they are in, the world of an emo rock musical where sexiness and physical prowess are valued. For this number, Colleen Worthmann, whose hair now swishes as seductively as that of any other member of the chorus, wears a dark blue corset and tan Daisy Dukes. While so dressed, she sits atop a desk with her legs crossed, crouches behind the actor playing John Calhoun and peeks over his shoulder to deliver narration, and performs choreography wherein her fellow chorus girls and she bend at the waist, place their feet close together, and turn from left to right while standing in place (Need To Know). She's still wearing the glasses The Storyteller wore, but her viewpoint has shifted. Now she is unquestionably part of this world, and we see clearly that she has all of
the desirability the gimpy Storyteller lacks. Worthmann finally openly displays the physical strength that allows her to drag herself across the stage while still observing the time constraints of the theatre, something few paraplegics could do. More significantly, she at last has a role in this dark comedy where she can be taken seriously.

According to Timbers and Friedman, the musical has three distinct comedic styles within it. The first section, which ends right after The Storyteller is shot, should be “nothing flashy, just stock period costumes and broad, affect-riddled acting” (iii). In the second section, which begins when the bloodied Storyteller drags herself across the stage only to be “accidentally kicked in the jaw and knocked unconscious” (Timbers and Friedman 29) “darker subject matter should butt up against the comedy in a somewhat disturbing and emotionally complex way” (Timbers and Friedman iii). The third section should contain a “gradual shift towards psychological realism” (Timbers and Friedman iii), until the epilogue that’s a return to the broad comedy of the first section. The Storyteller does appear in the third section, as an angel who has to be lowered on a pulley. She will never have the same complexity of the other characters in this dark comedy, as even the
double casting of the actress who plays her doesn't give the audience more pathos for her character. At her best, The Storyteller brings the pleasure of slapstick with her physical ineptitude. At her worst, she offers only schadenfreude, at her own expense and then at Jackson's, while Jackson slowly earns an audience's empathy through displaying increasing emotional depth.

Because she is also cast as a chorus member, Colleen Worthmann is able to show her captivating adaptability. Even on what Timbers and Friedman say may be the most exciting day of her life, The Storyteller is never afforded that privilege. Though she affects Andrew Jackson's fate, The Storyteller has very little control over her own. In this case, the double casting sends two messages. The first is that the perpetually inflexible Storyteller will never have the depth of the other characters. Her wheelchair shows she lacks physical flexibility, and her inability to take various positions in this world leaves her unable to take the sorts of intuitive leaps to self-revelation that the other characters have. Further, unlike in the case of Henry Clay/Black Fox, Colleen Worthmann's second character doesn't complicate her first. Instead, the ease with which the chorus member navigates onstage and within the dramatic
world emphasizes how much The Storyteller lacks. Most importantly, the contrast between the two characters allows Colleen Worthmann to play a disadvantaged character while showing herself to advantage. Within one play, she shows her natural grace as well as how effectively her skill as an actor allows her to conceal it. Though the double casting makes this contrast possible, comparisons between The Storyteller and the chorus member aren't directly embedded in the text. To find out what happens when a norm actor is cast as a gimpy character who at least partially constructs her own self-image within the dramatic world, we will consider the character of Pooty in Craig Lucas' *Reckless*.

“I THOUGHT IF I WERE SOMEHOW NEEDIER THAN THE REST I WOULD GET SPECIAL ATTENTION”

According to dancer Bill “The Crutchmaster” Shannon, Condition Arriving is “a social phenomenon experienced by people who have a visible or apparent condition in which the individuality of that person with the condition is rendered invisible by the trappings of the condition” (whatiswhat.com). In Craig Lucas' *Reckless* (1988), Pooty Bophtelophti's paraplegia doesn't arrive before she does, as we don't hear about it courtesy of exposition. However, it
is the first defining detail Rachel, the protagonist, learns about Pooty's life. When Rachel asks Lloyd, who shares a house with Pooty, about their joint life, he says only that he knows Pooty, that she works where he does, and that she is either his wife or his girlfriend (Lucas 11-13). As a result of Lloyd's evasiveness, Pooty's paraplegia, muteness, and deafness are the only truths we know about her, truths Rachel realizes the moment we do.

LLOYD: You have to keep your face towards her so she can read your lips.

RACHEL: Oh, she's deaf. You're deaf! I'm sorry, not that you're deaf, but [...] Well. Did you slip on the ice, it looks like.

LLOYD: She's paraplegic.

RACHEL: Parapalegic. Oh, parapalegic!

LLOYD: Paraplegic.

RACHEL: I have to keep my face this way, don't I?...Um...Tell me Pooty [...] What kind of name is that? Your name. It's so unusual. Your name!

(POOTY jots her name down on a piece of paper. Rachel reads.) Pooty (Lucas 14-15).

Lloyd is reluctant to speak of Pooty when she is absent, but now that she is actually onstage, Rachel and he
have no compunction about speaking for her. Though she could speak for herself using ASL, Rachel and Lloyd reveal her conditions to the audience. Further, though Rachel is an outsider who has to adjust to the space Pooty and she now jointly occupy by turning so Pooty can read her lips and learning how to pronounce “paraplegic,” she still has enough authority to control the audience's reaction to Pooty by acting as its representative. In other words, Rachel's reactions to Pooty tell the audience that Pooty is “unusual” even before Rachel identifies her as such. Further, the audience is being instructed to regard Pooty's presence as particularly unusual. Rachel, who introduced herself to Lloyd as Mary Ellen Sizzle, is living under an assumed name no one questions (Lucas 12).

Unlike Rachel, Pooty has a role to fulfill in the household. She is Lloyd's wife. For her, however, the title doesn't necessarily carry with it the privileges of either desirability or partnership. In a literature review entitled, “The Impact of Physical Disability On Marital Adjustment” (1979) Yen Peterson notes that “both role ambiguities and a wide discrepancy between performance of the generally sanctioned roles for men and women in the larger culture [are] conducive to marital discord. Role
intactness rather than role flexibility [is] the most important variable” (Peterson 48). If Pooty doesn't perform all of the roles traditionally expected of a married woman, then she won't truly be regarded as Lloyd's wife.

We do see a situation where Pooty is denied the role of wife, but it doesn't take place in the Bophtelophti household. When Rachel, Lloyd, and Pooty are on a game show called, Your Mother Or Your Wife? Pooty poses as Lloyd's mother. Later, Rachel tries to explain the game show to her psychiatrist.

FIRST DOCTOR: Pooty pretends to be the mother. Do you think there's any significance to that?
RACHEL: No. I mean you can't go on the show unless you have a mother and a wife. That's just the way the game works, and Lloyd doesn't have a mother, so--
FIRST DOCTOR: But Pooty is the wife and you are not a member of the family at all, unless we say that you are the adopted child.
RACHEL: Right. But Pooty's deaf [...] [I]t was just easier to make her seem like a mother since she wouldn't have to talk and she's in a wheelchair (Lucas 33).
Rachel has usurped Pooty's role as Lloyd's wife. She says she is the more logical choice for that role, since Pooty is mute and unable to speak for the Bophtelophtis as a unit. The role of Lloyd's mother is a more “believable” one for Pooty to play, both for the imaginary game show audience and for the actual audience. Once a son marries, his mother isn't expected to have a say in his domestic decisions because his wife is the primary woman in his life. Since a man's mother is older than his wife, Pooty's wheelchair becomes a symbol of the infirmity often associated with aging and disability. According to the rules of the game show and, by extension, society, a mute, gimpy wife is — to borrow Rachel's initial description of Pooty — unusual. Yet it is important to remember that Pooty is an agent in her own usurpation, since she agrees to pose as Lloyd's mother in order to help him win a cash prize. More significantly, she embraces the role of the mute, dependent gimp even more completely in her personal life.

When she met Lloyd, a physical therapist at the rehabilitation center where she stayed after her accident, she was immediately attracted to him.

POOTY: I thought he was the most beautiful man I'd ever seen. A light shining out through his skin.
And I thought if I couldn't be with him I'd die. But I knew I would be just one more crippled dame as far as he was concerned, so my friend helped to get me registered as deaf\textsuperscript{18} and disabled. I thought if I were somehow needier than the rest I would get special attention [...] He needs me to be the person he thinks I am [...] I'm a crippled deaf girl, short and stout. Here is my wheelchair, here is my mouth (Lucas 21).

Pooty captivates Lloyd by exploiting the helplessness associated with femininity and disability. As Lenore Manderson and Susan Peake write in their essay, “Men in Motion: Disability and Masculinity” (2005), “being feminine and disabled are consistent and synergistic; the traditional notions of woman and disability converge, reflected in the ascription of characteristics such as innocence, vulnerability, sexual passivity or asexuality, dependency and objectification” (Auslander and Sandahl 233). Because she has to be the most helpless in a community of gimpy women, she willingly takes on the role of a mute, as well as

\textsuperscript{18} Reckless is an episodic play in which each character experiences at least one reversal of fortune. Rachel and Lloyd each eventually feign deafness (Lucas 22, 40, 50). The emphasis on deafness as a state one chooses, a metaphor for how Americans deal with dark aspects of their own culture, supports the casting of a hearing actress who knows or can be taught ASL.
taking the passive role in her relationship that muteness symbolically implies. She wants to attract Lloyd, but she denies her own sexuality to do it. While her description of his body is sensual, she describes herself as a crippled dame or a crippled girl, using words that deny her physical desirability and her womanhood. When she references a nursery rhyme about a teapot, she literally objectifies herself, naming her wheelchair as an object that limits both her physical movements and her ability to escape her traditional gender role. Her wheelchair isn't an extension of her body. It is her body. She's defined by her self-imposed limitations; when she opens her mouth to scream, no sound comes out (Lucas 22).

Since “everyone gets special attention where Lloyd is concerned,” (Lucas 21), Pooty has to ensure she is the neediest person he ever encounters if she is to become the center of that special attention. Yet his attention isn't solely due to love, altruism, or even his profession. He cares for Pooty because he failed to care for his previous family. He ran over one of his two sons with a lawnmower while he was drunk, leaving the child permanently brain damaged. Unable to bear their presence, he deserted them without paying child support to his wife, who has multiple
sclerosis (Lucas 25). His profession, and presumably his marriage to Pooty,\textsuperscript{19} are attempts at penance for his past actions. The past, he tells Rachel, "is something you wake up to. It's the nightmare you wake up to every day" (Lucas 25). By marrying Pooty, he makes sure this is true in his own life. As far as he knows, Pooty is more helpless than his previous wife, as she is deaf, mute, and gimpy. If she were to speak and act for herself, she would deny Lloyd the absolution he needs from his marriage. She is meant to replace his child and his wife by being more damaged and helpless than either. And yet, staying with Pooty in sickness and in health will require less of Lloyd's compassion than his previous marriage probably did; unlike multiple sclerosis, paraplegia isn't a degenerative condition.

Pooty involuntarily reveals she can speak when she is unexpectedly poisoned, calling Lloyd's name twice and screaming in pain (Lucas 38). When she becomes a speaking-if-still-dependent wife who names her own needs, Lloyd is too shocked to call for assistance (Lucas 38). Pooty's need

\textsuperscript{19} This link between Lloyd's marriage and his choice of vocation is made explicit in the 2004 production starring Mary Louise Parker as Rachel. Nina da Vinci Nichols says in her review for CultureVulture.net: Choices for the Cognescenti, that Lloyd (Michael o'Keefe) refers to Pooty (Rosie Perez) as "his only patient."
to claim the role of a wife – someone who can, at least to some degree, command her husband by virtue of her position – signifies the death of the Bophtelophti marriage as well as her own death. She is twice revealed to the audience as hearing, but she never contradicts the dependency and asexuality symbolized by her wheelchair. Though the negative qualities associated with disability are never re-presented, the actress playing Pooty is briefly revealed as a norm in her death scene when she “double[s] over in pain” (Lucas 38), an action that would be impossible for someone who were actually paraplegic to perform. However, an audience member would have to be especially attentive and aware of the effects of paraplegia to notice this departure from what living with that disability is like.

The character of Pooty isn't double cast in Lucas' script. According to the text, the actress playing Pooty could be gimpy in real life, though perhaps not paraplegic. She isn't required to make audiences reevaluate real world perceptions of gimpiness. But in the 1988 production of Reckless at Circle Rep, the negative representation of disability was, not only represented, but reinforced when

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20 Lucas says Tom/Tom Junior/Man in Ski Mask are doubled, and all of Rachel's six psychiatrists are played by the same actor.
norm Welker White was cast as Dr. Helen Caroll as well as Pooty.

Dr. Helen Carroll, the author of a book called *Stand Up Straight*, is a guest on a talk show where Rachel and her sixth psychiatrist are in the audience. According to Carroll, “Feeling tall is a state of mind [...] I want you to look out as if you're the tallest person in the room, proud [...] Pull this little string from the top of your head up” (Lucas 51). As Carroll, Welker White claims that even someone who is sitting can be the tallest person in the room, a claim whom someone who was always in a wheelchair and surrounded by standing actors could never make. She is teaching the audience for the game show, and the play, to be visible while sitting in a way that the invisibility conferred by disability and femininity makes impossible for Pooty. Further, White reveals that she isn't paraplegic herself by adjusting her spine in a way no paraplegic could.

Pooty's status as the helpless, disabled woman now belongs to Rachel, who is pretending to be mute and adopting a physicality Carroll calls “the I'm Not Really Here Type” (Lucas 52). Like Pooty, Carroll is the victim of a murder attempt meant for Rachel, but it is Rachel who now possesses Pooty's passivity, helplessness and dependency. However, her
association with these qualities is less complete than Pooty's; after she screams when Carroll is shot, her therapist tells her that her decision to speak means if she can tell herself what she wants, she can have it (Lucas 53). Though the link between femininity and helplessness is presented as fluid, the link between helplessness and disability is presented as permanent. Gimpiness is particularly limiting. Pooty could speak if she chose, but she cannot escape her wheelchair. White's doubling as norm character Dr. Helen Carroll confirms the able/disabled binary by showing that someone who is sitting can possess pride and a strong physical presence...as long as she isn't sitting in a wheelchair. Of course, part of the reason White represents the able/disabled binary is because she plays a gimpy character and a norm character. However, I contend that even a norm actor playing only Pooty will reveal her status to the audience before her character dies, emphasizing both that the negative qualities about gimpiness are inextricably bound to the condition and that a norm actor can entirely escape them. To illustrate this, let's consider a 2010 production of the play at Marymount Manhattan College.21

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21 Gerry Goodstein took the production photos for the 1988 production at Circle Rep. When I contacted him to ask about those photos, he said they were in poor condition. He
In this production, Pooty (Nicole Johnston) is marked as “unusual,” as Rachel puts it, from the moment we see her. There are multiple Christmases in the play, but Pooty is wearing the same outfit both times she celebrates the holiday. She wears a red sweater with reindeer and snowflakes embroidered on it, and a green turtleneck underneath. The layers de-emphasize her breasts. The presence of her wheelchair ensures that her legs will never be de-emphasized, but the loose fitting pants she wears don't eroticize them. Her long, brown hair is pulled back in a ponytail that is obscured by the back of her wheelchair. While there is nothing inherently strange about choosing to wear a holiday sweater or even choosing to wear the same holiday sweater each year, this shows that Pooty has few forms of self-expression available to her. More importantly, she provides a strict contrast to Rachel, who meets the Bophtelophtis while wearing her nightgown. The nightgown isn't especially revealing, but it does show her legs and brush against them when she moves. Perhaps both of these women have “euphoria attacks” (Lucas 7) at Christmas, but only one of them shows that by wearing a bulky-but-festive sweater. From the moment Rachel enters the Bophtelophti kindly directed me toward this production of the same play, which he also photographed. I'm grateful to him for sharing part of his collection with me.
household, she establishes the dynamic that will be made explicit when Lloyd, Pooty, and she are costumed for the game show, *Your Mother Or Your Wife*. Venus (Rachel) and the Earth (Pooty) both revolve around the sun (Lloyd), but only the woman who evokes the Roman goddess of love has magnetism of her own (Lucas 27).

Pooty is subject to a peculiar kind of objectification. She is twice indirectly compared to *things*, the planet she dresses up as and the teapot she says she resembles. Naturally, this impacts her relationship with Lloyd (Daniel Telese). Though she's no longer in his rehabilitation center, he treats her like a patient. Yes, a physical therapist sees his patients as people, but he doesn't see them as intimates. Lloyd frequently chooses to kneel in order to more easily converse in sign language with Pooty, but since norms are commonly advised to kneel during conversations with gimps ("Wheelchair Etiquette – Disability Awareness"), it isn't necessarily an intimate gesture. More significantly, he only comes close enough to put his hands on her knees or allow her to touch his knee with the tips of her fingers. Though her gesture does indicate some physical intimacy in their relationship, her leaning forward doesn't reveal her waist, bottom, or cleavage in a way that
sexualizes their her. It *does*, however, reveal that Johnston isn't paraplegic; someone who was paraplegic couldn't extend her arm so far. Still, Johnston could be gimpy without being paraplegic. While what identifies her as a norm is something entirely under her control, it isn't something of her own.

In the Marymount Manhattan College production, Pooty's manual wheelchair has a canvas seat and back, as well as immovable footrests that her feet don't quite rest on naturally. The materials the wheelchair is made with indicate that it's intended for short term use. Hospitals and rental companies often provide wheelchairs with thin, canvas seats, but a frequently used wheelchair has a customized seat to provide padding for comfort and prevent the mobile gimp's version of bedsores. Further, the way her feet sit on the footrests show the wheelchair hasn't been designed to fit her measurements. Nicole Johnston-as-Pooty is using a wheelchair, which still plays the “role” of an object that is never fully integrated into the onstage world. However, she isn't using her wheelchair. Once she is revealed as a norm, the audience can assume she is only temporarily claiming all of the negative qualities associated with disability – helplessness, dependency, desexualization – Pooty embodies. Even if disability is never
re-presented in Lucas' play, Johnston's association with it can be reevaluated as soon as the play ends. If the role of Pooty isn't double cast, however, only a very attentive audience member will be able to spot the minor details that show whether the actress playing her is a gimp or a norm. A norm actor would have an advantage, insofar as a gimp actor who took the role would have the unsatisfying task of representing all of the negative qualities associated with disability in the real world without complicating them for her audience. Yet that is something she could do, however much she might dislike the task. What happens, by contrast, if a gimpy character is required by the script to do something only a norm could do? What if this character, who is truly a "victim" of disability due to an unfortunate accident, actually walks unassisted? To gauge the effect of such a dramatic moment, we'll examine the character of Julia in Maria Irene Fornes' Fefu and Her Friends.

"I TOLD THEM EXACTLY WHAT THEY WANTED TO HEAR. THEY SAID, 'LIVE, BUT CRIPPLED'"

When Margaret Harrington played Julia in the 1978 production of Fefu and Her Friends at the American Place Theatre, which was directed by Fornes, New York Times
reviewer Richard Eder called her “a feverish mind in a disintegrating body” (Eder 10). There is a reason for her poor mental and physical state. She was in a hunting accident and sustained a spinal cord injury and a concussion. The former is the reason she uses a manual wheelchair. The latter causes petit mal seizures and hallucinations (Fornes 17). While the effects of Julia’s accident are played realistically, the circumstances are highly symbolic as Cindy, who was present during the accident, explains:

CINDY: [A hunter] shot [a deer]. Julia and the deer fell. The deer was dead...dying. Julia was unconscious. She had convulsions...like the deer. [The deer] died and she didn’t [...] She was delirious [,saying] [t]hat she was persecuted. That they tortured her...That they had tried her and that the shot was her execution. That she recanted because she wanted to live...That if she

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2 I'm primarily concerned with analyzing Julia as a gimpy character who is played by a norm actor. For a feminist reading of the psychology of all of the characters in Fefu and Her Friends, including Julia, see Penny Farfan's “Feminism, Metatheatricality, and Mise-en-scène in Maria Irene Fornes’s Fefu and Her Friends” (Modern Drama. December 1, 1997. p. 442-455).
talked about it...to anyone...she would be tortured further and killed (Fornes 17-18).^{23}

As a mobility device/extension of Julia’s body, the wheelchair is presented as an aspect of her life that Julia lightheartedly accepts. She gladly allows the effusive Emma (who exhibits none of the discomfort norms often have around gimps in the real world) to ride in her lap (Fornes 19), and she offers to do a dance while sitting on a settee if Emma will choreograph it (Fornes 21). Yet the wheelchair is more than just a mobility device retaining its real world function. It also serves as a symbol of the hallucinations that have “gimpified” Julia – made her unable to easily associate with “normal,” “healthy,” “sane” people – since her accident. Thus, her wheelchair is an outward indication

^{23} Julia's identification with the deer echoes a common trope in poetry, where the deer is pursued by a male hunter/suitor who “catches” (seduces), “shoots” (penetrates), and “kills” her, or him in the case of homoerotic poetry. [An orgasm is often poetically referred to as a “death.”] The male hunter/suitor sometimes expresses regret for his action, because he has robbed the deer of grace and innocence (virginity). After all, deer represent an ideal of femininity and litheness that may be used in seduction but is impossible to sustain during sex. Poems that utilize this trope in some form are Marvell's “The Nymph Complaining For The Death Of Her Fawn” and Wilde's “In The Forest.” While Julia's encounter is nonsexual in nature, her psychic empathy with the deer implies she's taking her place within this trope. She's a submissive, feminine creature who submits to the will of the judges, her male “hunters” and executioners.
of the pain that resulted from her psychic self-identification with the deer. The damage to Julia’s mind is reflected in her damaged body. Yet her suffering is also the result of her recantation, the self-purification (deseexualization) that convinced her torturers to spare her life.

JULIA: [The judge] said that women’s entrails are heavier than anything on earth and to see a woman running creates a disparate and incongruous image in the mind. It’s anti-aesthetic. Therefore women should not run. Instead they should strike positions that take into account the weight of their entrails [...] He said that a woman’s bottom should be in a cushion, otherwise it’s revolting. He said there are exceptions [...] that ballet dancers can run and lift their legs because they have no entrails. Isadora Duncan had entrails, that’s why she should not have danced [...] You don’t think I’m going to argue with [the judges], do you? I repented. I told them exactly what they wanted to hear [...] They said, ‘Live but crippled.’ (Fornes 34)
According to the judges, the only women who are physically beautiful and desirable are the “deer” of the dance world; ballet dancers are lithe and graceful without being overtly sensual or sexual. There's even a certain masochism in their vocation. They submit to the demands of their craft and the potential damage that it could do to their bodies, in the same way that a deer surrenders to a hunter. No form of dance is undemanding on the body, but ballet, with its singular representation of beauty, is particularly taxing. A ballerina’s technique emphasizes her control over her body, how she has disciplined and streamlined it in order to fit a certain model of beauty and grace.

Julia isn't a ballerina, and so she convinces the judges to spare her by letting them streamline her body through another method: confining her to a wheelchair. Disability is often linked to desexualization, especially the desexualization of women. This is partly because (from a heteronormative perspective at least) seduction is so often a physical activity for women. In the classic construction of femininity, a woman is considered to be “beautiful” based upon the sinuousness with which she moves, keeping her legs close together and swaying her bottom and her hips while
walking. It's precisely this sexualization of the body that causes the judges to think of the sight of a woman running as unsightly – a “feminine” woman running moves in roughly the same way as a “feminine” woman walking, with the added “grotesqueness” of sweat and bouncing breasts. However, Julia, like any other gimpy woman, doesn't have these “sexy” movements at her disposal. Her wheelchair hides her hips. Her legs are supported by footrests, ensuring they will never be coyly crossed, even should she wear a dress or a skirt and reveal them. Her stomach and her breasts will be de-emphasized when she leans forward to wheel herself. In addition to containing and partially concealing it, her wheelchair indicates that there is something wrong with her body. Being perceived as somehow damaged or inferior is a considerable disadvantage when the point of seduction is to show yourself as physically desirable. However, Julia willingly takes on this disadvantage in order to appease the judges by essentially becoming asexual. She also becomes weaker when she becomes gimpy (Fornes 18), a characteristic the judges, who clearly desire women to be submissive, would approve.

Julia’s wheelchair is never so much an extension of her body as a refutation of it. Her wheelchair is the object
that keeps her insulated from her femininity. Julia’s lengthy monologue about the bargain she made with the judges occurs in Act Two, in one of the two moments in which she isn't in her wheelchair. She's lying on a mattress, covered to the shoulders by a sheet and wearing a white hospital gown. Her wheelchair is parked at stage left (Fornes 33). While the medical imagery is consistent with the common perception of disability as an illness, being in the bed exposes Julia to more sensory stimuli than being in the wheelchair would. Sheets can be felt against the skin, and a hospital gown is a revealing article of clothing, though the potential for exposure is more humiliating than sexy. Her whole body is accessible, and it can easily be touched, either by Julia or by another. Most importantly, since she isn't in her wheelchair, she has nothing to streamline her body into an “acceptable” position. It's in this position of renewed vulnerability to the judges - for whom the audience members can be seen as stand-ins, since their presence as silent witnesses crowded around Julia’s bed “magnifies the horror of what goes on”(Eder 10) that she delivers her monologue in an attempt to show she's still behaving herself. She can demonstrate the self-control of a ballerina even without her wheelchair.
The other moment when Julia leaves her wheelchair occurs in Act Three:

As PAULA goes upstairs, FEFU comes down the steps. She is downcast. The lights shift to an eerie tone. FEFU hallucinates the following: JULIA enters in slow motion, walking. She goes to the coffee table, gets the sugar bowl, lifts it in FEFU’s direction, takes the cover off, puts it back on and walks to the kitchen [...] Immediately after, JULIA re-enters wheeled by SUE [...] FEFU stares at JULIA (Fornes 55).

In Fefu’s hallucination, Julia is a norm, and the ability to make the “feminine” movements that the judges abhor is restored to her. Fefu struggles to accept her own female identity, the quality that makes her powerless in her male-dominated 1930s society. Since Fefu sees Julia as a representation of her own self-loathing, she urges Julia to overcome her gimpy (asexual) status and walk (Fornes 59-60). Fefu wants Julia to prove that it's possible to be feminine without being reviled or oppressed by men, because Fefu is trying to reconcile her experience of the male power structure (societal) with her love and desire for her husband, Phillip (individual) (Fornes 58-59). Unfortunately
for Fefu, Julia has no need to fight, because she has no such conflict. Like Fefu, she is vulnerable to male objectification. However, her gimpiness precludes her from being physically desirable; thus she never faces the quandary of having to contrast the societal system of male oppression with her love for an individual man. The only men who claim to love her are the judges, and they show their love by embodying the male power structure: forcing her to recant her femininity and her sexuality and smilingly accept their abuse (Fornes 33). The best that Julia can offer to Fefu is the hope that she will never undergo the “death” of shedding her femininity, that she will never have to see men as synonymous with the male power structure and see herself with the same fear and loathing that her society has for women. However, even her hope that Fefu can evade her fate presumably angers the judges. When Fefu shoots a rabbit, Julia again experiences a psychic sympathy with a helpless animal. She has admitted her taboo knowledge to Fefu, disobeying the judges’ order not to discuss her experience with anyone. She has failed to be perfectly submissive to their will, and they revenge themselves by allowing her to die (Fornes 61).
Like Pooty, Julia poses as a helpless gimp. Unlike Pooty, who wishes to attract her physical therapist husband by distinguishing herself amongst other gimps in a rehab facility, Julia wishes to be rendered invisible by the gimpiness she hopes will invalidate her femininity. Her very physical existence is a constant attempt to erase her own presence. Indeed, Julia's body is of little interest to Fornes herself. She calls Julia “the mind of the play” (Farfan 444). Julia embodies, not only the tension between feminism and society, but the tension between feminism and disability. In her essay, “Does She Boil Eggs?: Towards A Feminist Model Of Disability” (1992), Margaret Lloyd describes how disabled women are often overlooked by feminists and disability activists. While disabled men are primarily concerned with discrimination due to classism and the inaccessibility of healthcare, “disabled women are concerned to […] integrate physical and social aspects of self-presentation with critical analysis of the dependent, non-assertive disabled woman which society 'requires'” (Lloyd 212). While Fefu urges Julia to fight against the stereotypes she faces as a woman, those she faces as a gimp are presented as entirely of her own making and easily
discarded. These ideas are strengthened by the presence of a norm.

Even if Julia's body is a metaphor for the torturous thoughts infecting her like a contagion, the same isn't true of Margaret Harrington's. Through her embodiment of Julia, Harrington continually reveals how she is unlike Julia. In a production photo from the performance at The American Place Theatre, Rebecca Schull (Fefu) is shown choking Harrington (Julia), requiring her to shake back and forth and undulate her spine in a way that would be impossible for someone who had paraplegia (Cummings 68). Most importantly, the script requires her to perform an action no gimp actor who needed a wheelchair could. She walks without assistance, thus ensuring that Julia-as-written must be played by a norm. As a norm who plays a gimp and then reveals she isn't one, Harrington is what phenomenologist Bert O. States calls a self-expressive actor, someone who adopts the character as a 'mask' beneath which the actor is visible. As soon as Harrington walks, she reveals to her audience that her portrayal of Julia has been a display of her skill at "becoming" someone she isn't.

In chapter one, we discussed how States' self-expressive mode could be useful to a gimp actor, who could
captivate an audience by openly flaunting the contrast between whom she is and whom she pretends to be. When used by Harrington in this moment, the self-expressive mode functions very differently. In this case, Harrington shows she can “become” whomever she chooses, dropping her “mask” only to confirm for her audience how convincingly she has worn it. Julia isn't just a gimpy character who isn't written to be played by a gimp. She's a character whose conduct sends the message that a wheelchair and the gimpiness it symbolizes are challenges a “good” actor can overcome. Not only is this patently untrue for a gimp actor, it sets a standard of “skilled” acting she'll be eternally unable to meet. Confirming and then shedding the stereotypes associated with gimpiness simply by walking, Harrington tells her “judges” (her audience members) exactly what they want to hear, that gimpiness is a misfortune to be overcome. With all of their negative real world stereotypes

24 The presence of the gimp is denied actually as well as symbolically in this play. Julia is a gimpy character written for a norm to play when there is already a dearth of roles for gimp actors. A 2005 study by the Screen Actors Guild found disabled actors work an average of 4.1 days per year. Of the 2% of television characters who are disabled, only 0.5% have lines. Further, an actor who has a visible disability, such as gimpiness, is less likely to be granted an audition than an actor who does not (Soloman, Andrew. Backstage East. vol.47. iss. 18. p.3-43).
about disability affirmed, these judges are perfectly justified in crying, “Live...but not crippled.

Harrington can stand and receive this judgment, but a gimp actor cannot. How then, is she to defend herself against it? One possible method is to only play characters who are gimpy-as-written. If she wants to defend herself even more strongly, she can reject the negative associations that accompany wheelchairs and gimpiness in the real world by continually presenting herself as their opposite. In the next chapter, we will look at productions that provide such opportunities for gimp actors.
Chapter Three: The Presence Of The Gimp

Robert Browning, who was famous for creating complex characters in dramatic monologues, actually took his inspiration from the theatre. In October of 1832 Browning, who eventually became a playwright himself, watched Edmund Kean play Shakespeare's Richard III. He was “stunned by the power of the performance in which the brilliant but weary actor alternately electrified and embarrassed the audience as he struggled to dominate his role” (Damrosch and Dettmar 1322). What fascinated Browning was the tension between what Kean currently was and what he had been in his youth, and the implications that had for whom Kean-as-Richard III could be to his audience. Yet Kean is one of the actors Bert States calls self-expressive, someone who captivates an audience by revealing the skilled actor beneath his character. Kean wasn't as imposing as he had once been when Browning watches him, but his commanding stage presence still brought pleasure even as his weariness elicited pity. While playing Richard III, Kean embodied his character, his past self, and his present self. The struggle to act well
was also a struggle between the man he used to be and the man whom Browning saw. It's the interplay amongst those three selves, the fictional self, the past self, and the present self, that fixated Browning and the rest of Kean's audience. What happens when an actor without the benefit of Kean's reputation has moments of unscripted self-revelation, moments when she is clearly not whom she pretends to be? Four gimp actors who play gimp characters—Ann Stocking in John Belluso's Gretty Good Time (1999), Nabil Shaban as Hamm and Garry Robson as Clov in Robert Rae's production of Samuel Beckett's Endgame (2005), and Neil Marcus in his own play, Storm Reading (1996), show us how such moments may be perceived by an audience.

“PEOPLE DECIDE NOT TO SEE ME THAT WAY”

In her eulogy for playwright John Belluso, his friend and collaborator Ann Stocking, said that “a large part of his charm lay in his asymmetry – [clothes] not exactly fitting on him, and him not exactly fitting in the world” (Stocking). According to Stocking, Belluso's bone

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disorder, Engleman-Carmurdrie syndrome, affected the way he moved through the world in more ways than one. Yes, it impacted his physical movements, but it also impacted the connections between the personal and the sociopolitical that are found in his work. His interest in providing a historical contextualization of disability culture is evident in his first play, *Gretty Good Time*. Stocking originated the role of Gretty Myers, a thirty-two year old polio patient languishing in a nursing home after Jonas Salk has invented the vaccine that will keep future generations from being in a similar position. Trapped in what she calls a "shit body" (Belluso 9), Gretty wants the new doctor in the nursing home, Henry Foster, to assist her in committing suicide.

Yet in the play's prologue we see that Gretty's role as a patient in a medical institution isn't Belluso's main concern, and it shouldn't be ours either. In the first scene, Gretty has fallen out of her manual wheelchair while dreaming (Belluso 7). She lies on the floor with her overturned wheelchair next to her. Unlike Pooty in *Reckless*, Gretty isn't unusual because she is unexpectedly gimpy. She's unusual because she has been separated from the extension of her body that makes the adjective apply to her.
Her wheelchair is a symbol of her entrapment, not a cause of it. Second, she usurps her wheelchair's power by overturning it, ensuring her prostrate body will catch an audience's attention before the metal object that usually encases it does. Third, the prologue makes the whole audience confront the same dilemma Gretty faces. Her wheelchair grants her mobility, but she cannot move of her own volition. Rather than being an extension of her body, her wheelchair's ease of movement mocks her own dependency. Gretty certainly sees it this way; despite having a wheelchair she says she can't move (Belluso 13,50, 56).

Since Gretty is in an institution where she receives frequent medical attention, the body she despises is constantly being assessed, and her own assessment of it is consistently low. When someone in one of her dreams invites her to play strip poker, she declines because “people don't usually see my body uncovered. It frightens me. It stays covered. [...]People will] see the twists, the bulges, the deadness” (Belluso 72). Gretty considers her body, like her wheelchair, an object that exists apart from her. It is a thing she cannot use to realize her desires. She feels this way partially because she's frustrated by the paralysis of her left side, but also because she lives in a nursing home.
amongst people who are unwell. Regardless of whether it's terminal, illness, like disability, marks one's body as a thing that needs to be fixed, a process of objectification that becomes complete upon death. As Mary Leighton points out in her article, “Personifying Objects/Objectifying People: Handling Questions of Mortality and Materiality through the Archeological Body” (2010), dead bodies occupy a unique position in society. Those who work with them simultaneously desire to regard them as objects that can be examined and moved with impunity and to imbue them with personal characteristics. The newly dead are particularly disturbing, because their physicality indicates how precarious the line between living and dying is. Says Leighton, “Particularly in the case of recently dead bodies which still have skin, hair, and moisture, the necessity of touching intimate substances stimulates feelings of disgust and discomfort” (Leighton 80). If she commits suicide, Gretty will be acknowledging the dilemma over whether she should be treated as a human being or an inert body. Henry already assists Gretty in ways that are so intimate as to be potentially uncomfortable, plucking a hair from her chin (Belluso 17), and helping her use a bedpan (Belluso 52). Even while she's alive, Gretty's need for assistance means
she, not unlike a corpse, makes even those who have been hired to touch her uncomfortable. Suicide won't spare her physical humiliation, but it will spare her the embarrassment of realizing she has been humiliated. Henry tacitly understands this, which is why he's eventually willing to help her kill herself.

Henry, however, doesn't just respect Gretty's personal autonomy. He likes her. He washes her hair with a perfumed soap (Belluso 59) and bathes her (Belluso 62). Both of these are activities usually left to aides, and in this case neither is devoid of sexual tension. While he is bathing Gretty with warm water, Henry reminds her that spinal polio doesn't cause loss of sensation. After she says, "People decide not to see me that way," (Belluso 60) when Henry asks if she has had any boyfriends, Henry consistently shows her he doesn't only see her as a patient. He reminds her that she is a living, breathing, desiring woman. Of course, his effort to convince her not to accept one form of objectification (death) puts her at risk of enduring another. Though the play is set in the nineteen fifties, Gretty's relationship with Henry exemplifies a problem often discussed in contemporary disability culture. Specifically, she is facing the dilemma of double minority identification.
that Mary Jo Deegan discusses in her essay, “A Case Study of Physically Disabled Women,” (1985) although Deegan says public identification with multiple minority groups wasn't a noticeable trend until the 1970s (Deegan 38). Henry seeks to transform Gretty, who identifies as a gimp woman, into a gimp woman. Of course, the members of either minority group are marginalized. The sexualization of heterosexual able-bodied women and the desexualization of heterosexual disabled women are different kinds of oppression that come from the same source, the privileging of the male, able-bodied experience. Disabled women are doubly disadvantaged because they are regarded as sex objects men don't desire. One of the few powers consistently granted to heterosexual women, the power to allure men, is denied disabled women. As Nancy A. Brooks wryly states in her essay, “Disabled Women: Sexism without a Pedestal,” (1985) recognition of a disabled woman's sexuality is often reduced to the idea that “a disabled woman needs a man to take care of her, if she can find one” (Brooks 8).

If a woman's attractiveness is partially determined by her physicality, a gimp woman in a wheelchair occupies a unique position even amongst other gimp women. Even if she uses a manual wheelchair that she pushes herself, the
wheelchair that helps her move will not move with her. Unlike when someone is using canes or crutches, each stroke of the wheel is not timed with a footfall. Her breasts and hips don't sway as she moves. If she chooses to wear high heels, they won't be heard tapping against the surface of the floor. Though she may come too close to someone, she won't inadvertently brush her body against him. Any woman can be treated like a sex object, but it will be difficult for a gimp woman to show her sex appeal even when she actually wishes to do so.

Gretty faces an additional difficulty. Since her left arm is paralyzed, she can't push her own wheelchair. Difficult as it would be to move in a "feminine" way while in a wheelchair, Gretty can't even improvise. Her body is seldom under her own control. Henry is attracted to Gretty because he senses she is repressing her passion, not because of how she is expressing it (Belluso 63). Still, if Henry's opinion of Gretty becomes the audience's as well, she'll "triumph." Unfortunately, there are two things that keep us from empathizing with Henry's feelings. The first is that he shouldn't be acknowledging them.

Henry is a doctor in the nursing home where Gretty is a patient. Their attraction is mutual — Gretty suggests that
Henry bathe her (Belluso 61) - but it's still illicit. Henry doesn't take advantage of his authority, but the idea that he could makes this relationship potentially unethical. His transgression is made more serious because many caretakers for the disabled do abuse their power. According to Dr. Nina Burrowes' 2011 review of studies about sexual assault, the rate of violent crimes against disabled people is more than twice that of comparable crimes against the able-bodied. Sixteen out of every thousand disabled people are victims of sexual assault, as opposed to five out of every thousand people in the able-bodied community. One reason for the significantly higher rate of sexual assault amongst the disabled is that members of that community are often physically vulnerable to caretakers (20).

Henry's position makes his attraction to Gretty a potential ethical compromise, even though the two do no more than kiss. Yet the greatest problem in his courtship of Gretty isn't due to his professional position. It's the

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26 Though the rate of rape in the disabled community is more than twice as high as that in the able-bodied community, disabled women who are victims of sexual assault receive comparatively less attention from researchers than other minority groups. In Burrowes' review for 2011, she found nine papers about sexual assault of members of minority ethnic groups, eleven papers about sexual assault of lesbian and bisexual women, and sixteen papers about male survivors of sexual assault. By contrast, only four papers about sexual assault of disabled women were listed in the study.
inferior physical position in which he inevitably places her. After wheeling her into the nursing home's courtyard and helping her drink a juice box they both agree moistens her tongue, Henry “leans over and kisses her, deeply and passionately” (Belluso 79). When she asks what motivated his impulsive action, he says, “It's what you wanted” (Belluso 79). Certainly, desire shows on someone's face, and Henry isn't mistaken. Gretty eventually admits she is attracted to him (Belluso 80). She wants this particular kiss, but she'd be equally vulnerable to one she didn't want. Someone could easily misread her expression, either accidentally or willfully, and she wouldn't be able to escape him without assistance. Gretty and Henry agree that his professional position compromises their attraction (Belluso 80).

Yet Henry's power over Gretty primarily comes not from what he does but from who he is. As a norm who is attracted to a partially paralyzed gimpy woman, Henry often shows his love by assisting her. This puts her at a distinct disadvantage, since he can withdraw his help should his love fade. Indeed, Gretty initially berates him for kissing her because even that act threatens her already limited physical autonomy. Doctor or not, any man who maneuvers Gretty's wheelchair into position and kisses her is treating her like
a thing. However immobile, this Snow White is already awake, and she “leans over and releases [Henry's] saliva from her mouth. It drips down onto the ground. She spits the rest out of her mouth” (Belluso 80). She rejects Henry's kiss, the mingling of their saliva and their lives because she knows that, for her, both carry the risk of being tinged by pity. Unfortunately, her assertive act turns her into a potentially pitiable figure: a drooling gimp.

As she tells Henry, whether or not she's a desirable girlfriend depends on how people decide to see her. Henry sees her as a woman, but the audience has another possible representative, Dr. Caplan. Caplan has little regard for Gretty. He doesn't pick her up when she falls out of her wheelchair (Belluso 8), and he wants to actually and metaphorically deprive her of a voice by unnecessarily placing her in an iron lung (Belluso 23). For an audience to perceive Gretty as independent, she has to conform more closely to Henry's vision of her than Caplan's. She has to show that, when she chooses, she can take care of herself.

Sadly for Gretty, her best defense against Caplan is, not her determination but her helplessness. She repeatedly exerts control over others by making them help her. She asks her friend, McCloud, to hold a peach for her to eat instead
of holding it in her own right hand, while telling McCloud not to leave her (Belluso 10). When Caplan accuses her of being a liar because she won't reveal where McCloud went to escape the nursing home, Gretty shows her anger at him by asking for a drink of water. When he holds a cup with a straw in it up to her mouth, she “violently lunges her head forward, knocking the cup out of [Caplan’s] hand” (Belluso 36). Even this victory comes at a price, since she needs Caplan to dry her off. Given her passive aggressive behavior and how often she smiles “like a little girl” (Belluso 11, 20), Henry's admonishment to her that “just because people treat [her] like a child doesn't mean [she] has the right to act like a child” (Belluso 38) isn't entirely unjustified.

However, Gretty expresses herself this way because, not unlike a child's, her limited physical autonomy restricts her options for self-expression. She can't entirely control what she does – or rather, how much she needs others to do – let alone how an audience perceives what she does. In that case, how can she present herself as the fierce, attractive woman Henry sees?

What Gretty is like isn't nearly as significant as how Ann Stocking, the actress who originated the role, isn't like Gretty. Stocking does sometimes use a manual wheelchair
in real life.\textsuperscript{27} Because she is a woman in her early thirties in the aughts, however, an audience can safely assume she isn't gimpy due to paralysis from polio or post polio. Thus, some of Gretty's limitations have been deliberately embodied by Stocking, who must have consciously left the wheelchair Gretty has fallen out of in the opening scene. More importantly, though, Stocking's body isn't marked by the ravages of polio. She never removes her clothing, but we can assume she doesn't have the flaccid muscles and bulges about which Gretty is so self-conscious. Even as Gretty declares she keeps her body covered up, Stocking is inviting an audience's inspection. Stocking doesn't share Gretty's reticence about her body, and she doesn't share the physical and cultural experience of having been disabled by a virus that left her body not quite her own. Playwright Charles Mee says traversing the able/disabled binary as a result of contracting polio at fourteen left him “[running] toward normal and at the same time away from it, trying to pass for normal and feeling it to be a lie” (Mee 166).

Though Stocking's onstage self-representation might not be absolutely true, it's at least deliberately crafted. As an actress, that is “normal” for her. Unlike Gretty,
Stocking makes deliberate physical choices of her own volition, because that is what an actor does. It's the contrast between whom Stocking is and whom she is pretending to be that lends credibility to Henry's vision of a captivating gimpy woman. Stocking, who has more control over her body and her actions than Gretty ever could, can't entirely control how an audience decides to see her. She can choose how and when to complicate what audience members see. This is an advantage of being a gimp actor who is demonstrably less gimpy than her character. She can choose when she wants to draw attention to Gretty's physical struggles and when she wants to “triumph” over them. We don't know precisely which backstory accompanies Stocking's wheelchair onstage, but we know her story isn't the same as Gretty's.

We should note, though, that Gretty's wheelchair is especially forthcoming. Gretty Good Time is a climactic play. To climax a work is to “arrange [its events] in ascending gradation” (OED). One event is directly related to the next, and each event enhances the narrative. Since Gretty is a character in a climactic play the sequence in which events happen to her gives us more information about her, as well as her wheelchair and her relationship to it.
Of course, every wheelchair has a backstory - the gimp got there somehow, after all - but not every backstory is revealed in the straightforward way allowed by a standard climactic plot structure. For example, perhaps the curtain rises on a play where we see a character with an undisclosed disability who is in a wheelchair for an undisclosed reason. A wheelchair that enters without a narrative that clearly ties it to both its user and its function in the real world is more likely to be evaluated based on how it performs its other two “roles,” a metaphor for qualities associated with gimpiness and an extension of its user's body. These “roles” become even more significant in the case of an immobile character for whom a wheelchair is evoked but not embodied onstage. To consider the implications of such an (admittedly rare) scenario, we'll examine Hamm in Samuel Beckett's Endgame.

“IT'S WE ARE OBLIGED TO EACH OTHER”

Though Hamm evokes many stereotypes associated with disability in the real world, he isn't gimpy.²⁹ He's immobile. His mobility device is literally a wheeled chair, an “armchair on castors” (Beckett 1) laboriously wheeled around by someone else. Unlike the wheelchairs we've been examining, this wheeled chair is definitely a prop. A set designer can make it as easy or difficult to maneuver as her director desires. More importantly for our purposes, the presence of an armchair on castors - or rather, the absence of a wheelchair - allows Beckett to utilize all of the negative qualities associated with disability without explaining or critiquing them. Hamm consistently exhibits the physical dependency frequently associated with gimpiness. He uses a catheter (Beckett 24, 34), struggles to propel himself with a gaff (Beckett 43, 82), and repeatedly asks for painkillers to ease his misery (Beckett 7, 12, 24, 35, 48, 71). To be fair, the need for medicine, physical weakness, and difficulty urinating could evoke illness as much as disability. Hamm never says why he is unwell or ¹⁹⁹⁰).

²⁹ Though Hamm is never identified as gimpy, he is disabled. He is blind (Beckett 3). Like gimpiness, blindness also carries real world associations. However, blindness also has literary associations, signifying either perceptiveness or a lack of awareness. In the Symbolist play, *The Intruder* (1890), for example, it signifies the former.
immobile, but he does address which condition disadvantages him most. To get around easily he says, he would need “a proper wheelchair. With big wheels. Bicycle wheels” (Beckett 25). In other words, he would need a chair that was designed for him to wheel himself.

Since he can't do that, this armchair on castors isn't an extension of his body. Three times he tells Clov, who wheels him, “Don't stand there, you give me the shivers” (Beckett 27, 32, 65), responding to an invasion of his personal space when Clov stands behind the chair. Admittedly, Clov's presence might be unwelcome to Hamm no matter what sort of chair Hamm were in. In that case, Clov's filial relationship to Hamm would afford him some privilege...but even the son who is welcome to hang onto his father's armchair isn't equally welcome to hang onto his father's arm. If Beckett only teasingly addresses the absence of a wheelchair, it's partially because Endgame isn't a play about disability as much as a play about immobility. If every life is a continuum from youthful agility to increased weakness, Hamm is slowly becoming more like his parents, Nagg and Nell, who are confined to ashbins lined with sand (Beckett 17). In fact, he curses his adopted son, saying that one day Clov will also become helpless:
“You'll be sitting there [...] for ever, like me. [Y]ou'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you because you won't have had pity on anyone” (Beckett 36). Someone who is sitting and waiting to be attended, as a gimp would be, is deserving of pity. Further, pity from an assistant is what passes as companionship. Hamm doesn't have the wheelchair that would directly evoke his helplessness and need for pity to an audience, but his wheeled chair signifies them.

Though Hamm reaffirms negative associations with disability in its most literal sense of rendering someone unable to perform a physical action, his dependency isn't as important as his co-dependency. Hamm and Clov each have a physical disadvantage. The former can't stand, and the latter can't sit (Beckett 10, 37). There are ninety sets of stage directions for Clov in the play, mostly requiring him to move, halt, turn, or return to his place behind Hamm's chair. The sound of his boots on the floor as he constantly clomps around the stage is a reminder of both the size of the space and how effectively he is consigned to it. However, since Hamm's confinement is more absolute and his wheeled chair isn't designed to allow him independence, Clov pushes him. Clov, not the armchair on castors, provides
Hamm's mobility. Further, since Hamm is blind and his feet aren't touching the ground, he relies on Clov to define the space in which he moves. In a ritual Clov hints is often repeated by only referring to it as "the round," (Beckett 26) Clov positions Hamm to Hamm's specifications, and then tells him where he is.

HAMM: Is that my place?

CLOV: Yes, that's your place.

HAMM: Am I right in the center?

CLOV: I'll measure it.

HAMM: More or less! More or less!

CLOV: (moves chair slightly) There! [...] 

HAMM: I feel a little too far to the left. 

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

Now I feel a little too far to the right.

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

I feel a little too far forward.

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

Now I feel a little too far back.

(Clov moves chair slightly.)

Don't stand there, you give me the shivers!

(Beckett 26-27)
Both Hamm and Clov use language that divides and characterizes parts of the space—place, center, more, less, there, left, right, forward and back. In the last line Hamm, who can't see Clov behind the chair, still chastises him for being too close. Of course, this careful repositioning could all be inaccurate, since Hamm refuses Clov's twice repeated offer to measure the distance between Hamm and center stage (Beckett 26, 27). The round isn't so much an exact measurement of the stage as it is an indication of how each man measures it. For Clov, it's a small space he paces endlessly. For Hamm, it's an endless space in which he makes minute movements.

Yes, Hamm's helplessness, dependency, and physical misery are negative qualities associated with gimpiness in the real world. Beckett carefully quarantines these qualities by not providing Hamm with the wheelchair that would make an audience directly confront the presence of the gimp. Admittedly, a wheelchair from 1957, when the play was first performed, wouldn't have been terribly helpful. The first wheelchair to even vaguely resemble a contemporary model was manufactured in 1932. It was closest to the sort of chair now used in hospitals. The wide wheels, which were tilted back and not cambered, made the chair difficult to
move oneself. The footrests weren't placed directly below the user's feet to allow for proper physical positioning. The wheels, like the bicycle wheels Hamm evokes in the play, had to be inflated with an air pump, an act which required one to be in a standing position (“Wheelchair Information: History of Wheelchairs”). Even if he had a proper wheelchair Hamm would need assistance, especially as it's difficult for a blind man to orient himself while sitting. The advantage of Hamm's wheeled chair then, is that it allows Beckett to only evoke disability when its presence serves his play. As an object that is never fully integrated in its onstage world, a wheelchair may not always signify what a playwright, a director, or an actor who is using it intends. Though the absence of Hamm's wheelchair is striking, we should acknowledge that physical limitation is not extraordinary in Beckett's dramatic world as most of his characters are limited in some way. Stanford Garner writes that in the worlds of Beckett's plays “movement determines spatial arrangement as something volatile, transforming, and closer to the moving geometry of dance than to the stable surface of a painter's canvas” (72). All of these characters' movements are “gimpy,” as they are slow, laborious, and only sporadically effective. If Beckett's use
of space is volatile, insofar as he make his actors and his audience redefine their relationship to the stage, his vision has its limitations. Like all playwrights' visions, it's confined to his dramatic world.\textsuperscript{301} In most cases, the actor playing Hamm will stand for curtain call. And if he's lucky enough to receive a standing ovation, he'll likely be able to see it perfectly. If a character in \textit{Endgame} or the actor who plays him has a definable disability, it's part of a director's concept. In that case, the director will probably explain his decision in the playbill, unless he is associated with a disabled theatre company.

When Robert Rae directed the play for the theatre company, Theatre Workshop, in 2005, he cast two gimp actors as Hamm and Clov. Nabil Shaban (Hamm) uses a manual wheelchair in the real world due to osteogenosis imperfecta,\textsuperscript{3} All dramatic worlds are confined to the stage. However, Beckett cleverly acknowledges this by using metatheatrical language throughout \textit{Endgame}. Hamm and Clov reference an audition (Beckett 49), an aside (Beckett 77), a soliloquy and an underplot (Beckett 78), the unwelcome possibility they're “beginning to...to mean something,” (Beckett 32), the “multitude...in transports...of joy” (Beckett 29) Clov sees in the auditorium, and ending (Beckett 1,2, 5, 15, 23, 45, 50, 51, 69, 72, 77, 78, 81, 83, 84). Acknowledging that the world is temporary emphasizes that the characters' struggles are too. However, this is complicated in Hamm's case because his wheeled chair refers to a real world object (wheelchair). This object associates its user with the negative qualities Hamm exhibits, but not temporarily.
commonly known as brittle bone disorder. Garry Robson (Clov) uses either crutches or a motorized wheelchair due to complications from multiple sclerosis. For the production, Robson used a motorized wheelchair, and Shaban stayed in a wire cage that was suspended from the stage with a bedpan beneath it. This staging decision preserves the continuum from mobility to immobility present in Beckett's play. A caged Hamm is less mobile than a wheeling Clov. This exchange, for example, still plays in fundamentally the same way as it would if Hamm were in an armchair on castors:

HAMM: How are your eyes?
CLOV: Bad.
HAMM: How are your legs?
CLOV: Bad.
HAMM: But you can move.
CLOV: Yes.
HAMM: (Violently) Then move (Beckett 7-8)!

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31 As both of these men are well known actors in the disabled theatre community, frequent references to their work and their disabilities can be found on the BBC Disability Podcast, Ouch!

32 I have never seen this production. For my knowledge of the staging choices, I'm entirely indebted to Nabil Shaban, who posted production photos on his Youtube account, ScabsNabs.
Admittedly, a gimpy Clov couldn't "[go] to the back wall [and lean] against it with his forehead and hands" (Beckett 8) as Clov-as-written does when Hamm tells him to move. However, we can see Garry Robson's Clov has "bad" legs, since a motorized wheelchair is a prop signifying a lack of physical mobility. We've no reason to disbelieve his eyes are as "bad" as he claims too, though he can see and hear much better than Hamm. What changes if Hamm is caged and Clov is gimpy isn't each man's relationship to his own body. Hamm is still immobile and spatially disoriented. Clov is still constantly moving, although he's no longer unable to sit. What Rae's casting and staging decisions change is the relationship Hamm and Clov have to each other. In Beckett's play, their particular physical disadvantages make them co-dependent. Hamm needs an attendant because he can't move, and Clov tends to Hamm because he can't stop moving.

In the Theatre Workshop production, Hamm and Clov are no longer forced to compromise due to their separate needs. Apart from swinging the cage, Shaban's Hamm is still unable to move. However, since he has a bedpan, Robson's Clov doesn't need to take him to the bathroom. Nor is he responsible for moving and orienting him. Clov may constantly be moving, but he isn't laboring, since the man
he should labor for is out of his reach. Further, though the
decision to put Clov in a motorized wheelchair allows Robson
to more easily move in stage time, the act of moving is no
longer physically difficult. A motorized wheelchair doesn't
require its user's muscular strength in the same way a
manual wheelchair would. More importantly, constant wheeling
doesn't cause pains in the legs the way constant walking
would, particularly for someone who had a “stiff, staggering
walk” (Beckett 1). If Hamm and Clov aren't mutually
entrapped, the “inner scream” (Gallagher) of the body taxed
beyond its means actor Billie Whitelaw says she felt
whenever she performed Beckett's work no longer reverberates
throughout the theatre.

In this case, casting gimp actors as Hamm and Clov
relieves the characters’ co-dependency, thus limiting the
amount of physical duress placed on the actors. For Clov,
the presence of a gimp body is privileged over the presence
of a moving body. While Clov-as-written unceasingly obeys
Hamm, Robson-as-Clov “uses artificial legs to stamp on the
floor, deceiving Hamm that he is climbing the ladders
(before observing the world through a periscope)” (Brown
28). Indeed, that's the only task Clov even feigns
performing for Hamm in this production. The set pieces are
sculptures designed by Eduard Bersudsky of the Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre, which means Clov cannot directly interact with them. The stuffed black dog with a missing leg that Clov brings to Hamm in the play, for example, is now a large dog shaped like a Dalek, with a phone dial for a nose (Mansfield 34). Of course, we expect that in any production choices will be made to support the director's concept and the particular gifts of the actors. Here, however, the compromises made to Hamm and Clov's co-dependency decrease dramatic tension by shifting the balance of power between the two men. In Beckett's play, each man serves the other. In Rae's production, Clov pretends to serve Hamm.

At the end of Beckett's play, when both men mistakenly believe Clov is finally going to leave Hamm, Hamm says, “It's we are obliged to each other” (Beckett 81). At first, Hamm and Clov are being uncharacteristically courtly, giving thanks to each other for services rendered. However, Hamm's remark clarifies the true nature of their relationship. One man is not obliged (thankful) to another for a kindness. Each man is obliged (obligated) to the other, because each has a need that can only be fulfilled through providing a service. To Shaban, Robson, and Rae's credit, directly confronting how immobility and disability respectively
complicate relationships by creating caretaking obligations is a major feat. Yet, one of the advantages of placing Hamm in an armchair on castors is that it allows him to confirm negative stereotypes about disability without actually embodying them. By twice reinstating the presence of the gimp and casting actors who are well known within the disabled theatre community, Rae risks representing negative “truths” about disability without being able to complicate or refute them. Further, any action that would be too difficult for the actors to perform — Hamm struggling to move himself with the gaff, for example — simply has to be struck from the show. While this could result in a reductive presentation of Beckett's play, we should note that striking actions a gimp actor can't perform is far different from only staging actions he can perform successfully. In Neil Marcus' *Storm Reading*, the gimp body is represented — or re-presented, given its place in the able/disabled binary of the real world — as the epitome of gracefulness.

“THEY'RE WATCHING TO SEE HOW WELL I DO THIS THING CALLED HUMAN”

Playwright, actor, and dancer Neil Marcus is gimpy due to a neurological condition called dystonia, and each scene
of the play *Storm Reading*, performed at the Access Theatre in 1996 and written by Neil and Roger Marcus and director Rod Lathim, is intended to encourage a reevaluation of Marcus’s condition. In one scene, actor Matthew Ingersoll reads a description of dystonia taken from The Dystonia Medical Research Foundation. “Playwright Neil Marcus suffers from dystonia, a rare neurological disorder in which powerful involuntary muscle spasms twist and jerk the body into unusual postures. The playwright is afflicted with ‘generalized dystonia,’ (dystonia musculorum deformans), the most severe and painful form of this disorder. It denies his ability to speak, stand, walk and/or control sudden and sometimes bizarre movements” (“Storm Reading: An Excerpt”). Marcus objects to this representation of his condition (drawn from the medical model for disability), and he instructs Ingersoll to read the text again.

Playwright Neil Marcus has flourishing dystonia, a neurological condition which allows him to leap and soar and twist and turn constantly in public, thus challenging stereotypes of every sort and making him very interesting to watch and sit next to during lunch hour [...] The playwright has "generalized dystonia," which means it is all over
him like a phone line that links world nations. It makes Neil very alive, but then again, aren't we all? Perhaps dystonia is, in a way, a universal condition (“Storm Reading: An Excerpt”).

Marcus takes a text that makes him look powerless and alters it to represent his condition as empowering and even enviable. Then he uses the performance model of disability (invoked in his admission that he is “very interesting to watch and sit next to during lunch hour”) to make dystonia not only empowering, but universal. With the line, “[Dystonia] makes Neil very alive, but then again, aren’t we all?” Marcus implicitly links his “performance” of disability with the various “performances” (the caring mother, the providential husband, etc.) required of his audience members in their daily lives. By acknowledging that disability is just one of many possible “performances” of socially constructed identity, Marcus erases the differences between himself and his norm audience members. By calling attention to disconcerting aspects of his dystonia – not only mentioning them within the text of the play but embodying them onstage – Marcus gives a subjective “performance” of his disability that is evaluated (and
hopefully reconsidered by his audience) using only his own point of view.

Marcus’s reevaluation of his disability – his spasms, his stutters, his gimpiness – has humor and pride that are lacking in Ingersoll’s medical definition of dystonia. Marcus needs an audience to witness and give credence to his self-evaluation, because it represents norms he encounters in daily life whose minds he seeks to change. His audience in the real world – people who stare at him in the street – relies on inference to evaluate both Marcus and his disability. The audience of Storm Reading, by contrast, is receiving information directly from Marcus, information that contradicts the medical view of disability as unfortunate and debilitating.

Marcus’s play presents a more effective opportunity for reevaluating disability than one of his daily “performances” of dystonia would, because being onstage allows him to take advantage of the performer-audience relationship, wherein a (usually) passive audience’s view of onstage events is manipulated by the performer’s decisions about his physicality, vocal timing and delivery. As Richard Tomlinson points out, the gimp performer-norm audience relationship is the opposite of the able/disabled relationship as it exists
in society. In many social settings, such as nursing homes or group homes, the disabled are potentially rendered powerless by able-bodied attendants. By contrast, a gimp actor who is performing for what is most likely a largely norm audience, has the opportunity to reverse this power dynamic (Tomlinson 10-11). Marcus uses this principle to teach his audience to consider the possibility that being humorous, charismatic, and eloquent is not necessarily incompatible with being gimpy.

However effectively he takes advantage of the opportunity for re-presenting disability that is provided by the performer–audience dynamic, Marcus is still representing disability. In other words, though he presents his “performance” in a positive way, he is still performing the same role that he would play in the real world, that of a gimp. In that case, how is his “performance” to be evaluated?

Brenda Jo Brueggemann’s essay “Delivering Disability, Willing Speech,” offers one possibility. Bruggemann describes the effect of watching Marcus struggle to speak in the first scene of Storm Reading.

[Marcus’s] voice, punctuated by [...] spasms, is difficult to understand – stuttering and heavy
with hesitation [...] For a full (very full) forty seconds, Marcus struggles to speak. Then a female interpreter appears from side stage, gracious and flowing in a soft violet ballet dress. Her name is Kathryn Voice, though she doesn’t voice. She signs. [Then] a male interpreter, Matt Ingersoll, appears from the audience. [He] pronounces in a clear and mellifluous voice what Marcus has stammered out [...] “People are always watching me [...] They’re watching to see how well I do this thing called human.” (Auslander and Sandahl 20)

Marcus is represented as the quintessential gimp, painful and unpleasant to watch as he works to perform the simple (from a norm's perspective, at least) act of speaking. By contrast, Kathryn Voice and Matthew Ingersoll, who are both norms, are described with adjectives that evoke ease. Voice, dressed like a ballerina, is the ideal of physical grace; Ingersoll is the ideal vocally captivating actor.

These descriptions reveal how Marcus’s style of self-presentation has entrapped him. By “performing” his disability in the same way that he would in the real world,
Marcus ensures that his performance will be evaluated by the standards of that world. He is only “flourishing” when he is not upstaged by Voice and Ingersoll. He may have caused his audience to reevaluate dystonia (and by extension his life, as a man who has dystonia), but he is still regarded as unfortunate when contrasted with his co-performers. To be fair, including norms in his play is a considerable risk for precisely this reason, a risk that Marcus does not shy from.

Marcus’s conundrum is this: Though he has taken advantage of the performer-audience relationship, he has chosen to present himself in the same “role” that he would play in the real world. This renders his reversal of the able/disabled power dynamic partially ineffective. Though he succeeds in presenting alternative perceptions of dystonia, his “role” in the real world is judged using the criteria of the real world, wherein he and his disability are unfavorably represented. Therefore, his presentation of dystonia as positive only succeeds when it is divorced from its real world context. Unfortunately, it is in precisely that context that Marcus wishes for his audience to reevaluate him. Yet, because he has not presented an image of himself in any role other than his real world “role” as a man with dystonia (and how could he perform that role
poorly, since he is a man with dystonia), it is only in that role that he may be critiqued. Marcus has to be judged by how well he does this thing called human. Is he empowered or afflicted, enviable or pitiable? With Marcus’s presentation of dystonia as a liberating condition that allows him to challenge “stereotypes of every sort,” he unintentionally makes himself a stereotype, a man who can only be characterized by his disability.

Thus far, Marcus' self-presentation is an embodiment of Ann Stocking's argument that gimp actors' life experiences enrich their performances. However, Marcus takes this idea further, claiming that norm actors like to play gimps and do charity work with gimp children because “disabled people actually are living a very dramatic life[.] After all, society isn't organized to make our lives any easier. Why, we are the living incarnations of brave acts.”33 Disability doesn't enrich Marcus' art. It is his art. The title of the play encapsulates this idea; encountering Marcus' tempestuous, spastic movements is learning the “art” of reading a storm. If a gimpy man is

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33 I've never been lucky enough to see Storm Reading, which was intermittently performed at The Access Theatre from 1988 until 1996. Unless otherwise noted, I'm taking my information from the DVD: Marcus, Neil and Marcus, Roger. Lathim, Rod, dir. Storm Reading. The Access Theatre Company, Santa Barbara, CA. January 19 and 20, 1996.
inherently also an artist, then Ann Stocking does not go far enough with her claim that disabled people know what it's like to have people stare at them. If disabled people on the street are comparable to movie stars onscreen or actors onstage, then onlookers are supposed to stare at them. Performers, after all, have cultivated stage presence, that ineffable quality that draws an audience's attention. Despite constantly foregrounding how his dystonia makes him both a dancer and an artist, Marcus also repeatedly chastises onlookers in the real world for their curiosity about him, reenacting encounters with a museum guard, a woman at the grocery store, a man and woman at the train station, a man at the laundromat, a jogger, and a child, all of whom are shown to be uninformed and presumptuous about his life and his disability. By the tenets of his representation, however, all of these people are justified in encountering him with as much fascination and as little information as they would have about any other self-expressive actor.

Whatever his assertions about his personal life, Marcus is also an actor of the sort we've been exclusively examining thus far. Storm Reading is, after all, a play meant to be staged. He allows himself to be compared to
Voice and Ingersoll, norms who can more easily “become” their characters. However, each is put at a significant disadvantage. If she's not playing a love interest for Marcus, Voice only signs words he has spoken or written. Ingersoll does assume characters, but none of them have depth or garner sympathy. Perhaps this is partially to prevent an audience from identifying more closely with Ingersoll than it does with Marcus, but it's also because Ingersoll's primary role is to act as Marcus' voice. In fact, when Marcus says Ingersoll should flirt with Voice because Marcus is too nervous, Ingersoll says, “I'm not even really here. I'm just your voice.” Admittedly, these casting decisions are partially practical; Marcus has difficulty moving and speaking in stage time. However, they also give the impression that, though Marcus is a gimp, it's Voice and Ingersoll who aren't intact. Only Marcus is an expressive individual. Voice and Ingersoll are merely his means of expression. Further, he is consistently eloquent and elegant; he recites pieces of his poetry with help from Ingersoll, and he dances without his wheelchair. He isn't just the only intact person onstage. He's the only movie star. If disability is an art, the audience is only privy to the choices that play well.
There is only one exception to Marcus' re-visioning of the gimpy body as it appears onstage and in the real world. In one scene, introduced with the scene title, "An Introduction To Elegant Italian Dining, With Your Host, Neil Marcus," Voice and Ingersoll are on a date in what we are told is a classy Italian restaurant. Marcus, their waiter, waits for them instead of on them. He leans against Ingersoll's chair while Voice and Ingersoll decide what to order, then tells Ingersoll to write the order down and get the dishes and the food.

Perhaps Marcus interacts primarily with Ingersoll for the practical reason that it's he, not Voice, who is a trained actor. However, this also allows for a reversal of the dynamic the two maintain throughout Storm Reading. Previously Ingersoll has played various bystanders who disadvantage Marcus with their ineptitude. Now it is Marcus who, though in an admittedly minor way, disadvantages Ingersoll. More importantly, because Marcus isn't the straight man in this comedy sketch, he can't look at the audience each time Ingersoll acts foolishly, as he has done six times previously. When this laugh cue is gone, Marcus opens up the possibility that an audience could laugh at him as well as with him.
Yet this is carefully prevented. At one point, Ingersoll turns away from Marcus and asks in a stage whisper to Voice, “What does he get--.” He never finishes asking what Marcus, a waiter who doesn't wait on customers, gets paid for. As he is the norm counterpart to audience members who would probably be just as befuddled were they in his situation, his unwillingness to explore this issue indicates to his audience that it shouldn't either. Instead, the audience should pay attention to the question Ingersoll actually finishes asking. After listing every task Voice and he have done to get this meal, Ingersoll asks her, “What's so elegant about this?” Voice points out that Marcus couldn't have managed any of this by himself, then turns to Marcus for his assent. When Marcus agrees that he couldn't, he moves from potentially being the butt of a joke about his physical struggle to again being a teacher of oblivious norms. This time, however, it's Voice who delivers the lecture, saying, “Don't you think it's elegant that all three of us worked together to prepare this meal?”

According to the OED Online, the most likely etymology for the phrase “butt of the joke” comes from the fourteenth through the seventeenth century, when a “butt” was a hill designated for archery practice. Applying that motif to comedy, a comedian has to be as vulnerable to a joke as a butt is to arrows in order for the joke to “land.” Despite not being the straight man in this sketch, Marcus also isn't vulnerable to jokes made at his expense.
Though this is a comedic sketch, Marcus doesn't fulfill the role of a physical comedian whose struggles are cause for laughter. Admittedly this is partially because, though his struggles are deliberately staged, they aren't necessarily deliberate. The spasms and motor difficulties caused by dystonia make waiting tables arduous for him. Even if he carefully choreographed his movements, however, the sketch still wouldn't be primarily intended to be comedic. As Voice's replacement of a punchline with a homily makes clear, it's meant to be edifying. The difficulty here isn't that Marcus is inelegant. It's Ingersoll's failure to appreciate that collaboration is more elegant.

Marcus isn't only contesting the idea that the gimp body is awkward. He's positing the gimp body as a work of art. In his heterotopia of compensation, he contests what Nabil Shaban calls the Body Fascism of the real world. Gimp actor and theorist Nabil Shaban coined the term Body Fascism to describe an able-bodied society’s attitude towards the disabled body. Body Fascism is an ideology wherein worth is determined based upon physical appearance, and the attributes of the able-bodied body are more attractive than those of the disabled body (Shaban 146). Though many members of the disabled community now use this term, I think that it
creates an unnecessarily strong divide between desirable bodies and undesirable ones (gimpy and otherwise). Fascism is defined as “extreme right-wing, authoritarian, or intolerant views or practice” (OED). Since many bodies, including the gimpy body, are considered undesirable by the standards of Western media and society – as Shaban acknowledges – the implication of absolute intolerance towards specific minorities is inaccurate. Actually, the standards of attractiveness are subject to change. (Consider, for example, the contrast between a Ruben nude and Paris Hilton.) Of course, a beauty standard does reflect the sociopolitical values of the particular time period from which it comes. However, I think the most effective way to encourage reconsideration of the beauty standard is to acknowledge, not its divisive qualities, but the arbitrariness with which those qualities are assigned value. In order to acknowledge this, I will use the term Body Beautiful instead of Body Fascism. Beauty is defined as “a combination of qualities that delights the aesthetic senses.” (OED) Beauty, then, is defined by fluid standards, and the term Body Beautiful is intended to reflect that fluidity.
I'm using the term Body Beautiful to question how our culture defines beauty, and how the disabled body serves as a riposte to that definition. In *Storm Reading*, by contrast, Marcus' body isn't intended to reevaluate the real world's privileging of the Body Beautiful. It is the Body Beautiful. If disability is an art, then the disabled body is its most evocative canvas. Associating a gimp's body with the Body Beautiful requires creating images that are striking enough to counter the ones in the real world, where disabled bodies are the “ugly” half of the able/disabled binary. Marcus attempts to showcase his gimpy body as the Body Beautiful throughout *Storm Reading*; in one scene, Ingersoll, playing a painter, tells Marcus, “The Chinese calligraphers study years to move like you do.” If Marcus were to be physically inept while playing a waiter, he would risk embodying how the gimpy body is perceived in the real world. Further, no awkward body can be the Body Beautiful, which is idealized as perpetually graceful.

I'd never advocate that Marcus make dramatic choices that would undermine his work. However, we should acknowledge that the Body Beautiful, while lauded, isn't necessarily *comedic*. Someone who consistently exhibits physical grace is someone we admire, but she is not
necessarily someone at whom we laugh. Writing of “Dancing In The Dark,” a 1978 SNL sketch wherein Steve Martin and Gilda Radnor perform a slapstick dance in a club, Nicole Stamp says on her blog, Pageslap: Nicole Stamp’s daily dose of Internet Awesome, that “it's equally fun to be impressed by [Martin and Radnor's] grace as [it is] to laugh at their silliness.” The pleasure of comedy, then, isn't seeing awkwardness completely transformed into grace. Charlie Chaplin is regarded as a skilled comedian, not because he doesn't take pratfalls, but because he takes them in an especially captivating way. Like a gimp actor, a comedian is always self-expressive, insofar as he is always displaying the physical and verbal discipline required for effective comic timing.

The difficulty, of course, is that it may be impossible for a gimp to purposely display physical awkwardness only when she wishes to do so. The very nature of being gimpy means she may have difficulty walking, speaking, or controlling her spasms and extraneous lip movements. Further, the gimps we have been discussing also use wheelchairs. Even if they manage to control their bodies well enough to appear “normal”, the wheelchair is an extension of the body that requires the “unnatural” action
of ambulating while sitting. Gimp actors in wheelchairs aren't necessarily self-expressive in a way that brings the pleasure Bert States claims self-expressiveness usually does, especially since “good” acting usually requires an actor to “become” her character.

Perhaps, however, we have been too stringent in only considering the conundrum faced by a gimp actor in a wheelchair. After all, not all gimps are in wheelchairs, and not all performers who take the stage are actors. Since we are especially interested in what it means for a gimp to be comedic at the moment, let's remove some of the other hindrances we've until now placed upon her. Let's say she doesn't need the wheelchair we've said is unique even amongst mobility devices.

Certainly, the term “sit down comedian” exists. However a sit down comedian must forego some of the advantages of the stand up format. Because she isn't standing, the audience has to readjust to see her properly. Because she cannot pace, she has to find an equally effective way of drawing attention to herself. A stand microphone has to be lowered significantly for her, but a hand mike impedes her ability to move even if she manages not to wheel over the cord.
Yes, there are sit down comedians. Even norm comedians occasionally choose to sit down, most notably Bill Cosby, who delivered the routine for the special, *Far From Finished*, from a folding chair (“Far From Finished – Bill Cosby”). However, since we're currently concerned with how a gimp comedian can make complex comedy, we'll say our gimp comedian can stand up, though perhaps not unassisted.

Since she can stand up, she can now become a stand up comedian. This means she can take utilize all the advantages the stand up form offers, without concerning herself with the wheelchair we've said has an especially complex stage presence even amongst mobility devices. A comedian is inherently self-expressive, but a stand up comedian is unabashedly so. In its standard form, stand up doesn't involve “becoming” characters. Now that our gimp performer can eschew the particular difficulties a wheelchair poses and the expectation to embody a character so completely she herself isn't visible she would face in a theatre, we must give her another challenge. Can she be the butt of her own joke and still have an audience find her funny, or will she merely seem pitiable if she delivers a punchline at her own expense? To find out, we'll have to examine scenarios where gimp comedians acknowledge, embody, and mock their own
conditions. We'll have to see if “a gimp stumbles into a bar...” is a set up for disappointment or for an excellent joke that has yet to be told.
Arab-American gimp comedian Maysoon Zayid was a theatre major when she attended Arizona State University. However, she says in her 2014 TED Talk that she wasn't cast in a single university production until

Finally, my senior year, ASU decided to do a show called *They Dance Real Slow in Jackson*. It's a play about a girl with [cerebral palsy...] I started shouting from the rooftops, “I'm finally getting a part. I have cerebral palsy!” [...] I didn't get the part [...The head of the theatre department] said it was because [she] didn't think I could do the stunts. I said, “Excuse me, if I can't do the stunts, neither can the character!”

(Maysoon Zayid: I Got 99 Problems...Palsy Is Just One)

Zayid is recounting her story for comedic effect. When she announces that she didn't get the part, the live audience laughs. Nonetheless, she's presenting a painful illustration of the conundrum we have said faces gimp actors. The faculty
and students of Zayid's theatre department don't see her as a stage performer. They see her as a gimp who can only “perform” her disability. Even that ability has strict limitations, as the head of the theatre department assumes Zayid can't “perform” cerebral palsy as skillfully as the character in the play does. Zayid says she became so frustrated while encountering closed-minded theatre directors and casting directors that she pursued a career in stand up instead of becoming an actor (Maysoon Zayid: I Got 99 Problems...Palsy Is Just One).

Even a gimp who can walk unassisted, as Zayid does, may have difficulty kicking open the door to an audition room. It's tempting to criticize the head of ASU's theatre department for putting Zayid in the unjust position of being cast or not based on how well others assumed she “performed” her disability. Certainly, not consulting her about the specifics of her disability before declining to cast her was unkind, if not unethical. However, let's presume for a moment that the character in the play does perform acts Zayid can't. In that case, her failure to perform a stunt successfully could lead to a comedic moment in an otherwise serious play. Such a moment would be unexpected for an audience. According to science fiction writer, Isaac Asimov,
showing an audience what it doesn't expect to see isn't the province of drama. He says, “the one necessary ingredient in every successful joke is a sudden alteration in point of view” (Asimov 1).

As a stand up comedian, Zayid challenges her audience members by asking them to accept a performer who reveals and talks about her disability without being defined by it. While Zayid doesn't attempt to hide the effects of her disability - the extraneous lip movements when she speaks, for example - she also emphasizes her femininity. If she totters onstage, it's partially because she chooses to wear high heels. Her low-cut tank top emphasizes her breasts. She wears lipstick and eye shadow, and she brushes back her long, black hair whenever she leans toward the microphone to make a point about which she's particularly passionate. As an eloquent gimp comedian who stands up in heels, Maysoon Zayid presents an alternative possibility to contest ASU's vision of a gimp performer, and probably that of her audience at the TED Talk as well. However, she doesn't present an alternative possibility for what it means to be a woman. Zayid's style of self-presentation isn't a challenge to the idea that all women are feminine. It's a reassurance that even gimp women desire to be feminine. This
significantly affects her ability to captivate her audience, as a woman comedian is expected to either emphasize her gender or try to make it irrelevant to her work.

In a blog post that's meant to compliment stand up comedian Amy Gordon, subtitled “Comedian Plays The Kazoo With Her 'Who's-ee-whatzit,'” Jerry Corley writes, “Take a gander at how she approaches the mic with such a demure attitude, nicely dressed, carrying a purse, for crying out loud!” (Jerry Corley's Comedy Clinic). Corley doesn't attempt to hide the fact that his advice is gendered. The main title for his blog post is, “How To Be A Funny Woman.” It's unarguably blatantly sexist to expect a woman to be demure and carry a purse to impress an audience, even if one is praising her for it. It's unarguably discomfiting for a man to write an authoritative blog post about how to be a funny woman. However, let's focus, not on the absurdity of Corley's instructing Gordon at all, but on what he's instructing her to do. Essentially, Corley wants Gordon to act stereotypically feminine; her vagina is the main focus of his subtitle, even if he doesn't name it directly. Certainly Gordon isn't obligated to present herself in a stereotypically feminine way to please a man, but she can represent herself as feminine if it serves her comedy.
Remember, though, that we aren't solely concerning ourselves with comedians who identify as female. We are concerning ourselves with gimp comedians, and a gimp comedian who identifies as female may not be able to easily perform “feminine” gestures. She may have difficulty carrying a purse while holding crutches and, if she's spastic, she probably won't have the muscular flexibility necessary to play a kazoo with her vagina.

More importantly, her “demure” actions may not be actions she performs by choice. She may cast her eyes down while walking to the microphone because watching her foot placement keeps her from losing her balance. What Corley likes about Gordon is that she acts demure in an attempt to be self-deprecating. The difficulty for a gimp comedian is that she'll struggle to be perceived as feminine while constantly being perceived as demure. She won't have a chance to be self-deprecating, because her audience will pity her before she has said a word.

Zayid only partially exemplifies Corley's advice in her TED Talk. She is unquestionably feminine, but she isn't necessarily demure; she instructs her audience to clap when she says disabled characters should be played by disabled actors. More importantly for us, her comedy isn't self-
deprecating. Though she finds humor in having been denied a stage role because of someone's misconceptions about her disability, she makes it clear to her audience she should have gotten the part. By contrast, how does a gimp comedian who draws an audience's attention to her disability without emphasizing her femininity fare? Let's consider two sitcom appearances and a routine by stand up comedian, Geri Jewell.

"QUESTIONS DON'T HURT, IGNORANCE DOES"

Geri Jewell is most famous for being the first disabled person to be cast in a prime time sitcom (The Official Geri Jewell Website). She made two guest appearances as Geri Warner on The Facts of Life. In her second episode, which aired on December 30, 1981, Geri arrives the weekend her younger, glamorous cousin, Blair Warner (Lisa Whelchel), is organizing a party in the gym for her French Club. Blair readily accepts Geri's request to attend, but she privately agonizes over how she'll convince someone to be Geri's date. At first her friends chastize her, but the usually acerbic Jo (Nancy McKeon) finally admits, “I guess [cerebral palsy] would make some guys uptight” (Youtube). While Blair is in the living room trying to think of disabled men to whom she can introduce Geri,
Geri is in the kitchen being asked out by someone else. Whether the audience finds the norm French teacher, Mike Palmer (Lou Richards), attractive is of little importance. All of the girls eagerly attest that he is.

More significantly, Geri's condition doesn't strike Mike as forcibly as Mike's attractiveness is meant to strike the audience. He has seen her stand up routine on a cerebral palsy telethon. His previous knowledge of Geri's work precludes the possibility of what dancer Bill "The Crutchmaster" Shannon calls Condition Arriving, wherein a gimp's disability makes a stronger impression upon first introduction than she does (whatiswhat.com). Further, Mike makes a conscious effort not to emphasize Geri's disability. After she makes a joke to gently correct him when he automatically carries her coffee cup to the sink, he says, "Hey, I really am [...] a good audience, believe me. Keep trying" (Youtube). He recognizes that part of his job as an ideal date is to accept her perspective as readily as a receptive audience would.

To the girls, the most extraordinary part of Mike's conduct isn't that he listens to Geri, but that he's willing to be seen with her at all. Blair gleefully tells the girls' guardian, Mrs. Garrett (Charlotte Rae), that Mike "made [the
party] seem like a...a real date, [not what] Geri's used to, where she and a buddy go out for a hamburger” (Youtube). The girls like Geri, but they can't imagine a scenario where Mike's attention to her could be sincere as well as gracious. Surely, for Geri, a real date is one where her partner and she sit on opposite sides of a booth, in no danger of making physical contact. In fact, when Mike asks Geri to climb Sunset Ridge with him the next day, the girls take it as evidence he “thinks he's noble for dating a handicapped person [...Soon] he'll dump Geri and move on to another cause” (Youtube). Since Mike only appears onscreen twice, we're given neither enough time nor enough information to glean his motives. What matters is that the girls are convinced he can't both be attractive and be genuinely attracted to Geri. Once they confess their doubts, Geri emphatically corrects them. “I don't have to be grateful to him for asking me out. He's lucky I went” (Youtube)! Chastened, the others quickly agree.

Like Mike Palmer, the girls learn how to be a good audience and unquestioningly accept Geri's self-presentation. However, their reassessment of Geri's physical attractiveness is prompted solely by her indignant outburst. Neither the girls nor the audience see Geri dancing and
climbing Sunset Ridge on her dates. If she were to be shown doing physical activities that are often difficult for gimps, it would complicate her assertion of her own worth as a girlfriend. Certainly, it would be harder for an audience to imagine the lovemaking that presumably kept her at Sunset Ridge with Mike from the evening until the early morning if she had trouble with less strenuous physical actions. Geri's romantic relationship proves the inherent worth of her body only because her body is never sexualized.\[^{35}\] Admittedly, this is partially because Jewell presents her body in a self-deprecating way as part of her comedy. If, as Giacomo Casanova advises, the key to romantic conquest is to “be the flame, not the moth” (Casanova 10) Jewell's self-effacement won't serve her well. However, her first appearance on The Facts of Life showcases more of her stand up routine. When she has more control over her script, Jewell has no interest in captivating audience members as she does Mike Palmer. Instead, she wants to educate audience members like she does the girls at the Eastland boarding school.

\[^{35}\] Even if Jewell's body were sexualized in this scenario to combat the desexualization of gimps, she wouldn't be expressing her own sexuality. She came out in her 2011 biography, I'm Walking as Straight as I Can (Bierly, Mandi. “Facts of Life Star Geri Jewell Comes Out in New Memoir, I'm Walking as Straight as I Can.” Entertainment Weekly: Shelf Life. January 28, 2011). However, she would have presented as heterosexual to an audience watching her on television in 1981.
In this episode, which aired on December 24, 1980, Geri comes to visit her cousin because Geri happens to have an act booked nearby. When she meets Blair's friends, she greets them with a joke that explains her unsteady gait: “Don't worry, I'm not drunk. I have cerebral palsy. When I'm drunk, I walk perfectly straight” (Youtube). When Tootie (Kim Fields) laughs, Natalie (Mindy Cohn) hurriedly shushes her. When Tootie protests that the remark was funny, Natalie asks Geri if it was intended to be. When Geri says it's a joke from her nightclub act, Natalie cues everyone to laugh. The girls are not merely learning to appreciate Geri's comedy. She's helping them to confront what I call crippilification. The attitude norms frequently have toward gimps (or cripples) is illustrated in this experiment that Phillippa Perry recounts in her 2012 article for The Guardian, “The Able-bodied Must Face Their Anxiety About Disability:”

In an experiment in which able-bodied people were asked to sit next to a disabled person, half were first allowed to stare at the disabled person through a two-way mirror and half were not [...] Those who were allowed to stare sat closer than
those who were introduced without first having had that opportunity. (Perry)

Since a gimp's body is a shocking sight in a society where the presence of the norm is expected, norms often visibly fixate on gimps. This isn't solely due to physical appearance. Norms are also encountering what a gimp's body might represent to them. Perry notes that fascination, fear of behaving inappropriately, and anxiety about becoming disabled are possible explanations for why the able-bodied feel uncomfortable around the disabled. When the able-bodied people in the experiment were allowed to literally come face-to-face with these concerns by staring at disabled people, their anxieties were reduced enough that they were willing to sit close to people who had previously frightened them.

Perry lauds this experiment and the opportunity for mutual vulnerability it affords. However, she also clearly indicates who she thinks should be responsible for creating such opportunities; it is not the disabled who are being instructed about what they must do in the article's title. Yet it's important to note the conditions that yield results Perry approves are part of an experiment. In an ideal experiment, a situation is contrived with the consent of all
parties. Norms and gimps in the real world seldom have opportunities to consensually stare at one another, even if doing so might lessen each group's fears about the other. When we can't acknowledge our feelings, "it may be more comfortable for us to [...] patronize than to empathize" (Perry). For norms, this sometimes means they fixate on a gimp's presence and what it might symbolize for her and for them until communication becomes ineffective.

We should remember, however, that the encounter between a gimp and norms we've been examining isn't from the real world. We're at the fictional Eastland School, where Geri Jewell has both the time and the inclination to ease the girls' misgivings. More importantly, Jewell is a stand up comedian, both in the context of the sitcom and in the real world. When Jewell tells the girls she's a comedian who deliberately told a joke that's part of her nightclub act, she isn't just giving them permission to laugh. She's giving them permission to treat her like a performer, someone at whom they may openly stare.

It's important to note that the girls' fascination is tempered by compassion. Tootie and Natalie are kind; as soon as Geri makes them aware of the risk of being immediately labeled as a drunkard because of how she walks, they want to
learn more about cerebral palsy and how it affects her life. It is because Jewell is a performer who has reversed the able/disabled power dynamic of the real world by using the same material she uses onstage that she's able to help the girls overcome their cripplifixation. She answers each of their questions about the nature of cerebral palsy (whether it's painful, whether she can drive, and whether she can make coffee by herself), and she accompanies each answer with a joke.

When the others chastise Tootie for wondering if it's permissible for her to use the word “handicapped,” Geri says, “Questions don't hurt, ignorance does.” If Philippa Perry considers norms primarily responsible for changing social interactions between norms and gimps, it isn't only because the former are privileged in the able/disabled binary. It's also because norms are “ignorant” in two senses. First, they usually lack knowledge of the minutiae of gimps' daily lives. Second, they are foolish for never recognizing that not everyone shares a norm's privileged social status and acknowledging that status carries certain obligations. The girls at Eastland and the live studio audience fulfill both definitions; Jewell's line about ignorance is met with the applause of the newly enlightened.
However, gimp/norm relations become more complicated if a norm has some knowledge of a gimp's life, as Blair makes clear after Mrs. Garrett accuses her of being ashamed of Geri:

> You just don't know what it's like, Mrs. Garrett. Every year for Thanksgiving I make my special dish, and everyone says, “Blair's perfect squash soufflé...again.” Geri pours one glass of wine and doesn't spill it on the tablecloth, and everyone applauds. Geri's out there winning battles, and all I've won are stupid [art] awards (Youtube).

Blair isn't ignorant of Geri's struggles, in either sense of the word. Nor is she fixated on Geri's body because it differs from her own. She doesn't even contest the idea that Geri's body becomes the Body Beautiful when Geri manages to pour a glass of wine without having a spasm. What troubles Blair, who has won a prize for one of her paintings, is that a quotidian action like pouring wine is considered an expression of artfulness deserving of applause. Though her jealousy is perhaps unwarranted, it does lead us to pose a difficult question: If all of Geri's comedy is about her disability, then is her art creating
comedy or teaching norms how to encounter and accept gimps?\textsuperscript{6} There's nothing wrong with either of these vocations. However, as the former, Geri is a comedian who happens to discuss gimpiness. As the latter, Geri is a gimp whose work is defined by her condition. These concerns are never brought up in the episode, because Blair recants her entire outburst and joins Geri onstage for a vaudeville act instead of giving an acceptance speech for her art prize. When she stops the routine to praise Geri in front of the audience of Eastland and the live television audience, she effectively signifies her decision that Geri deserves to be applauded for not spilling wine at Thanksgiving dinners. She's lauding Geri as a human being, not as a comedian.

Just because Blair decides not to analyze Geri's comedy, however, that doesn't mean we shouldn't do so. During the vaudeville act Geri doesn't talk about herself at all, but before Blair joins her she does jokes that are presumably from her nightclub act. Consider this one: “Hey, I'm a good bowler. I've had some high scores. Only problem was it wasn't in my lane” (Youtube). This joke seems self-deprecating at first, as it's about a failed attempt at bowling. Yet that attempt doesn't end in defeat. Geri calls Jewell leans toward the latter in her personal life. According to her website, she also works as a motivational speaker.
herself a good bowler, and she gets a high score. Most importantly, this punchline isn't at her expense; she focuses on the ball going into the wrong lane, not the spasm that caused it to go there. Like Geri's comment to Tootie that her coffee doesn't taste bad because of her cerebral palsy, this joke actually requires an audience to acknowledge her success. She can make coffee and bowl by herself, even though both tasks require refined fine motor skills. If Blair sometimes feels Geri gets attention for "triumphing" despite her disability, it's partially because her comedy is structured to emphasize her achievements. She doesn't talk about her own body in her routine with Blair, because she might compare unfavorably to her conventionally attractive cousin.

Yet Lisa Whelchel's presence isn't all that's stopping Jewell from discussing her own body in a self-deprecating way. In a 2011 stand up routine at the LA Gay and Lesbian Center's Renburg Theatre, Jewell still exempts her body from an audience's scrutiny. Consider this routine:

This has been given so much publicity, that I'm an "out" comedian for the first time. The funniest thing I've seen so far is [someone tweeted], "Oh My God, Geri Jewell is gay? I thought she had
cerebral palsy all this time!” Believe it or not, you can do both. Not only that, you can have cerebral palsy and be Jewish. You can have cerebral palsy and be Catholic, and feel really guilty about it. You can have cerebral palsy and be an alcoholic, and nobody [will] ever know!

(Youtube)

Even while performing under the auspices of the Gay and Lesbian Center, Jewell seeks to normalize her disability as well as her sexuality. She says that disabled and homosexual are both minority groups with which a person can identify. She also says it's possible to be religious and have cerebral palsy. According to a 2007 Pew Research Center survey, only 4% of Americans identify as either atheist or agnostic. By saying someone could have cerebral palsy and be religious, she is linking her disability with a trait that's considered “normal” in American culture. Her joke about feeling guilty for having cerebral palsy is at the expense of Catholics, not gimps. Though Jewell is homosexual, neither religious group she lists is one with which she openly identifies in her stand up. When she draws attention away from the potential link between cerebral palsy and homosexuality, she de-emphasizes her disabled, sexualized
body. She seemingly returns the audience's attention to her physicality with her last line, when she says that a drunkard's cerebral palsy would never be detected. This is the same image she uses in *The Facts of Life*, when Geri wanders into The Eastland School looking for Blair and assures the girls she isn't drunk. However, in this case she isn't talking about herself. She uses the second person pronoun throughout this routine when talking about someone with cerebral palsy, and of course she isn't drunk while performing. More importantly for an examination of the gimp body, she isn't moving. Jewell holds the microphone in her hand, but she doesn't pace the stage. She de-emphasizes the physical effects of her disability by mentioning the way someone with cerebral palsy walks after other, nonphysical traits someone with cerebral palsy might have. Though she laughs when she presents the image of a gimp walking like a drunkard, she doesn't give her audience an opportunity to laugh at her by demonstrating. The joke might work for her routine, but it would harm her argument. She's trying to normalize her body for the audience, and drawing attention to her physical struggles would undermine her efforts.

In Jewell's defense, we admitted at the beginning of the chapter that it's difficult for a gimp woman to be truly
self-deprecating. First, she may not have the physical control necessary to make “demure,” feminine movements, such as casting down her eyes. Second, even if she does, performing her gender role doesn't create the shift in perception Isaac Asimov says is necessary to comedy. By contrast, if a straight white male (gimpy or not) is self-deprecating, he reverses the real world power dynamic, where he would be dominant over any audience member who isn't like him. To see how gimpiness complicates this comedic style, we'll look at a routine by Josh Blue.

“THEY WERE LIKE, 'THAT'S A PRETTY BIG WORD FOR A DRUNK ASS!'”

Though he's an accomplished soccer player, Josh Blue is most famous for remaining standing when he was expected to stumble. In 2006, Blue, who has cerebral palsy, was the winning contestant on the fourth season of NBC’s reality show, *Last Comic Standing*. By the ninth episode of that season, his raucously cheering supporters were holding up signs with TRUE BLUE, JOSH BLUE FOR PREZ, and MY FAVORITE COLOR IS BLUE! written in blue marker. Of course Blue wanted to win the contest, but he had more complex reasons for seeking exposure. He said, “I don't know of any other comics
with disabilities who have really got on national TV and said what they had to say” (Youtube). Blue started defining himself as a disabled comedian, as opposed to a stand up comedian, from the very beginning of his time as a contestant. Here is his stand up routine from the second episode:

Hey, how are you guys doing? All right! You know, people ask me if I get nervous before coming up onstage. I say, “Heck no, I’ve got this many people staring at me all day!” I was walking downtown, and the drunk tank stopped and picked me up. I was like, “Uh-oh!” I was like, “Wait a minute here fellas, there’s a misunderstanding. I’m not drunk, I have cerebral palsy.” They were like, “That’s a pretty big word for a drunk ass!” I was in there for seven days! They were like, “Damn buddy, what did you drink?” I’ve only got three minutes, shut up. To silence this part of my performance, I’d like to inform you you are all going to hell for laughing at me (Youtube).

Like Geri Jewell, Blue draws a comparison between the way someone with cerebral palsy looks while walking unassisted and the way a drunkard looks while walking
unassisted. Unlike Jewell's comparison, which quickly becomes a teaching opportunity for both the girls at Eastland and her live audience at the Renberg Theatre, Blue's encounter is an extended misunderstanding. If Blue hadn't been walking like someone who has cerebral palsy, the police officers wouldn't have assumed he was drunk. If they hadn't assumed he was drunk, they would have paid attention to the phrase, “cerebral palsy,” instead of being surprised he could manage to say it. The veracity of Blue's story isn't important. What matters is that, regardless of how he would behave if this happened in his personal life, while he's performing onstage he both critiques and perpetuates the assumption that his body isn't “normal.” The police officers are the fools here, but it's Blue's complicity in the situation that allows them to be continually lampooned. If he hadn't followed them to jail without resisting arrest, his conversation with them would have been much shorter. However, while Blue-the-civilian tries to reason with the officers because he wants to extricate himself from the situation, Blue-the-comedian has no interest in doing so. He's the victim in the gimp/norm relationship between the officers and himself, but he's the agent in his relationship with the audience. If norm audience members laugh at him,
it's only because he has crafted a scenario that allows them to do it.

This ability is partially a privilege of his race. According to a 2014 study published in *Crime and Delinquency*, 49% of black men have been arrested for non-traffic related crimes by the age of twenty-three. A pastor at the Antioch Baptist Church, the Reverend Dr. Robert Waterman, says the pattern of victimization this statistic indicates permanently affects the futures of young black men, since getting carried to the police station “becomes a custom or a pattern that becomes part of their lives” (“Study: Nearly Half of Black Men Arrested by Age 23”). As a twenty-seven-year-old (in 2006) white man, Blue isn't recounting an incident the audience expects to be a part of his daily life. This makes it more shocking, but it also makes it less threatening than, say, a black man's comedy routine about being pulled over while driving a Lexis.

Blue's skin color isn't the aspect of his appearance that leads to either the officers' scrutiny or his arrest.\(^3\)

Also, Blue repeatedly shows the audience the very movements that cause his troubles are partially under his

\(^3\) As his IMDB page states, Blue was born in Camaroon. Thus, he sometimes refers to himself as “African-American” in his stand up. He isn't, however, acculturated as either an African in America or an African-American would be.
control. The most visibly unruly part of his body is his right arm. It usually swings at his side, his right hand balled into a fist. However, throughout his stand up, Blue demonstrates that he has more control over himself than the audience might initially expect. He swings his arm while he talks about how frequently it disobeys him. He walks back and forth, crossing the stage in long, loping strides to show, not only how long handicapped ramps are, but how long it takes him to use one. He takes mincing steps, flails his arms, and violently juts his head forward while explaining to the audience that, since his first appearance on television, he has often been recognized on the street...and mistaken for Animal from the Muppets. Like most comedians, Blue isn't presenting his body as the Body Beautiful. However, he also isn't presenting it as the gimp body he evokes in his comedy routines. That body is so spastic he appears intoxicated. By contrast, his body, like his audience, is firmly under his control. Further, his audience has to rely on his vocal timing to know how to assess and reassess his physical failures. Returning for a guest performance on the fifth season of Last Comic Standing, Blue laments to the audience, “I did vote Republican...but I didn't mean to” (Youtube). As vocally and physically skilled
as Blue is as a performer, perhaps his greatest gift is his rapport with his audience. Although his norm audience members may not have firsthand knowledge of the scenarios he describes, he doesn't assume they're foolish. He briefly mentions stereotypes about gimps that exist in the real world – that gimps have limited vocabulary, constantly “perform” disability, or deserve the pity of the faithful – and expects his audience to immediately recognize them. Yet he insistently asserts how completely his position as a performer reverses the power dynamic of the able/disabled binary in the real world. He tells the audience to shut up when prolonged laughter keeps him from continuing at his desired pace, and, though he relies on the audience to recognize the stereotype of the gimp as a figure of divine pity, he also condemns the audience to Hell for subverting that stereotype by laughing at him.

If Blue's comedy is more complex than Jewell's, it's partially because he has advantages she doesn't. Since he has more physical dexterity, he can hold a hand microphone and walk, thus becoming more visually compelling to his audience. He doesn't have a lisp, so he can display that his voice is at his command even when other parts of his body are recalcitrant. Most importantly, his gender allows him to
be self-deprecating without appearing demure. By this assessment, his comedy is “riskier” than Jewell's edifying one liners, even if this is partially because his position of relative privilege as a straight white man means he can afford more risks than she. For a moment, though, let's consider a risk Blue doesn't take. When he says he doesn't get stage fright because he has “got this many people staring at [him] all day,” (Youtube) he conflates the live audience with the people who stare at him in daily life. By claiming that his disability is a performance, albeit one he sometimes uses hyperbole to describe, he achieves Jewell's triumph without resorting to her homilies. If this audience is just like the “audience” he faces offstage, then his success as a performer must be indicative of how completely he succeeds in daily life. In this case, the situations he presents aren't just hyperbolic. They are imaginary, insofar as even his physical struggles are really successes he has re-presented for his audience's amusement. After all, he has people staring at him every day, and they're no more disappointed than the live audience that's in his thrall.

While this choice doesn't detract from the effectiveness of Blue's comedy, it does let him elude the quality that makes the line, “A gimp stumbles into a bar” so
uncomfortable. The premise is built on an unstable foundation, and the tension created by that instability is dependent on a frank admission of both a gimp's physical difficulties and our lack of knowledge about whether she will overcome them. If a gimp is stumbling into a bar, it's either because she's already drunk or because she habitually stumbles. To make our scenario more complex, let's say she stumbles even while she's sober. Let's also assume she has no one to steady her. [Set aside the fact that, since bars frequently aren't entirely accessible and don't have accessible bathrooms, it's actually difficult for a gimp to visit a bar alone.] In that case, how should we envision her stumbling into the bar? Is she wearing high heels that make walking more difficult, causing her to periodically be in danger of toppling? Is she unsteady enough that she actually stumbles into the bar, bumping or grazing the building itself? If so, is the building made of material that could bruise or scrape her? We can see how this line of inquiry could become troubling if we continue to pursue it. A sober gimp who stumbles into a bar risks being hurt or humiliated because of a disadvantage that isn't caused by her own choices, and where is the comedy in that scenario? If we're truly going to consider the implications of self-deprecation
as a form of comedy, we need to take a painfully close look at a gimp who fails. Harder still, we have to find a way to laugh at that failure, even if the actions that lead to it aren't entirely under the control of the comedian who's presenting the situation to us. Once we make the gimp body an object of (potential) ridicule, we'll discover whether it's possible for a gimp comedian to be self-deprecating without being demeaned.

However, if we truly want to see the discomfiting spectacle of the inept gimp body, we'll have to leave the bar. After all, anyone who stays in a bar long enough will stumble and perhaps even be unable to leave unassisted. Instead, we'll visit a restaurant, a public place where poise is expected. It's already crueler to laugh at someone stumbling in a restaurant, where sobriety is assumed, than it is to laugh at someone stumbling in a bar. Now we'll imagine that the person who's displaying physical ineptitude is the one person from whom we're most justified in demanding efficiency: our waiter.

“LIKE MOST PERFORMERS, ONE OF MY REALLY BIG DREAMS WAS TO
BECOME A WAITER”
Unlike Geri Jewell and Josh Blue, Greg Walloch's identity as a stand up comedian isn't his primary identity as a performer. He has also been a member of the avant-garde theatre troupe Theatre of Life. His one-man show, *White, Disabled Talent*, first toured in 1999, and it was released as a film, *Fuck the Disabled*, in 2001. Walloch is a storyteller for The Moth podcast, as well as an emcee and storyteller for *Eat Your Words*. His work frequently departs from the setup/punchline format of conventional stand up, since he is as interested in telling a story as he is in telling a joke. Because of this, he has to be subtler about his setup. Let's consider a routine he delivered at Joe's Pub in The Public Theatre in 2007:

I just want to share one more thing with you before I go, because isn't that what life's about, sharing your hopes, your dreams, your love? I have a dream I want to share with you. You see, I came to New York to fulfill my dreams, and, like most performers, one of my really big dreams was to become a waiter. I applied at places all over town. I kept getting turned down. I don't know why. Finally, I got a job at this place downtown— they said they were an equal opportunity employer.

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I wanted to do really well at my new job and really impress people, so I'd walk right up to someone's table and I'd say, “Your dinner's ready. It's in the kitchen. Go get it.” And, you know, this worked pretty well for awhile, but then the public became very demanding and very irritating, and they'd say things like “Hey waiter, can we get some water, maybe some menus over here?” “The water pitcher is right there. You have two good legs. Can't you see I'm crippled?” And although I thought my attitude fit in perfectly with my New York co-workers', I was fired from that job. But I was undaunted, because, you see, I have that undaunting spirit that every single disabled person possesses. Oh sure, I could overcome insurmountable obstacles, run a marathon, or even explain complex theories of quantum physics, but that wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to open my own restaurant in New York City and call it Pour Your Own Fucking Coffee! But it didn't happen, and I had to find a way to go on, like I always do, day by day, fighting the adversities of life, brave and strong. You know, a lot of times
people come up to me and they say, “I think you're so brave!” or “I think you're so courageous, just for being who you are!” But I know they're not saying that because of who I am or what I've accomplished, they're just saying that based on the way I look when they walk by, so I grab them and I turn them around, and I say, “No, I believe every single one of us is disabled....in their own special way.” And you know what? I get a warm feeling inside of my heart when I look out at everyone sitting here tonight, because I know that what I said was true (Youtube).

Walloch mentions a number of roles a person might perform in daily life: the struggling performer, the insouciant waiter, and the resilient gimp. Unlike Blue, whose difficulties come from being placed in a role (drunkard) he strenuously asserts doesn't suit him, Walloch claims to be the perfect man for every role he embodies. If he is a triumphant cripple, it's only because all cripples are triumphant. If he is surly to his customers, it's only because all waiters in New York City are surly. If he wants to be a waiter, it's only because that's what all performers really want to do. Surely this essentializing isn't convincing; yes, many
actors end up waiting tables, but that's not necessarily because they long for service jobs. More importantly for our purposes, Walloch isn't being self-deprecating here. He claims he wants to be impressive at the job of serving customers even though he refuses to do it. When he's finally fired, he finds nobility in accepting that, since serving customers is expected of a waiter, he can't open a restaurant called Pour Your Own Fucking Coffee!

However, what seems like self-importance actually becomes self-deprecation once we consider that Walloch can't be an effective waiter. Though he is a stand up comedian, he doesn't walk unassisted. He uses crutches. Not only would he take longer to bring a pitcher of water than it would take a customer to get it, he wouldn't be able to carry it by himself. By insisting he can be a waiter, Walloch forces the audience to focus on all of the reasons why he couldn't be one, or at least not a waiter with any hope of keeping his job. Despite its absurdity, Walloch's scenario is more believable than the scene in *Storm Reading* wherein Neil Marcus fails to wait tables. None of Walloch's customers learn that a meal they help him to prepare is tastier than a meal he brings on his own. In fact, Walloch is satirizing the food service industry as much as he is
saturizing his place in it. Why would someone ask a waiter for a water pitcher when she can reach it herself? Nonetheless, by announcing this job he can't do successfully is his dream job, Walloch risks the possibility his audience may choose to evaluate other roles his disability keeps him from performing “convincingly.” He's a performer who can't be a waiter, for example, but can he truly consider himself a performer, a paragon of poise, if he stumbles onstage?

Admittedly, one of the benefits of complicating the stand up format is that Walloch can choose to be still or silent without losing the attention of his audience. Once he crosses onstage, he leaves the microphone in its stand, occasionally grabbing the stand while balancing the crutch he's no longer holding against his hip. Most of his expressiveness comes from eye contact and inflection. He takes on the facial expressions and vocal patterns of the characters he introduces, and he uses eye contact to place the person to whom he is speaking for the audience when he recounts conversations. Part of what allows audience members to laugh at the spectacle of Walloch as a waiter, then, is that they don't have to see it. Still, I contend that Walloch is the only one of the gimp comedians we've examined who truly uses self-deprecation as a comedic tool because
his body is his punchline. If Walloch weren't a gimp, his would be the story of yet another frustrated performer who waits tables in a New York City restaurant to afford his rent. His comedy is dependent on his disability without being defined by it. He doesn't draw attention to his appearance or exacerbate his physical struggles. In this case, his humor wouldn't be effective if he did, as he refuses to recognize physical limitations his audience can clearly see will keep him from his dream job.

Walloch acknowledges his condition - he uses the words "disabled" and "crippled" - but he never acknowledges how that condition might keep him from his chosen vocation. He can't give an audience a greater awareness of a problem he refuses to see himself. He does take on the role of a motivational speaker, but only to sardonically refute his previous essentialism. If the people who stop him on the street to laud his courage were more clear-sighted, he asserts, they would realize they appear to be failures as frequently as he does. But Walloch doesn't distance himself from his audience members, even while he criticizes them. For him, the performer-audience relationship isn't didactic. He hasn't come here to teach, but because life is about "sharing your hopes, your dreams, your love" (Youtube). The
discovery of what constitutes a failure or success is not something a gimp has authority to clarify for an unknowing norm. It is a painful, subjective experience that is shared, insofar as every human being has to confront it. Walloch's obliviousness, then, is a tactic to get his audience to acknowledge this at the same moment he does.

Even though Walloch is self-deprecating, he does have a privileged position. Like all of the comedians we've examined here, he can walk. Occupying that position in the disability spectrum is a distinct advantage for a performer. He can take the stage unassisted and, unlike someone in a wheelchair who has to hold or reach a microphone, he doesn't have to challenge an audience's expectations about how often a body moves. Nor does an audience have to change its vantage point in order to see him properly, as would be the case if the person onstage were sitting.

However, it isn't the view afforded by less complex blocking needs that's these performers' greatest advantage. They have all made the choice to be onstage, and the choices made regarding self-presentation are entirely under their control. They have written their routines themselves. Since the presence of an audience is openly acknowledged in stand up comedy, they can frankly stare back at the norms who
stare at them, reversing the able/disabled power dynamic of the real world how and when they desire. The norm audience members, too, have made a choice. They have chosen to sit down in the comedy club, to participate in the performers' routines in whatever ways are required of them.

Of course we have said that an audience member is always permitted to stare at a performer. However, if you are an actor in a theatre, whether you're allowed to acknowledge that depends on what sort of play you're in and what sort of character you're playing. Let's return to the theatre, the place where an audience's awareness of an actor's own physicality isn't as acceptable as it is in stand up. This time, we'll witness a gimp character who uses a wheelchair, in a play with audience interaction. We'll rob her of an advantage all of the stand up performers we've examined have, the physical and cognitive ability to decide to go onstage and return an audience's stares. Even in a play where the characters interact with the audience, she cannot do so. Further, though the norms in the audience have chosen to be in the theatre, the norm characters in the play stay with the gimp character out of obligation. Should the norms be able to change the “script” of their lives, which is centered on the gimp even though she can't contribute to
it? To consider such a complex situation, and how to find humor in it, we'll return to a play we briefly noted in the first chapter, where we agreed it presented a frank admission that sometimes gimps are hard for norms to love: Peter Nichols' *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg.*
In January of 1969, a father wrote the following journal entry about his daughter:

Our oldest daughter has declined a great deal since we last saw her nine months ago. Her legs are withering entirely with lack of use. You can almost circle them at the calf with thumb and middle finger [. I can't say I was overjoyed but certainly felt some cold comfort from knowing she won't have to survive this much longer (Nichols).

The father was playwright Peter Nichols. He was writing about his daughter, Abigail, who died in 1969. Nichols' 1967 play, *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*,\(^3\) is a semi-autobiographical dark comedy about parenting Abigail, who had severe physical and cognitive delays due to cerebral palsy. Nichols' description of his daughter isn't unfeeling; he would have had to touch her to know he could nearly

\(^3\) The play was originally produced at The Roundabout Theatre in 1967, with the title *Joe Egg*. I'll cite it with the title on my 1968 library copy, but I'll refer to it as *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* throughout my dissertation. That's the title it has been given in all subsequent productions, and it's the title the playwright prefers.
encircle her legs with his fingers. If he wants her to die, it's because he thinks someone with such extreme physical weakness and such severe cognitive delays isn't truly living. It's the issue of what kind of life Abigail has and how its continuation affects the parents who care for her that inspires Nichols' play. We have considered the effects of writing a gimp character who confirms stereotypes about disability, but we haven't yet considered one as absolutely helpless as Nichols' fictionalized version of his daughter. Like all breathing creatures she has a life, but how is an audience to regard it?

“SHE'S NOT ALIVE. WHAT CAN SHE DO?”

Married couple Bri and Sheila live in a house “with life burgeoning in every cranny--” (Nichols 61) various plants, stick insects, goldfish, guinea pigs, and cats who have been put outdoors due to a flea infestation (Nichols 15). Most significantly, they are caretakers for their ten-year-old daughter, Josephine (Joe). She is physically normal but for the stiffness of her legs and arms [but] she cannot support herself properly and has to be propped wherever she is put[.] In her [wheel]chair, she sits with the...
upper part of her body forward on the tray in front of her chair as though asleep. Her face is pretty but vacant of expression. (Nichols 16-17)

This stage direction provides instructions for the actor playing Joe about how to position her body, but it also teaches a director how an audience should perceive Joe. The use of the words “pretty” and “normal” indicates the audience members should see her as they would see their norm children...with one key difference. The same stage direction tells us she lacks cognition. Her attractive face is expressionless, and she constantly leans against her wheelchair tray as though she is asleep. We have seen that the wheelchair is an extension of the body, but it would be more accurate to say Joe's body has the same rigidity as the frame of her wheelchair. In fact, the language used to describe her deftly evokes an object onstage. If she is to take a position, she needs to be propped. Of course it's possible she has thoughts to which the audience simply isn't privy, but this is unlikely. She speaks nine times in the first act, but her vocalization is monosyllabic and unrelated to the conversation happening around her. Apart from epileptic seizures, her only onstage actions are to sneeze, have a spasm, bump her nose, and cry in an
involuntary response to pain (Nichols 25) and to turn her head once (Nichols 86).

Sheila looks “at that flawless little body, those gorgeous eyes, and [prays] for some miracle to get her moving” (Nichols 40). For her, Joe's relative physical normalcy is an indication she could show increasing improvement. Joe used to be able to knock down block towers at a year old before she had a series of grand mal seizures that caused a relapse. That shows Joe was delayed for her age even at her fittest; most one-year-olds are capable of more complex physical tasks. Still, after saying she's sure her daughter could knock down block towers again one day, Sheila envisions her skipping rope (Nichols 44-45).

This moment, which occurs at the end of Act One, shows an audience there are two possible ways to see Joe. To Sheila, she's a norm child arrested in infancy, in which case she could one day overcome whatever impedes her development. Joe doesn't just jump rope in Sheila's fantasy. She excels at physical and intellectual multitasking, creating complex patterns with the rope while spelling “difficulty.” Arguably, an audience who has seen Joe as a norm child will never be able to completely disregard

39 We're told Joe has grand mal and petit mal seizures, but we never see the former. This is presumably because a more intense seizure would be too difficult to stage.
Sheila's vision. More importantly, an audience has now been given an irrefutable truth it can't disregard. Joe has to be embodied by a norm actress, which means any gimpiness Joe reveals in the second act is proof of how well the actress who embodies Joe “becomes” her character. Joe can't do anything, but the actress who embodies her chooses to do nothing. Even if an audience empathizes completely with Sheila's belief that her daughter is a Sleeping Beauty who could wake up at any time (Nichols 40), Bri sees someone who's medically classified as a vegetable (Nichols 36).

The audience also sees Joe from Bri's perspective. She's referred to as an object three times in the play. When Bri and Sheila act out the story of Joe's birth and diagnosis for the audience, they represent her with “a tubular cushion the size and shape of a swaddled baby” (Nichols 31). Though it may seem cruel for Joe's parents to treat this object as though it were their daughter, the comparison isn't entirely inaccurate. She's no more responsive than the cushion; indeed, Bri says he “might as well be talking to the wall” (Nichols 25) when he talks to her. Eventually, when she's afraid a frustrated Bri will leave her, Sheila admits Joe is also like the cushion in that she can only move when others move her. Sheila asks for
Bri to carry Joe upstairs, since “she's such a lump” (Nichols 87). If the value of a dramatic life is determined by a character's ability to make decisions and indicate them to an audience, then Joe's dramatic life is worthless. When Sheila's friend, Freddie, strenuously asserts that every life has value, Bri snaps, “She's not alive. What can she do” (Nichols 61)? It's because talking to Joe is like talking to a wall that Bri and Sheila break the fourth wall in the theatre. Even if the audience members don't respond to them verbally, sustained eye contact, shuffling, and laughter create a more complex interaction than any Bri and Sheila will ever have with their daughter.

Since their actions can't give meaning to Joe's life, they give her “roles” that give meaning to theirs. They contextualize the noises she makes based on the personality they have given her in a particular scene (Nichols 43). They give her lines too, even calling themselves Mum and Dad on her behalf since she can't recognize her relationship to them (Nichols 17-19, 21, 25, 55-56). Sheila and Bri have dedicated a night to turning the “play” they're living into an actual stage play with an audience, so we're being asked to evaluate the worth of two types of life, a biological life and a dramatic life.
The diary entry that opens this chapter shows Peter Nichols considers the life of someone as severely disabled as Joe to be of little worth, but most of the characters in the play disagree. When Bri pours Joe's anti-convulsion medication down the sink in order to finally end her life, Sheila and the three guests in the house condemn him for it (Nichols 82-84). How much value any biological life has is a subjective matter, but Joe unquestionably has a biological life. She breathes without a respirator and her heart beats without medical intervention. Yet, if a dramatic life is the only kind that matters in the theatre and Joe's has no worth, then why doesn't the “audience” of four characters onstage empathize with Bri when he tries to kill her?

We've noted that Joe has to be played by a norm actor. Even if that actor holds her head and arms as stiffly as Nichols indicates she should, the audience will be able to see that the rest of her muscles lack the spasticity that is a mark of cerebral palsy. Since she has the control over her tongue and jaw that's essential to an actor's work, the audience will only be told how Joe drools until “her garments, after a few hours on, [are] stiff with saliva” (Nichols 66). If the actor playing Joe has long hair, as she Nichols makes his stance even clearer in his diary entry for July 17, 1969, wherein he laments the defeat of the Euthanasia Bill in the House of Lords.
does in the production we'll examine, then it will swish when she sneezes and has petit mal seizures. Even the most disciplined actor won't be able to keep her expression entirely vacant for two hours without losing an audience's attention. These tiny indications that the actor who plays Joe is only suppressing liveliness Joe supposedly doesn't possess give credence to Sheila's wistful claim that “while there's life, there's hope” (Nichols 45). Even if the scene where Joe jumps rope were cut and a gimp actor were cast, she'd still have to be less severely cognitively and physically disabled than Joe-as-written. Joe should only make noise when the script demands it, and a genuine seizure won't happen on cue.41

The play's title emphasizes the tension between what Sheila sees and what Bri sees that Joe-as-embodied illustrates. Bri's grandmother would say she was “sitting about like Joe Egg when she meant she had nothing to do” (Nichols 51). By using the same phrase to refer to Joe's inactivity (Nichols 21, 43), Bri and Sheila wryly suggest

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41 Even though Nichols has written a part for a norm actor, it's important to him that she represent cerebral palsy accurately. He has supervised rehearsals for three Broadway runs of the play, two runs at the Citizens' Theatre, and a film version in order to coach the actors playing Joe on properly embodying his daughter's seizures (Evans, Lloyd. “Wanted: A Producer for Peter Nichols' Four New Plays.” The Spectator. July 13, 2013.).
that it could be a deliberate choice. Of course Joe has neither the cognitive ability to make choices nor the physical ability to enact them. The actor playing her, however, does. As Joe becomes increasingly helpless, the actor is given an opportunity to show how well she “becomes” her character. Though Joe's decline may be painful for an audience to see, it may also be pleasurable to watch someone convincingly embody hardships that aren't her own. There are two factors, then, that allow an audience to watch Joe suffer. The first is that her suffering is known to be scripted, and thus temporary. The second is that Joe's body is sometimes represented as an object. A person has the necessary self-awareness to respond to her own pain, but a thing does not. Like all of the other gimp characters we've examined, Joe's wheelchair is an extension of her body. Yet the stage direction accompanying Joe's first entrance tells us we should focus our attention, not on the prop that's an extension of Joe's body, but on how she herself is like a prop. Since she can neither make decisions nor enact choices, someone else has to act for her. It is her father, Bri, who makes the decision to end her life and takes the steps to do it.
Unlike the role of Joe, which allows a norm actor to showcase how convincingly she “becomes” a severely disabled young girl, the role of Bri is written to be played by a self-expressive actor. Phenomenologist Bert O. States says that, instead of adhering to the standards of “good” acting by disappearing into a role, a self-expressive actor awakens “our awareness of the artist in the actor [and] reacting to the actor's particular way of doing his role” (States 165). We have seen that a gimp actor is inherently self-expressive, insofar as the presence of her wheelchair always affects her particular way of doing her role. Of course she can reveal the artistry States discusses as well as revealing her disability. However, a norm actor working in the self-expressive mode doesn't have her disadvantages. He adopts the character as a “mask” underneath which his charisma is always visible because he chooses to do so, not because he needs all of his charisma to make the audience accept the presence of the gimp. The role of Bri is self-expressive because the actor uses his own charm to win an audience even while Bri behaves cruelly toward his daughter. We have also seen that stand up comedians are inherently self-expressive, because each one reveals a particular way of telling a joke. Bri is also the comedian of the play, and
Joe is usually the butt of his jokes. Talking of her medical history he tells Joe, “I know you can't resist a doctor” (Nichols 25). Apart from re-imagining her macabre time in a doctor's hands, he's also crediting Joe with an understanding of sex, attraction, and a doctor's social status she clearly doesn't have. In fact, she doesn't have sufficient cognitive ability to like anything. A person has to be able to understand something before she can decide whether or not she likes it. Unlike Neil Marcus in Storm Reading or the gimp stand up comedians who choose to tell self-deprecating jokes, Joe is entirely vulnerable to Bri's humor. She can neither recognize nor respond to it. In order to determine why Bri tells jokes about Joe and why an audience enjoys them, we'll consider a production where the role of Bri was played by someone who “knows how to deal with sensitive issues [in his comedy] without [being] mean-spirited or rude” (“Eddie Izzard---Comic Style”), stand up comedian, Eddie Izzard. Izzard became the first comedian to play Bri in a major production of the play when he replaced Clive Owen at The Roundabout Theatre in 2001. The production moved to Broadway in 2002, and a live performance

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42 The other actors who have played Bri in major productions are Joe Melia in the debut (Citizens' Theatre, 1967), Albert Finney (Brooks Atkinson Theatre, 1968), and Jim Dale (Longacre Theatre, 1985) in the two previous Broadway runs.
was filmed in that year. It's the filmed live version from 2002 we'll be examining. Izzard's training as a stand up comedian gives him a knowledge of how to form a connection with an acknowledged audience while discussing difficult subjects in a humorous way, and he used that while embodying the character of Bri.

"WE COULD BE LAUGHING"

A play that starts with "bird in cage, fish in tank, plants in pots [and] two paintings of cowboys [that] are conspicuous" (Nichols 10) is firmly anchored in realism. However, Bri and Sheila's respective monologues (Nichols 25-27) show they're competing for the audience's willing suspension of disbelief by presenting their feelings about this play as irrefutably "true." The actors who play Sheila and Joe so completely "become" their characters that the audience doesn't doubt them. By contrast, the actor playing Bri is self-expressive, as any comedian would be. He woos the audience by so winningly showing his particular way of doing his role that the audience likes him despite Bri's two attempts to end Joe's life and his eventual desertion of his family. If the audience's laughter in the 2002 filmed, live performance at London's Comedy Theatre is a reliable
indication, Izzard succeeds. Even when Sheila (Victoria Hamilton) is irked by Bri's behavior, the audience adores him. This is partially because, like any skillful self-expressive actor, Izzard allows Bri's depression to be a “mask” underneath which his own personal charisma is constantly visible. After Sheila complains that Bri exaggerated the symptoms of his flu and impetigo to keep her from visiting an infant Joe in the hospital, she starts to say it was painful not breastfeeding. Izzard interrupts this scripted line after the word, “painful” to say of the impetigo, “It was painful.” When Hamilton tries to say her line again, he interrupts her after “breastfeeding,” exclaiming, “Oh, that's you!” When Sheila says her husband tried to urge the milk out by sucking on her nipples, Izzard proudly crosses upstage and bows. The audience loudly applauds, delighted by Izzard-as-Bri, because he's charming even when he's showing Bri's selfishness ("Eddie Izzard in Joe Egg, Act I, Part 5 of 8"). However beleaguered she may be though, Sheila can choose to correct or ignore Bri. His greatest feat isn't getting an audience to accept his teasing the wife he loves. It's getting an audience to accept his mockery of a daughter for whom he “just [goes] through the motions” (Nichols 26) of being a nurturing
father. Even in Act I, Izzard-as-Bri's stage business with the cushion that symbolizes Joe is less reverent than Hamilton-as-Sheila's. While Hamilton cradles the cushion as the mother she's playing would, Izzard shakes it, snaps his fingers in front of it, and balances it on his hand before pronouncing the baby he's supposed to be testing "very flexible" ("Eddie Izzard in Joe Egg, Act I, Part 6 of 8"). He doesn't lose the audience when he's careless with an object that represents Joe but, more importantly, he also doesn't lose it when he treats Joe (Elizabeth Holmes-Gwillim) like an object. He makes the sound of an engine revving when he adjusts Joe's head as well as when he pushes her wheelchair ("Eddie Izzard in Joe Egg, Act I, Part 2 of 8"). This unscripted choice is an indication that Izzard-as-Bri sees Joe as an inert object instead of as his human daughter, and the audience finds it funny.

To be fair, the word "funny" is used as a synonym for "unsettling" three times in the script; when she suspects Bri has purposely poured out Joe's anti-convulsion medicine instead of spilling it as he claims, she rhetorically asks Joe, "What's funny daddy been up to" (Nichols 70)? Certainly a man trying to kill his daughter is unsettling, and an audience that unexpectedly finds humor in something
disturbing is experiencing the alteration in its point of view Isaac Asimov says is essential to comedy. Any gimp joke requires a norm audience to alter its perspective and temporarily see the world as the gimp does. A joke told at a gimp's expense is more complex, because it requires the audience to acknowledge both a gimp's perspective and how norms perceive gimps. When Izzard-as-Bri doubles up and squeezes the tubular cushion to illustrate a joke about how he smothered Joe with a pillow while his wife was away ("Eddie Izzard in Joe Egg, Act II, Part 3 of 8"), his unscripted action is funny because he's treating the cushion as though it were a person. It's also unsettling, because he's reminding the audience that, though Joe is not dissimilar to a prop, she's also a person whose life can be ended. If Izzard-as-Bri is able to tell uncomfortable gimp jokes, it's because he has taken the "self" out of self-deprecating. He isn't the subject of the joke, but its subject doesn't have the necessary self-awareness to be hurt. Therefore, an audience can't sympathize with her.

Admittedly, joking about ending his daughter's life, is very different from actually trying to end it. As Bri and Sheila's earnest friend, Freddie, points out, "the whole fallacy of the sick joke [is] it kills the pain but leaves
the situation just as it was” (Nichols 56). If Freddie is right, then the success of Bri's jokes is only partially dependent upon the skill of the self-expressive actor who plays Bri. An audience member who sympathizes with his jokes about Joe has done nothing more than show herself capable of an ideological shift. A joke lets the listener gaze at a road less traveled by without actually taking it. Yet Bri does actually try to kill Joe, denying her her anti-convulsion medicine, then leaving her on the backseat of his car on a snowy winter evening (Nichols 69, 82). To him, she's like the fleas on the family cats, a creature incapable of complex thought who drains his marriage to survive just as fleas drain cats of blood. Even if audience members don't entirely agree with his assessment, they have to watch him stop leaving the situation just as it is and enact his joke instead.

Of course it's not unthinkable to ask an audience to watch a father murder his physically disabled daughter. In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1594), the protagonist and title character murders his daughter Lavinia, whose rapists cut off her hands and tongue to ensure their anonymity (Shakespeare 862). Titus' successful murder has some similarities to Bri's attempted one. It happens when
guests are at a banquet in his home and thus able to witness his brutality. More importantly, both the guests and the audience are meant to regard Lavinia as an object; she comes to the banquet veiled, and she's still veiled when Titus stabs her (Shakespeare 879). Yet, even in her present state, Lavinia isn't as helpless as Joe. She holds her uncle's staff in her mouth and balances it between her stumps to write the names of her rapists in the dirt (Shakespeare 868), and she catches their blood in a bowl when her father slits their throats (Shakespeare 878). Lavinia's tragedy isn't that she's now entirely helpless. It's that her former beauty and social status have been compromised, as her uncle, Marcus Andronicus, points out when he says no one who had seen her play the lute and sing could bear to cut off her hands and tongue (Shakespeare 863). However, he says her assailants' greatest blow isn't to her physical body, but to her reputation. Their greatest crime is taking “that more dear/Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity” (Shakespeare 878). As a widowed, disfigured rape victim, she has lost both physical and social mobility. Titus can restore neither to her, so he absolves her of her need for both. In one way, his actions are crueler than Bri's. Lavinia can communicate and perform physical tasks, though
not in the same way she did when her body was intact. It's possible, though, that Lavinia nonverbally consented to Titus' decision before the banquet, as he says he can read her facial expressions (Shakespeare 865, 868). In this case, his murder could more accurately be called an assisted suicide, since Lavinia can't hold a sword. No such excuse can be made for Bri, since Joe doesn't have sufficient self-awareness to know whether or not she wants to live.

Admittedly, an audience may forgive Titus partially out of pity for innocent, wronged Lavinia, and the audience is told to regard that as an indication of how to judge her father's actions. As her captives are dragging her away, she begs them to kill her rather than imperil her virtue. When they refuse, she cries, "Oh be to me, though thy hard heart say no/Nothing so kind, but something pitiful" (Shakespeare 860). She declares herself deserving of pity before her rapists violate and mutilate her, and she begs to be killed rather than be so demeaned. In that case, we should laud Titus for showing the mercy her assailants denied her.

Perhaps we can forgive Bri and Titus, albeit for different reasons. Titus murders his daughter to end her physical misery and restore her honor. Bri attempts to murder his daughter to end a life that could never really
begin. However, we shouldn't forget that each man also acts for his own benefit. Titus says he's sparing himself the pain of continuously beholding Lavinia (Shakespeare 879). Bri is trying to regain Sheila's emotional support and sexual attention by disallowing her to fixate on Joe (Nichols 26). Sympathizing with the selfishness of these men is arguably more difficult than sympathizing with their sorrow. If Titus makes this possible for us, it's only because he, like Lavinia, has endured much physical and emotional pain; three of his sons are lost to him, two of whom he hoped to spare from execution when he cut off his own hand and sent it to the emperor as a tribute (Shakespeare 865). He acts as brutally as any tragic hero, but he also deserves as much pity. Unlike Shakespeare, however, Peter Nichols hasn't written a tragedy. He has written a dark comedy, which means an audience must be able to laugh at Bri even while it pities him. If some audience members at the Comedy Theatre are able to do this, as their laughter indicates, it's due to three factors.

First, since the role of Joe isn't self-expressive, an audience's opinion of the girl's helplessness is influenced by how completely Elizabeth Holmes-Gwillim-as-Joe “becomes” her character. In the second act, Sheila brings Joe
downstairs so Freddie and Pam can meet her. When she starts to have a petit mal seizure, Sheila lays her on the couch. While Holmes-Gwillim only moved her head and arms during the seizure in the first act, because Joe's body was braced by her wheelchair, she lets her whole body tremble while she's on the couch, violently shaking her head, legs, and arms, and making a loud sucking noise with her lips and tongue ("Eddie Izzard in Joe Egg, Act II, Part 4 of 8"). Without saying a word, she proves to the audience Izzard-as-Bri's assertion that his daughter's life is nothing more than "asphyxiation delayed ten years by drugs" (Nichols 61). Neither Sheila's care nor the physical therapist's exercises truly benefit her; she lives only because the anti-convulsion medicine reduces the number of seizures she has, and the support of the frame of her wheelchair impacts how her body is affected. If Bri isn't quite accurate in treating her like an object, neither is Sheila quite accurate in treating her as though she's a norm infant.

Second, Bri's attempt to kill Joe by leaving her in the cold contains both tenderness and farcical elements. While checking how much she has been weakened by her seizures he listens to her heart and checks her pulse as any concerned father would, but when he realizes she probably won't die
before Freddie and his wife, Pam, return with a new bottle of medicine, Bri throws Joe over his shoulder and carries her out to his car (Nichols 78). The choice to carry her over his shoulder, as opposed to using a gentleman's carry, reinforces for the audience that Joe is once again being equated with a prop; Bri is carrying her in the same way he would carry a sack. However, Bri also emphasizes Joe's helplessness when he carries her this way. If she doesn't need to be held against him as firmly as a gentleman's carry would require, it's because she has neither the physical strength nor the self-awareness to resist him. Treating Joe this way may make him seem cruel to some audience members, but the stark visual answers the question he asked Freddie earlier.

Joe really does nothing, and some audience members may sympathize with his viewpoint when they're presented with proof. Previously, Bri has used comedy to win the audience, and he does so even in this harrowing scene. If Joe is like an object, his handling of her belongs in a farce. In order to keep his mother and Sheila from realizing where he has taken Joe, he carries her out the kitchen door to avoid Sheila at the front door, crosses behind Sheila to sneak Joe from the back door to the front door, comes back through the
front door without Joe to offer to take his mother home, leaves to avoid Sheila as she comes through the garden, then carries Joe through the front door when he thinks she's finally dying (Nichols 78-83). If Bri were keeping an object from Sheila, the audience would likely laugh loudly as he ran through and slammed shut various doors. However inert she may be though, Joe is a dying child. Many audience members at the Comedy Theatre production titter nervously, but no one genuinely laughs. At the moment when Bri most needs understanding, the audience might agree with Sheila who “[wishes] he'd talk more seriously about Joe” (Nichols 45).

Yet even though he jokes Joe may die of a blight because she's a vegetable, he takes her seriously enough to steadfastly change her diapers and bathe her (Nichols 21, 25) when he doesn't share Sheila's opinion she'll improve. Presumably the audience takes her seriously too; reviewer Mark Shenton says the play “doesn't flinch from the uncomfortable facts of the situation [while] bringing

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Eddie Izzard-as-Bri isn't only self-expressive in that he shows his own particular way of doing his role. He also shows his own particular way of doing comedy. In the play Bri, playing a German (or Viennese) doctor who examined Joe, says she could die of “Colorado beetle” (Nichols 37). Izzard changes the line to “green fly,” and he says it in German before he says it in English. He's showcasing two hallmarks of his own stand up comedy, improvisation and his mastery of languages other than English.
wheelchairbound involuntary fits and spasms to reality” (Shenton). What Bri asks the audience to do is be complicit with him in refusing to treat Joe solemnly. John Cleese, former member of the British sketch comedy troupe Monty Python, says there's a difference between solemnity and seriousness. Cleese:

Now I suggest to you that a group of us could be sitting around after dinner discussing matters that were extremely serious, like the education of our children, or our marriages, or the meaning of life [,] and we could be laughing, and that would not make what we were discussing one bit less serious[.] But solemnity serves pomposity (Williams, Rollie).

Perhaps the characters onstage and the audience members who counter Bri's frustration with assertions of the inherent worth of Joe's life shouldn't be called pompous. However, there is an arrogance in presuming to know what Bri's relationship with Joe is like and how he should feel about it. Whether or not an audience member agrees with his (and Nichols') opinion about how much the life of someone as disabled as Joe is worth, we shouldn't dismiss his effort to use comedy to provide the alteration in point of view Isaac
Asimov says jokes make possible. It's because Bri and Sheila's dilemma is so serious that we should laugh at it. They deserve more than our self-assured solemnity.

Nichols' feat is that he creates a world wherein it's impossible to reconcile the difference between seriousness and solemnity. An audience member who, like Sheila, sees Joe as a child who may one day skip rope takes Joe too seriously to sympathize with Bri. It is that audience member whose viewpoint triumphs. Bri presents an alternative possibility, but the audience isn't made complicit in it. Bri exits while Joe is left onstage (Nichols 87). In the end, then, the audience isn't expected to treat Joe with solemnity. Trembling and bathed in light, she is more pitiable than laughable. Yet the audience does laugh at her, albeit not at the final curtain. What allows an audience to laugh at her? The most obvious answer is that, though audience members' pity for Joe may be limitless, her need for it isn't. Though the lights fade on Joe sitting in her wheelchair unattended, the lights rise again on Elizabeth Holmes-Gwillim-as-Joe clasping her co-stars' hands and bowing (“Eddie Izzard in Joe Egg, Act II, Part 8 of 8”). With this simple act, she shows she has agency and physical dexterity Joe lacks, and she doesn't need an audience's pity. She has intentionally
made herself a suitable butt of Eddie Izzard-as-Bri's jokes by embodying Joe's helplessness convincingly. An audience can laugh at Joe only because Joe-as-written doesn't really exist. Further, the audience is allowed to admit it wouldn't wait to face a truth as unwelcome as Joe's existence. When Freddie's squeamish wife, Pam, says she "can't stand anything Non-Physically Attractive" (Nichols 62), and the audience isn't expected to do so. Sheila and Bri each present the audience with a possibility for how to see Joe. Sheila sees an infant. Bri sees an object. To laugh at Bri is to see Joe as a thing, which becomes even easier to do when she's actually replaced with an object. Elizabeth Holmes-Gwillim-as-Joe is an actor who's revealed as a norm actor while onstage. Joe-as-written is treated like either a baby or a prop. No audience member is unrelentingly presented with the sight of a severely disabled child. Bri makes jokes about Joe because she can't understand them, but an audience laughs because the actor embodying her can. Nichols' are the most daring gimp jokes we've examined so far, but they work both because a gimp isn't telling them about herself and because the person who's the butt of these jokes isn't actually gimpy. If she were, then an audience enjoying the joke would have to acknowledge the possibility
that a joke told at her expense was “true.” In the play, Bri's treatment of Joe fits John Cleese's definition of seriousness while Joe's predicament is solemn. However, a gimp actor who's the butt of a gimp joke has to be simultaneously serious and solemn. She has to acknowledge an audience shouldn't be laughing at her while asking it to do so anyway.

CECI N'EST PAS UNE PIPE [THIS IS NOT A PIPE]

There are two structural elements of Bri's jokes that allow an audience to potentially laugh at them, apart from Joe being embodied by a norm actor. First, Sheila only makes gimp jokes when she wants to placate Bri or Freddie, and she doesn't mean for them to be taken seriously (Nichols 18, 58, 87). By contrast, Bri uses gimp jokes to express genuine frustration that “he's left holding the baby” (Nichols 48) who will perpetually demand as much of his wife's attention as an actual infant would. His resentment would seem entirely selfish if directed at a newborn. His jokes, which point out Joe's unending dependency, are attempts to alter an audience's point of view about how long a parent should nurture a baby who doesn't mature. Second, Bri tells his jokes knowing Joe will neither understand them nor react to
them. An audience may pity Joe, but she never expresses emotion on her own behalf. It's Bri, not Joe, who acts like a character in a dark comedy. In his monologue, he expresses anguish about how he's viewed by others even while he mocks himself (Nichols 25-26).

A gimp actor could use comedy in the same way and, like the actor playing Bri, she would be working in the self-expressive mode. Unlike him, she wouldn't only be showing her own particular way of doing her role. She'd also be showing her own particular way of living her life. The jokes Bri makes about Joe are neither true of the actor who plays her nor acknowledged by the character. Jokes a gimp actor made or allowed to be made at her own expense would have to be both. If an uncomfortable audience decided it was “too good” to laugh at them, then she'd be confronting the pomposity that John Cleese says undermines comedy. If she embodies the joke as completely as she can, she'll earn pity instead of laughter. If she refutes her own joke, she won't be funny. To express what's true about her body without making her audience think the joke is entirely true, she needs to embrace the “irrational juxtaposition of realistic images” (OED Online) that's a hallmark of surrealism. For now, we'll leave our comedic, gimp actor on a darkened
stage. We'll return to her (and her wheelchair), but first let's consider another object that expresses her dilemma.

Surrealist painter René Magritte's 1928 work, *La Trahison des Images* (*The Treachery of Images*) features a brown tobacco pipe. Beneath it is the sentence, *Ceci ne pas une pipe* (This is not a pipe). Magritte's claim is both true and untrue. His pipe isn't a pipe from the real world; he can't pack it, smell the tobacco burning once it's lit, or smoke it. Yet he's not representing an image of something else. If we were to compare his painting to, say, da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, we'd say of the former, “That's a pipe,” and of the latter, “That's a woman.” If we're comparing paintings, it's unnecessary to note that any painting is only a representation of the being or object it depicts. But when Magritte writes, “This is not a pipe,” he isn't comparing it to other pipes in other paintings. He's bringing a viewer's attention to the idea that his representation of a pipe evokes both a pipe in the real world and the word “pipe” without quite becoming either. In his article, “Foucault and Magritte” (1982), Guido Almansi argues that the only way to enjoy the painting is by allowing all of Magritte's “truths” to be in conflict.
Aggressivity is required when looking at Magritte's paintings. We must above all refuse collaboration. If we accept the rules of the game, we disappoint him; but by refusing them, we can create a state of wholesome disagreement (306).

To put Almansi's advice in theatrical terms, we can only appreciate this painting if we refuse to entirely suspend our disbelief. We shouldn't accept anything Magritte writes or represents as entirely true. Almansi says a viewer will have to be intellectually and perhaps emotionally aggressive to be successful at this, refusing to either agree with Magritte or become too attached to the possible “truths” he asserts. This is a valid response, but let's consider another: What if a viewer sees Magritte's painting and laughs? In that case, her laughter is the kind that, at least according to Michel Foucault, is an essential part of the questioning of any “truth.” Foucault: “It is opposing [an accepted truth] with a sort of uncomprehending burst of laughter which, in the end understands, or, in any case, shatters” (Foucault 312).

If Foucault posits laughter is as valid a method of investigation as the aggressive intellectualism Almansi advocates, it's because he doesn't believe contradictory
“truths” have to be sorted out. A gimp actor who embodies the “truth” of a self-deprecating gimp joke is sitting in the abyss Foucault says a shattering laugh creates, in three senses. First, unlike a stand up comedian, she allows the joke to shatter (hurt) her by showing her emotional reaction to it. Second, she shatters the audience's belief that she's too pitiable a figure to be laughed at. Third, her audience's laughter shatters “truths” about both whom she is and whom she pretends to be. This isn't a willing suspension of disbelief so much as a refutation of the idea that it's necessary to believe a truth in order for it to be pleasurable. To discover the pleasure of shattering laughter, we'll have to create a joke that could elicit it.

Imagine a gimp and a norm are on a date. She and he are very attracted to each other. The norm is so attracted to the gimp, in fact, that his erection presses against her as he's helping her transfer from her wheelchair into a restaurant chair. When she notices the bulge in his pants, she smiles at him and says, “Don't worry, I can't feel a thing.”

Erections are involuntary physical responses that are frequently evoked in comedy. While they are certainly embarrassing onstage and in the real world, they aren't
regarded as a hardship a man has to either endure or overcome. Further, an erection, unlike other involuntary physical responses, can only be evoked onstage. An actor may be able to cough on cue, but he won't be able to become genuinely aroused. Therefore, an audience who laughs at the norm's expense will be laughing at a situation that definitely isn't true in this particular moment, though it could occur in the real world. A laugh that reaffirms a certainty about the world instead of creating doubt isn't a shattering laugh. However, though the joke is enriched by the norm's embarrassment, it isn't his physical difficulty that provides us with our punchline. The joke is actually at the expense of the paraplegic gimp who can't feel the erection pressed against her. We have the alteration in point of view that Isaac Asimov says is necessary to comedy. We don't learn that the gimp is paraplegic until we reach the punchline and, in comedy at least, feeling an erection is usually privileged over seeing one. However, we've done more than alter an audience's point of view by presenting this situation from a paraplegic's perspective. We've also shattered some truths about that perspective. It's the norm, not the gimp, whose physical difficulty is presented as pitiable. Yet, though the gimp is the agent in the situation
and she smiles while delivering the punchline, the joke is
definitely at her expense. It's her inability to feel that
complicates the joke, taking it out of the realm of a sex
farce. Most importantly, neither the norm's discomfort nor
the discomfort the gimp potentially causes the audience is
eased by a re-presentation of either person's struggle.
Neither arousal nor paraplegia becomes something someone
should be lauded for triumphing over.

Though it may be simpler to replace accepted "truths"
that have been shattered with new, more affirming ones, it
isn't necessary. In fact, for Foucault at least, it's
undesirable. He says a laugh can shatter a "truth" without
signaling a perfect understanding of it. Why are we so
anxious for the dramatic worlds that are represented to us,
and our understanding of them, to be perfect? Why not
welcome the complications created by a wheelchair that's
unlike other onstage objects, an actor who is never whom she
pretends to be, or a laugh that shatters our "truths" about
the real world and the onstage world? Perhaps we're too
harsh in posing these questions, insofar as there may be
many people who would like to do these things, but are
convinced they shouldn't. After all, there are both gimps
and norms we've cited who believe every pipe that's
represented as a pipe should be unquestioningly regarded as one and all pipes are equal, even though some may be more bent than others. Even if we agree that's a very respectful way to view gimp/norm relations, it isn't very enjoyable. These people are confusing what John Cleese calls seriousness with what he calls solemnity, and they are using their solemnity as proof of the superiority of their perspective. However, we've seen that even the most serious “truths” can be questioned, shattered, and laughed at. A gimp actor's power comes, not from entrenching her wheels in solid ground, but from admitting she's wheeling along a fault line. A laughter that shatters creates the kind of fissure that helps her work successfully, without providing homilies that deny her audience the chance to share the struggle of reshaping the ground both she and it are on. Treading ground that isn't meant for her can be difficult, but it also allows her to survey lands others have ignored. Black, dyslexic, gay performer Danitra Vance says, while oppression is never justified, having one's experiences ignored sometimes forces her to be more mindful of others:

To me, the bottom is the most powerful position to be in because you can see the sun. If everybody else is so busy looking down on you, they're
missing out on what's going on in the rest of the world, while we're looking up and seeing everything there is to see...My comedy comes out of looking up from the bottom. (Bonney 189)

As Benjamin did his Angel of History, we've spent all our time piling debris at our gimp actor's feet: the dearth of roles for gimp actors and the specific challenges that come with comedic roles, the wheelchair that's an extension of her body, and the public perceptions that accompany her wheelchair and her onstage. If we acknowledge that a gimp actor is frequently wheeling over untrodden ground, we should also acknowledge that the particular hardships we've described are piles of debris that tower far over a sitting gimp's head. It's tempting for her, and for us, to cast our eyes down in defeat. We have another option. We can look up over the top of the tallest pile, knowing we can't scale it without getting dirty, and start climbing anyway.
Epilogue: Hurricanes of Yes

In the previous chapters, we've discovered what a gimp actor needs to do if she is to get roles and have a chance at being considered a “good” actor. First, she has to recognize her wheelchair is a unique object that always remains itself while onstage, and as an extension of her body it imparts the same quality to her. Thus, there are many negative traits associated with disability in the real world for which accompany her wheelchair and her onstage. This means she can never convincingly “become” a character, but she can transform that perceived weakness into a strength by working in the self-expressive mode and being so captivating while failing to do the impossible that no audience minds. Admittedly, a norm actor playing a gimp will always have an advantage over a gimp actor, no matter how skilled she is or what techniques she uses. Norm actors playing gimps can choose how “gimpy” they want to appear. In Purdue University's Disability Research Center website, it says disabled people moving through the world face two types of obstacles, physical and social. The second is an
attitudinal barrier in able-bodied culture that prevents a disabled person from fully participating in society. The barrier is made more complex and more pernicious because it exists due to the fear that a disabled person may need some sort of assistance in her daily life (Disability Resource Center).

We can easily see how the idea of a person who needs assistance with supposedly “simple” tasks such as carrying groceries and finding transportation would be unsettling in a capitalist society. Who is responsible for making sure a gimp can live her life successfully? Should norms stand for her by lowering curbs, for example, or should she stand alone, finding a way to navigate high curbs without requesting assistance? The truth, of course, is neither answer is entirely viable. While we should acknowledge few places are completely gimp-friendly, we also shouldn't blame a gimp for regularly needing accommodation. Of course, we haven't been concerning ourselves with the real world, but stages are inaccessible to gimps due to more than a dearth of roles for disabled actors. A theatre's ADA clearance is determined by how accessible the building is to audience members, not how accessible its stage is to a gimp actor. Raked stages are perilous for wheelchair, which forces a
gimp actor to limit her movements. It's rare that any kind of stage has ramps, which makes entrances, exists, and audience address difficult for gimp actors. If we haven't focused on such practical barriers here, it's only because we have concerned ourselves with the craft of making theatre rather than the theatre itself. After all, a gimp actor who struggles to ascend a steep ramp while playing a character who's expected to be lithe has been partially accommodated, but she still won't be considered a "good" actor.

My hope is we have found potential solutions to the particular conundrums that face a gimp onstage, as opposed to in the real world. We've admitted stages are frequently inaccessible, but the art of acting has an important benefit the art of living doesn't. It is openly acknowledged that, while rugged individualism is frequently lauded in American society, theatre is supposed to be a collaborative art. As Todd London puts it in his 2001 essay, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Good," "while as humans we bring critical capability our basic human responses to [art] include a complex mixture of emotion and intellect" (London). In other words, the theatre isn't simply a place where actors (and the characters they play) make choices. It's one of the few places where actors and audiences have the opportunity to
express what they think of those choices and how they make them feel.

This work should serve as a catalogue of the choices a gimp actor has to consider once she's onstage, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of different types of choices. Hopefully this will assist gimp actors in the broad study of their craft and the more specific challenges of playing the particular roles profiled here. For directors, designers, and dramaturges, this is a study of how the presence of the gimp affects a play's dramatic structure. While it's often helpful for gimp actors to do their own dramaturgy due to their unique understanding of the presence of the gimp, the success of a production is impacted by how well the cast and crew understands how a play is affected by an actor in a wheelchair, or a wheelchair the actor using it doesn't need in the real world. For academics and audiences, this serves as a chance to decide how gimp actors should be evaluated.

Of course it's possible a gimp actor could take the stage easily and effectively. As Philippa Perry points out when she recounts the experiment where norms are allowed to stare at gimps before sitting next to them, norms don't wish to encounter gimps because gimps represent all that our
society considers “ugly,” lack of physical grace and the possibility of dependency (Perry). A norm director or audience member who feels this way cannot avoid an encounter as someone in the real world might. It's less acceptable to exit a theatre or a rehearsal room than it is to exit a café.

However, while Perry is certainly pointing out a prejudice that exists, it would be unfair to claim that all norms who fear gimps do so for the same reason. I contend the norm theatre practitioner’s fear of a gimp actor is due to her position, or rather the position in which she places him. If a gimp and her wheelchair are onstage, bringing with them all the difficulties we've discussed, we're suddenly placed in a position where we may not know what to do. This is an unexpected and significant disadvantage in a world where every action is scripted and every outcome is certain. This affects both rehearsal and performance. In rehearsal, an action that wouldn't merit special attention if a role were being played by a norm actor, such as a stage kiss, suddenly becomes more complex to stage. If there's a gimp/norm couple onstage, how should the height difference be handled? If the gimp's lover kisses her on the head as well as the mouth, will his gesture seem too paternal due to
the infantilization of gimps? In performance, we have to consider how the audience will react if the presence of a gimp complicates its reading of the character she plays. Such concerns can be overwhelming, and it's even more overwhelming for the cast, the crew, and the audience when a solution doesn't work.

In 2013, my friends Cat and Ken took me to a local production of Jeffrey Hatcher's *Scotland Yard* for my birthday. The play features a character in a manual wheelchair, Frances Kittle, a woman who's the last living survivor of the sinking of the Titanic. As she's wealthy, she has a hired attendant who pushes her (Hatcher 30).

In this production, the role of the attendant was struck, and the actor was put in a motorized scooter. This was a practical choice; the stage entrance wasn't wide enough for a manual wheelchair. However, changing the type of wheelchair the character used also changed a key moment in the play. In the script, Frances is trapped in a room with three people whom she perceives as a threat to her. Her attendant is on the other side of the door, and she can't wheel herself. As the others in the room surround her, she becomes so anxious she dies of a heart attack (Hatcher 39).
In this production, the actor (who was actually a norm) was in a motorized scooter. She was able to move of her own volition, or at least she should have been. Since the character needed to remain trapped in the room, the actor decided Frances should develop a sudden, violent hand tremor that would keep her from moving her wheelchair for the only time in the play.

While the actor's attempt to solve a problem with the staging in the script is admirable, someone who has tremors experiences them unexpectedly and intermittently. Her ability to decide when to have a tremor only emphasizes for the audience that she doesn't actually have them. However, the audience received a more emphatic hint that she was a norm when she stood and bowed for curtain call. It was then that my friend and frequent collaborator, Cat, who's well aware of my concern about the presence of the gimp – and especially this gimp – turned to me and whispered, "Well, you're right."

I realize now she was probably referring to my having spent so much time analyzing so many of the elements we were watching: a norm cast as a gimp character, a staging solution for a gimp character that didn't serve the complexities of the script, a wheelchair that hadn't had its
unique place even among mobility devices considered thoroughly.

Perhaps I was particularly vulnerable because the Artistic Director had told me to bring my quad canes to the show, because there was no space for my wheelchair. Perhaps I was distraught about turning thirty without knowing when I'd act again. For whatever reason, I assumed she meant the feelings that frequently arose as a consequence of my research were right, the fears that my presence onstage was always incongruous and frequently unwelcome. “I don't want to be right!” I said. “I just want roles.”

She looked at me for a moment. “We've taken you to a bad play, and no one should go to a bad play on her birthday. We're buying you a drink.”

It was remarkable that I woke up without a hangover after drinking an Irish car bomb, but perhaps it was more remarkable that I woke up with a solution to the structural problems I had seen in the play. I didn't tell the director, because my feedback would have come too late to be helpful. What was important was my ability to find a solution, an ability I had almost squandered because of my despair over “truths” about the dramatic representation of gimps which, however disheartening, I've learned to expect.
Yet expecting them is different from internalizing the idea that they are inevitable. San Francisco Chronicle columnist Mark Morford promises, “Hurricanes of Yes are never blocked by the flimsy screen doors of But Why” (Contents Under Pressure). We have spent much time trying to figure out why gimp actors face particular challenges in finding roles and being given credit for performing well. In the end, though, this information will only help us change the onstage world if, instead of being hopeless or self-righteous about these problems, we confront them by creating Hurricanes of Yes so exhilarating that everyone wants to be swept up in them. Remember, the wind is always blowing.


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