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Shakespearean Echolalia: Autism and Versification in *King John*

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ABSTRACT

In *King John* 3.1, Bastard speaks with a repetition I claim as autistic, specifically echolalia. Echolalia is an autistic speech pattern involving repetition of words and phrases; it is not unique to autism. Attention to versification in 3.1 reveals the ways in which echolalia challenges ableist norms of meaning and suggests fruitful cripped ways of understanding temporality and intentionality in Shakespearean verse speaking. This article analyses Shakespeare's versification to unlock 3.1's autistic potential, thereby opening space for future neurodiverse readers and performers to engage with Shakespearean echolalia.

KEYWORDS

King John; neurodiversity; autism; disability; versification

This essay focuses on the autistic potential of Bastard's versification in *King John* 3.1 as he repeats Queen Constance's words. Constance berates Austria for supporting a French-English pact, objecting to the lionskin Austria wears to commemorate conquering Bastard's biological father Richard I (The Lionheart):

Constance:	[To Austria] … Thou weare a Lyons hide, doff it for shame,
	And hang a Calues skin on those recreant limbes.
Austria:	O that a man should speake those words to me.
Bastard:	And hang a Calues-skin on those recreant limbs. (a5r)[1]

While Constance, Philip, Pandulph, and John make long speeches throughout 3.1, and though Bastard capped 2.1 with a long monologue on 'commodity', in 3.1 almost all Bastard says involves repeating, 'And hang a Calues-skin on those recreant limbs', plus a few variations on this line. I explore these repetitions as

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[1]There is potential ambiguity in F1, *King John*'s first appearance, regarding whether France delivers the first few 'Calues-skin' lines because these lines have the speech-prefix 'Philip', first name of both Bastard and France. I follow most editors, from Boswell to Cambridge Shakespeare, in attributing all 'Calues-skin' lines after Constance's to Bastard.

opportunities to conserve and revel in the linguistic temporalities of autism, which challenge the priorities of normative ableist culture.

In 3.1, rival rulers Constance and John claim power over France, variously supported and challenged by Austria, Elinor (John's mother), and Philip of France. The rulers raise, then dash, the prospect of peaceful union attained by marrying Lewis the Dolphin to John's niece Blanche of Spain. Amid these complex negotiations, John attempts to stop Bastard from repeating the 'Calues-skin' line, but Bastard perseveres (or, more autistically speaking, perseverates).[2] While Beatrice Groves reads the 'Calues-skin' lines as purely and intensely 'comic' (286), Robert Maslen appreciates the ways in which Bastard's repetition challenges Austria's (and John's) rhetorical and political hegemony; unable to 'shut [Bastard] up' Austria's 'threats are exposed as mere posturing, formulaic verbal gestures, by his abject failure to put them into practice' (254). Donald Watson concurs, arguing that 'Austria has been a joke all along, a blustering braggart' and, as other characters reveal their flaws, Bastard becomes contrastingly 'by simple elimination … the only sympathetic character left' (140, 143). I read Bastard's repetition as echolalia – an autistic manner of versifying – thereby illuminating the ways in which these repetitions challenge ableist norms of political and rhetorical meaning-making and enable us to read and enjoy Shakespeare without subscribing to these norms.

Echolalia is an autistic speech pattern involving repetition of words and phrases (it is not unique to autism). Psychological studies frequently misunderstand and dismiss echolalia as meaningless, mechanical: the subordination of sound to sense, words repeated out of context. The person defining what counts as acceptable context and deciding on benchmarks of meaning, however, is all too often not the autistic person themselves. From the autistic person's viewpoint, their repetitions may be perfectly well contextualised and richly significant. Because it is a term both poetic and pathological, 'echolalia' allows emendatory cross-pollination between autistic experience and scholarship on versification. The OED defines 'echolalia' as: '*Pathology*. The meaningless repetition of words and phrases', with examples linking it to autism and schizophrenia, and 'a depreciatory term for a succession of sounds in poetry which subordinates sense to sound' in use from the nineteenth century. These negative and dismissive definitions deny neurodivergent people meaning-making capacity, linking them depreciatively to the versifier who 'subordinates sense to sound'.[3] This is part of a wider devaluing of autistic language. The DSM-V – which as Vanheule and Sen in their different ways elucidate, is certainly not a trans-historically valid objective bastion of disability-friendly

[2]Perseveration (associated with autism): fixating on words, actions, thoughts, people, emotions, events.

[3]Neurodiversity: variation in people's minds and brains, often specifically used with reference to (groups of) people who differ from dominant neuro-norms, such as autistic and dyslexic people. I use 'neurodivergent' to describe individual people whose ways of thinking and behaving diverge from dominant neuro-norms, without endorsing the norm/s from which we 'diverge'. 'Neurotypical' means in accordance with dominant neuro-norms. I use 'autist' and 'autistic person' synonymously.

truth – pervasively describes autistic language in terms of 'deficit(s)' (words used 12 times), 'difficult(ies)' (twelve-fold), and failure (twice); it is 'restricted' (sevenfold) and 'limited' (sixfold) characterised by 'lack' and 'impairment' and emphasis on 'severe' and 'abnormal' symptoms (APA, 299.00).

I do not apply modern diagnostic criteria to Bastard both because I do not find him consistently written as autistic and because I do not endorse DSM-V's othering, dehumanising language. Rather, as an autistic and physically disabled scholar, I speak from what Elizabeth Bearden calls 'crip authority' to explore the ways echolalia works rhetorically, prosodically, and socio-politically. To assert 'crip authority' is to follow early modern precedents. Bearden developed this term to explain the multiple ways disabled early modern writers demonstrated that 'disabled status has value' as part of 'authorial identity' (2016, 72, 81). These writers availed themselves of valorised religious, rhetorical, and political ideas, for instance suffering as *imitatio Christi*, impairment as a sign of courageous 'military sacrifice', disability as a source of rhetorically-persuasive pathos, and experience of melancholy enabling a melancholic to console other melancholics, to understand melancholy from within, and to enjoy various benefits (for instance early modern writers associated melancholy with longevity) (2016, 2021). Disability studies scholars like Bearden, Allison Hobgood, Genevieve Love, and Katherine Schaap Williams emphasise that we should value rather than discount early modern disability. Observing echolalia from the outside leads psychological studies either to deny its importance, or to limit themselves to rudimentary questions like whether or not echolalia is useful or meaningful to the autistic person (Sterponi and Shankey). Experiencing echolalia from within by naturally using it daily keeps me freshly aware of the complex ways echolalia can bear affective and cultural meanings, figure in sociopolitics, and challenge ableist notions of meaning-making.

Ableist norms represent rhythmic autistic speech as 'gabbling', lacking the intentionality necessary for the repetitions to be classed as poetic. Indeed, Buzz Goodbody's 1971 directors' script for *King John* labels 3.1 'crudity of Bastard', noting John's 'irritation' with Bastard's inelegant language. Love traces, and corrects, the elision of early modern disability's capacity to figure aesthetically (7–10); cultural and psychological understandings of autism evince this elision. Scientific literature on echolalia includes debates regarding whether the autistic person is just 'borrowing' others' words without understanding their 'internal structure', one way in which, as M. Remi Yergeau explains, autists are 'storied out of rhetoricity' because our words are seen to lack the intentionality and prosocial aims supposedly characterising 'normal' speech (Sterponi 277–8, Yergeau 10–11). Relatedly, our speech is denied political power. Alison Kafer explains that the long history of depoliticising disability often involves troubling erasure of disabled people from 'political frameworks of the future' and denying disabled people political power; accordingly, Kafer calls for political conceptualisations of disability (8–9). My reading marries

attention to the political valence of Bastard's echolalia with an emphasis on (following Tobin Siebers) the aesthetic value of disabled speech. As Julia Miele Rodas argues, in mainstream poetics repetition is lauded for its beauty and deep meaning. However, autistic repetition is pathologised as mechanical and 'a sign of absence or vacancy' perhaps because poets supposedly repeat intentionally whereas autists repeat involuntarily without understanding their own words, 'what clinical literature reads as "echolalia," "parroting," and "stereotypy,"' are 'forms of repetition other writers associate with mantra, with poetry, and with literary modernism' (44, 7). Rodas suggests erasing this dichotomy: autistic repetition *is* poetic!

Echolalia offers a distinct temporality, melodically linking past with present; thereby it beckons listeners to new modes of engagement shaped by the rhythms of speech. Analysing queer utopias, José Esteban Muñoz writes that utopia has its own time, its 'then and there'. Muñoz emphasises that the present is 'toxic for queers' (27); Anne McGuire shows that it is deadly for autistic people. Muñoz cruises queer texts to link queer past with utopic queer future. Inhabiting the temporalities of Bastard's repetition enables us to join diegetic past, present, and future within *King John*, and to join the early modern past with our present and desired autistic futures. Our autistic Shakespeare is 'not yet here', as Muñoz writes of queerness, thus we must 'dream and enact new and better pleasures' (1). We can do so by revelling in Bastard's repetitive play. I am interested in reading autistically: a dynamic process that maintains an autistic relation to the Shakespearean text with all the joys and revelations involved therein, rather than relegating autism to a static object of study. In so doing, I invite others to diversify my autistic reading; because autism is not just one thing (as I write, Cambridge University launches its Spectrum 10k project, to analyse the diversity within the autism spectrum) there can never be just one autistic reading of Shakespeare. Though I apply rhetorical terms – conduplicatio, repotia, mesodiplosis – to Bastard's lines, I deliberately describe them primarily as echolalia in order to bring autism and versification together. This illustrates how autistic speech can be revealingly communicative as well as challenging the assumption that 'meaningful' communication is opposed to, and more valuable than, words' melody. Rather than dismissing autistic melodies as meaningless, we should attend to the lessons they teach us about the processes of meaning-making.

Melody, Turn-taking, Temporality: Bastard's 'And'

'Crip time' means the distinct temporalities of a disabled existence (see e.g., Samuels). With autistic language, this can look like a parallel time, kairotic in its own way, not following the linear unfolding logic of able-minded conversational norms. Autistic speech may not 'move on' swiftly and superficially in

the way that allistic speech does.[4] Repeating phrases, emotions, and interactions from minutes, days, or years previously, autists may continually draw attention to overlooked ideas until they are fully acknowledged. We may exactly replicate words' tone, pitch, stress, and tempo with each repetition, or may vary these. Autists can stress words differently to allistic people, thereby picking out new significances in sentences, compounding this through repetition. Echolalia can communicatively shift listeners' temporality, guiding them to live with the autist repeatedly through the same arrangement of beats and pauses, stressed and unstressed syllables. Affirming echolalia as one of our core ways of communicating is not the same as saying that autistic people engage in echolalia without awareness or intentionality; echolalia can be playful or mocking, for example. Kafer reminds us that crip time includes disabled people's futures being denied, deleted, and limited, and a fear of futures involving queer, disabled individuals (8–9). McGuire traces discourses of urgency that describe autism as a threat needing to be caught early, an 'epidemic', something to be 'stopped, cured, fixed, eliminated', precisely because if caught too late it prevents a person from reaching normative developmental milestones at the so-called right time (19). According to this logic, autistic people develop too slowly (are held back), but autism is spreading too fast, and must be stopped, now. McGuire links this to the way liberal capitalism infuses everything with urgency: buy this, *now*, stop autism *now*; if possible multitask and achieve both together (109). Unlike these urgent capitalists, never stopping to enjoy one thing, let us allow echolalia to expand and spread, inhabiting its temporality. Let autism hold us here.

Bastard's repetitions bring an autistic temporality to Shakespeare's prosody. John suggests that France, who has heeded Pandulph (the Pope's legate) and retracted his support for England, 'will rue this hour within this hour' (a5v). Bastard caps this with an erotema regarding time: 'Old Time the clock-setter, that bald sexton Time,| Is it as he will? Well then, France shall rue' (a6r). The metrical irregularity of the epithets with their clusters of stress ('Old Time', 'clock-setter', 'bald sexton') draw attention to temporality on the metrical level. Though Bastard may deliver this aside to the audience, the hypophoric structure suggests that Bastard is (also) talking to himself, consulting Time within his own mind regarding John's curse, and answering his own question, 'France shall rue'. Bastard's self-reflective statement draws attention to his role as metrical clock-setter. Moreover, as we shall see, this reference to internal, idiosyncratic temporality resonates with an earlier instantiation of the Bastard character in the anonymous *The Troublesome Raigne of John* (c.1590).

[4]Allistic: not autistic. Allistic is not necessarily the same as neurotypical: a person can be allistic and still be neurodivergent; for example, whilst not being autistic they may differ from the neuro-norm in other ways.

Strikingly, Bastard repeats all of Constance's line, including 'And'. For quite some time, he preserves the entire line's intractable melody. When Austria asks a man to 'speake those words to me', Bastard repeats every single word, even though Constance's 'And' related to a longer lion-calf comparison, and even though 'And' is not strictly necessary for the insult to hit home. That Bastard sees 'And' as one of 'those words' indicates that we should attend, like him, to the line as a unit of melody:

Constance:	… And hang a Calues skin on those recreant limbes.
Austria:	O that a man should speake those words to me.
Bastard:	And hang a Calues-skin on those recreant limbs.
Austria:	Thou dar'st not say so villaine for thy life.
Bastard:	And hang a Calues-skin on those recreant limbs. (a5r)

In Bastard's first repetition, 'And' could be lexically meaningful: Bastard could be twisting 'And' so that it adds to Austria's previous line. Thus, Bastard's answer is, performatively, I (a man) speak those words to you; in addition I will hang a calves-skin on you. Autists do not always or readily distinguish between erotesis, irony, and genuine inquiry, and between questions and statements. It is legibly autistic to respond to 'O that a man should speake those words to me' by speaking the words (indeed at the RSC in 2006, Joseph Millson's Bastard spoke the first 'calues-skin' line in a rather helpful tone). Alternatively, Bastard might be deploying echolalia to ventriloquise Austria, taking advantage of the fact that both his and Austria's lines are regular iambic pentameter to run them seamlessly together into an extended request: 'O that a man might speake those words to me and hang a calf skin on my limbs!' By Bastard's second repetition, 'And' perhaps loses much of its lexical meaning; Bastard preserves 'And' for its melodic function, suggesting he values words for their sound.

'And' retains its *potential* to mean. Bastard re-activates this meaningful function of 'And' when Austria asks Philip to heed Pandulph:

Austria:	King *Philip*, listen to the Cardinall.
Bastard:	And hang a Calues-skin on his recreant limbs. (a5v)

Bastard's interpolated 'his' extends Austria's exhortation; together, Bastard and Austria urge Philip to listen to Pandulph and hang a Calues-skin on either Pandulph or Austria. Stressing 'his' and/or accompanying it with deictic gesturing would suggest that 'his' refers to Austria; an unstressed 'his' would probably refer to Pandulph. 'Those' in Constance's original line was not necessarily stressed, though a stress would make it sound wonderfully sassy, allowing Bastard to carry this effect over into a stressed 'his'. Bastard snatches up the ghost of a cue from Austria as an excuse to delight in the repeated phrase; the fact that Austria is speaking in an exhortatory way, and speaking about a third person, gives Bastard enough reason to insert his Calues-skin line into

the conversation. Bastard's use of language leaves Philip unsure of how to speak. Austria urges Philip to obey Pandulph:

> Austria: Do so, King *Philip*; hang no more in doubt.
> Bastard: Hang nothing but a Calues skin, most sweet lout.
> France: I am perplext, and know not what to say. (a5v)

Bastard throws a spanner in the works of the usual allistic rules of language. His echolalia leaves France 'perplex'd', which could mean 'confused', 'intricate', and 'involved'. Like many neurotypical people, France is confused by echolalia: what is it *for*? Is it communicative, or just disruptive? France is also involved, implicated, in Bastard's echolalia – intricately so, as 'Hang nothing but a Calues skin … ' obtrudes upon France, Austria, and Pandulph's politico-religious discussion. Philip's perplexity could stem from his political situation (should he obey the Pope or John?) but significantly he expresses this as a problem of language: 'I … know not what to say'. Bastard always knows what to say; his words, particularly his 'And', hover between importance and lack of importance. 'And' is meaningful and pure sound, interpretable and bewildering; it is the conundrum (for many allistic people) of echolalia itself.

Bastard's 'Calues-skin' line lends itself to regular iambic pentameter, making any pronunciation that diverges from regular pentameter particularly noticeable. The line is thus ideal for foregrounding autistic diction, which can stress syllables that allistic diction does not, in ways that jar with able-minded notions of correct alignments of stress and meaning. This offers the opportunity for the actor to explore autistic temporalities, the ways in which autistic speech and being disrupt allistic standards of time. Speaking 'Calues-skin' as a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable accords with Constance's emphasis on replacing lionskin (what Austria is actually wearing) with shameful calfskin, underscoring that timid and foolish calf better befits Austria (Goodbody's 1970 director's script notes that fools in Greek families wore calfskin, adding that with his mockery Bastard 'sexual [*sic*] diminishes Austria as well as morally castrates, attacks, ridicules him'). In this scansion, 'on' has some stress and 'recreant' is disyllablic. Bastard's prosody can intersect with his accent, for instance as a signifier of his social class and heredity. As Sonia Massai and Adele Lee et al's germinal work shows, accents are another important type of non-normative speech on Shakespearean stages; indeed Lee calls explicitly for more intersection between disability and accent studies (21).

Bastard's 'And' involves him in turn-taking: adding to and answering other characters' words. As Yergeau notes of autistic speech in general, echolalia is often seen as non-interactional and, relatedly, non-intentional, even though in fact it can be a complexly social form of communication. An everyday example: many autistic people use echolalia to affirm and agree with another person's words. Bastard displays ownership over the echolalic phrase when

he transmutes it, imagining the Calues-skin as a material entity. When he wants Austria to be quiet, Bastard envisages placing the calf-skin in or over Austria's mouth, 'Will not a calf-skin stop that mouth of thine?' (a6r). Attentive to nuances in others' words, Bastard deploys echolalia interactionally: to comment, remind, create alliances, control the temporality of political decision-making, intervene in political alliances.

As the rules of conversation are frequently governed by allistic people, autists are often deemed unaware of when to interject and when to fall silent. This is partly because we read and respond to body language differently. We may, for instance, talk over others who had signalled with their bodies or facial expressions that they too were about to talk, but the signals did not catch our attention. Oliver Morgan links Shakespearean turn-taking to conversational etiquette in Renaissance conduct literature (25–6); autistic conversation can breach both modern and early modern etiquette with speech that seems too clipped or too prolix, overlaps with others' speech, is over or under-responsive to others' words and body language, returns to points that allistic speakers thought had been dealt with, answers questions from earlier in the conversation (or previous conversations years ago), and fixates on topics and picks up on details the interlocutor did not expect. In *King John*, Shakespeare scripts these breaches of etiquette and their incendiary effects.

The indeterminate prosody in Bastard and Austria's exchange opens the possibility that Bastard interrupts and talks over Austria:

> Austria: Rebellion, flat rebellion!
> Bastard: will it not be?
> Will not a calf-skin stop that mouth of thine? … (a5v)

How much Bastard interrupts Austria depends on how much Shakespeare displays his characteristic awareness of the possibility for synaeresis. If both instances of 'rebellion' are trisyllabic and 'will it' is pronounced monosyllabically ('will't'), Bastard does not interrupt Austria and simply finishes the pentameter line after Austria's exclamation. Perhaps Austria uses syncope to convey urgent agreement with Pandulph's condemnation of Philip's 'rebellion'; Austria gets his words out quickly to demonstrate forthwith that he is on the Pope's side. However, if 'rebellion' has four syllables, and/or 'will it' is two monosyllables, the stressed 'will' irksomely overlays some part of 'rebellion', vying with 'rebellion''s stressed second syllable or unstressed final or penultimate syllable.

The above quotation is an example of how Austria starts trying to ward off Bastard's echolalia by enjambing lines and taking up just too many syllables in a half-line for Bastard to be able to fit in the ossified phrase 'And hang a Calues-skin on those recreant limbs'. Bastard responds by stuffing the remainder of the line with bombast ('will it not be') so that he can include his calf-skin theme in the following line. He later foils Austria's enjambment with trouser-themed interruption:

Austria: Well ruffian, I must pocket up these wrongs,
Because,
Bastard: Your breeches best may carry them. (a5r)

Austria attempted to gain ownership of the second line with 'Because'; Bastard picks up the minimal cue of 'because' and finishes Austria's pentameter line, 'your breeches best may carry them'. In Bastard's mouth, pentameter becomes something of an irritant to Austria. To pocket up wrongs probably meant to endure wrongs. With autistic humour, Bastard literalises this idea, considering whether the wrongs will fit in Austria's breeches pocket.

'You do forget yourself', 'Ruffian': other characters prefer to ignore or reprehend Bastard's echolalic versifying rather than responding in kind with mocking melodies, reusing his vocabulary, or rhyming with him. This is notable because 3.1 is characterised by characters picking up on the final lines of others' speeches and incorporating it into their response. France ends his opening speech by proclaiming 'a holy day', Constance's response begins, 'A wicked day, not a holy day'; Constance asks 'How can the law forbid my tongue to curse', Pandulph responds with rime riche, '*Philip* of Fraunce, on peril of a curse … ' (a5r). This is the way characters do politics throughout *King John*: mimicking each others' prosody, repeating each others' vocabulary, interrupting each other, and twisting each others' chiasmus on the head; we see this for instance when French and English meet at Angiers in 2.1. Maslen understands this prosodic and linguistic mimicking as signalling the rival monarchs' hypocritical biddability and facile alliances and enmities with each other (255–6). Bastard attempts to join in, deftly picking up other characters' rhymes and rhythms. Towards the end of 3.1, when Bastard modifies the 'hang a Calues-skin' phrase to create a rhyme: 'lout', with 'doubt', this enables him to respond specifically to Austria with repotia. He repeats 'hang no-' and echoes and mocks Austria's hortatory tone; the bundle of stresses at the end of Bastard's line emphasises the rhyme-word 'lout', creating a metrical chiasmus with Austria's bundle of stresses at the start of his line:

Austria: Do so, King *Philip*; hang no more in doubt.
Bastard: Hang nothing but a Calues skin, most sweet lout. (a5v)

Modifying his 'Calues-skin' phrase, Bastard vituperatively attempts to engage Austria. Verbally, Austria ignores or misses the cue though he may respond with (for instance exasperated) body language. Austria and Bastard's sporadic exchanges throughout this scene illustrate intricate interactions between speakers' different temporalities. Allistic people frequently miss autistic people's conversational cues and vice versa, even though these verbal interactions across neurotypes can actually involve speakers' close attention to and imitation of

each others' prosody, shared vocabulary, and interruptions affecting the conversation's emotional timbre.

Bastard's echolalia hangs between meaninglessness that can be ignored and huge import. It continually undermines Austria's attempts to advance the political discussion, bringing us back to the moment Constance insulted Austria, and drawing attention to the fact that Austria's unrealised threat of repercussions hangs over the scene. The phrase can be performed as a mere jingle that infuriates Austria (in 2001 at the Swan Theatre, Bastard, played by Jo Stone-Fewings, heckled Austria from the back of the stage). Yet this does not obviate a reading in which Bastard's echolalia is instrumental in exacerbating the other characters' fury and thus provokes the declaration of war ending the scene.

The Dramatic Power of Meaninglessness

Instead of understanding echolalia as meaningless in the OED's nugatory sense, we can view it as resisting able-minded norms of meaning. Thereby, it throws processes of meaning-making, and the inadequacy of ableist norms for describing autistic meaning-making, into sharp relief. Pervasively, as Yergeau points out, autistic speech is pejoratively styled as meaningless in the sense of lacking rhetoricity. However, they argue, such pejoratives miss the rich meaninglessness integral to rhetoric:

> at times, rhetoric is meaningless. Meaninglessness is not the pejorative so many of us would presume. I feel most autistic when I'm not making sense of anything – and there is a certain tranquillity and terror and disconnectedness in that, dwelling in a synaesthetic jumble of nothingness, awash in all the inventional resources that an autly sensorium can provide … rhetoric can be meaningless and that meaninglessness is a potentiality that rhetoric should (and can, and does) embrace. Rhetoric is the purview of meaning and cacophony both (87)

Yergeau usefully reminds us not to insist on the meaningfulness of echolalia at all costs. Rather than mounting such a desperate attempt to gain acceptance in a restricted able-minded concept of rhetoric, we can explore the rhetorical power of 'cacophony' and 'meaningless' speech onstage.

Carla Mazzio explains that inarticulate (stilted, muffled, mumbled) Renaissance speech could be a rhetorical strategy. Challenging the idea that the Renaissance was a time of eloquence, Mazzio 'argues for the affective and conceptual potential of the disabled utterance' (2). Mazzio's word 'disabled' is curious, because she does not address literal speech-related disabilities, focusing rather on people whose otherwise 'normal' language use breaks down due to 'passionate extremity or cognitive superflux', for instance through love or fear (2). Nevertheless, promisingly for disability studies in general and ideas of autistic futurity specifically, Mazzio points towards the communicative power of disabled speech, stating 'departures from rhetorical competence in both sacred and secular contexts, could be seem as enabling new forms of

thinking, feeling, and acting' (2). A decade later, Susan Anderson built on Mazzio's arguments to examine how early moderns mapped disabled and 'non-normative speech patterns' like stuttering onto diminished personhood (118). There is no binary opposition between eloquence and ineloquence, mere sound and rhetorical speech in Shakespeare's plays; meaning-resistant sound was embedded within Renaissance rhetoric.

Bastard's autistic speech exemplifies the dramatic potential of ineloquence. John, France, and Austria's bewilderment, frustration, and rage embody explosive responses to echolalia. They may be infuriated by echolalia's impoliteness, or seeming meaninglessness, or both. Earlier, Shakespeare flags Bastard's unnerving verbal excesses, associating him with dangerously energetic humoral bodies. The French ambassador Chatillion reports the arrival of 'a bastard of the king's deceas'd,| And all th' unsettled humours of the land' (a2v). Bastard's echolalia is not simply a blunt instrument eliciting howls of disapproval; it is imbricated in Austria's prosody and vocabulary, subtly commenting on other characters' words. Bastard's repetitions cannot reductively be summed up as sound without sense. Rather, his extra-rhetorical sense-making, his preservation of an intact phrase, sticks out as everyone else mercilessly skews and denies the meaning of each others' words. His repetition highlights the error of equating communicative speech with meaning, and mere sound with meaninglessness. Repeating Constance's words has the dual effect of both evacuating them of their meaning (turning them into an annoying jingle) and endowing them with more and more meaning as repetition gives them significance.

Political Echolalia

Reading Bastard's 'Calues-skin' line as a stim in a political context opens questions of the political (ir)relevance of autistic speech.[5] I have explored how we might read Bastard's echolalia as playfully apolitical, turning royal insults into an enjoyable repeated melody. It can also be understood as disruptive and politically impactful, an early modern example of autistic speech holding sway in a crucial political setting. Moreover, in terms of characterisation, it is an act of class-making; taking up a Queen's insult and redirecting it at Austria, Bastard (re)produces his identity as a newly-recognised royal family member. Bastard claims a right to royal speech through his biological father Richard I. However, growing up as a member of the lower gentry makes available to him an outsider's identity that enables him to approach royal words with cynical, mocking detachment. The 'Calues-skin' phrase evokes Bastard's established imaginative and lexical world and his interest in his heritage; earlier, John

[5]Stimming (associated with autism): movements or words, often repetitive, that delight, situate, and engage the self.

describes Bastard and his mother as cow and calf and Bastard vows to 'smoake [Austria's] skin-coat' (a1v, a2v). Having established his paternity, Bastard's thoughts swiftly turn to how he can demonstrate it through speech that is both deliberately 'incorrect' (mixing up lower-class people's names) and hyper-correct (trading stock courteous phrases) (a1v). Some psychological research gestures towards the idea that echolalia may actually be meaningful to the autistic person (Sterponi and Shankey). We can take Shakespeare beyond this basic debate by depicting the political and classed valence of Bastard re-animating Constance's voice and echolalia's deeply meaningful power.

Edward Gieskes argues that, more sarcastic than the Bastard of *The Troublesome Raigne*, Shakespeare's Bastard learns his new royal-adjacent role gradually rather than accepting it as his supernatural destiny. For Gieskes, this is reflected in Shakespeare's Bastard's ability to use language in several different registers. Writing of Shakespeare's character, he argues,

> The Bastard has just been made part of a class whose speech patterns he can describe with a measure of detachment and amusement … The Bastard's evocation of the courtier's 'dialogue of compliment' serves two purposes: first it ridicules that dialogue by caricature; but second, and more importantly, his speech shows the Bastard's awareness of and willingness to adopt, the speech patterns he pokes fun at. (790)

Though Gieskes does not explicitly address the 'Calues-skin' lines, he facilitates a conceptualisation of Bastard's echolalia as class analysis. Watson suggests that Bastard understands the 'illusion of power and authority' but simultaneously 'embraces the flawed nature of the political world' (146). Gieskes argues that Bastard occupies 'a liminal status in the social order', enabling him 'to articulate, if not a critique, at least an analysis of two sets of dispositions' (790). Bastard may preserve Constance's stress patterns and mimic the timbre of Constance's voice; alternatively, he may alter them. Either can signal his political stance: Bastard can at once mock and ally himself with John's rival Constance through mimicking her delivery-style. Varying Constance's delivery-style might suggest that Bastard is less interested in his relationship with Constance, focusing primarily on insulting Austria.

Morgan argues that though Shakespeare could have written his plays as a series of monologues, he deliberately deploys dialogues. This has a dramatic effect, emphasising meaning-making as a social process, whereby characters influence each other. Politics in *King John* is almost entirely conducted through competitive interlocution, whereby political agents weaponise repetition of each others' words. Bastard's speaking style fits *King John*'s wider pattern of repetition and interruption. However, Bastard's more specifically autistic style enables analysis of potential relationships between neurodivergent speech and political agency. Echolalia serves as political comment, political reminder, class-motivated withdrawal, and political and familial allyship; it

re-sets the temporalities of political decision-making and disrupts rulers' machinations as they attempt to gloss over and move beyond past murders and insults. Strikingly, experiences that are at once autistic and politically-weighted coagulate around this Bastard character across different works. In *The Troublesome Raigne*, Bastard has an experience legible as sensory autistic joy. He repeats Latin phrases he hears first in his mind, saying the previous King was his father, a life-changing revelation:

> Philip: *Philippus atauis adite Regibus*:
> What saist thou Philip, sprung of auncient Kings?
> *Quo me rapit tempestus?*
> What winde of honour blowes this furie forth?
> Or whence proceede these fumes of Maiestie?
> Me thinks I heare a hollow Eccho sound,
> That *Philip* is the sonne unto a King:
> The whistling leaves upon the trembling trees,
> Whistle in confort I am *Richards* sonne:
> The bubling murmur of the waters fall,
> Records *Philippus Regius filius*:
> Birds in their flight make musicke with their wings,
> Filling the aire with glorie of my birth;
> Birds, bubbles, leaves, and mountains, Eccho, all
> Ring in mine eares, that I am *Richards* sonne. (B1r-v)

As Bastard translates echoingly between languages, the stimming landscape offers an autistic experience. Water 'bubles' (suggesting both rumbling sounds and the tactile delight of small popping bubbles), trees tremble and whistle comfortingly and meaningfully, birds enjoy the melodic movement of their own flapping wings. Bastard echoes and dialogues with himself ('what saist thou Philip?'). The experience is significant for his personal identity, telling him, 'I am Richards sonne'. As we saw above, neurotypical others can hear echolalia as a 'hollow Eccho': language whose meaning or intention they cannot parse and thus angrily deny. However, stimming and echolalia can inform autists about, and create, who and where we are.

The Troublesome Raigne references the original echolalic: Echo. Arthur Golding's 1567 translation, which Shakespeare probably used (Miola 19–29), implicates Echo's speech in issues of intentionality. Her initial garrulousness was as much an indelible personality trait as the echoing speech to which Juno condemned her: Ovid says she was always 'garrula' (a blabbermouth, a chatterbox, 3.360); Golding translates, 'Yet of hir speach she had that time no more than now the choyce,|That is to say, of many wordes the latter to repeate' (Fiiiir). Juno tells Echo, 'of thy speach but simple use hereafter shalt thou have' (Fiiiir); 'simple use' translates Ovid's 'brevissimus usus' which can mean very stunted, short (3.367). 'Simple' can indicate plainness, humility, lacking intelligence, weakness, unsophisticated speech, and low rank. Performing and rendering

visible his newfound high rank and martial strength, Bastard's echoes challenge this; in *The Troublesome Raigne*, he discovers this high rank through echoing.

Ovid's Echo complicates assumptions about echolalia's non-intentionality. Ovid tethers Echo's repetitious nature to her (moral) character and identity; her culpability for repeating Juno's secrets suggests a measure of intentionality. After Juno's curse, Echo expresses her amorous intentions towards Narcissus, and her own despairing emotions, by repeating Narcissus' words in ways that reflect her own desires. Yergeau explains that a supposed lack of intentionality is a key reason why autistic speech is dismissed as uncommunicative. Such a dismissal would, absurdly, ascribe total intentionality to every allistic utterance. Rather, as we have seen, speech – including highly rhetorical speech – is usually a mix of significance and meaninglessness, and varying degrees of intentionality and its lack can lie behind both. Indeed, John wishes to mean but not mean when he cryptically orders Hubert's death (see Maslen 260–1). Rodas describes 'verbal embroidery that persistently challenges typical verbal intentionality; but this repetitive accrual of autistic ejaculation is also a performance of the irregular and unexpected ways in which language may make meaning' (xii). In a study aiming to travel to and beyond the edges of 'articulate speech' Steven Connor concedes that noise (which is meaningless, accidental, anonymous, mechanical, unimportant) and meaningful sound (which is expressive, personal, important, animate) are not a dichotomy but combine constantly in everyday speech (7, 10). Bastard's echolalia is not to be devalued as empty noise. It pointedly exposes the meaninglessness in allistic utterances. For Maslen, Bastard's echoes disclose the emptiness in *Austria's* threatening speech, showing that 'Austria is a sounding drum, as it were, full of verbal noise but void of substance' (255). Love tracks how, in theatre history, Richard III's body exists on 'a sliding scale of difference', 'an oscillating likeness and difference between his body and other bodies'; sometimes Richard's body seems starkly different to ableist norms, at others 'straight'-ly similar to them (131). So too Bastard's speech can, when understood as not so different to normal speech, highlight the noisiness and paucity of intent behind normal speech; at the same time if we emphasise Bastard's linguistic difference to the norm, his echolalia breaks apart ableist rhetoric's claims to hegemony.

Conclusion

Versification and echolalia, considered together, enable us to bring autistic temporalities from the past into the present, and lay the ground for studies of Shakespeare shaped by, and moving to the beat of, autistic temporality. One such future lies in performance. Schaap Williams emphasises the importance of 'the contingency of the actor's body and the spectator's perception' in representations of disability, concluding that disabled actors should be cast both in roles scripted for disabled actors and roles not explicitly so scripted, thus

'critics should retrain their analytic faculties to attend to the many attributes that a disabled actor, like any actor, brings to characterization choices' (14, 226). My disabled reading would bring significant changes to performance, as Bastard is often portrayed as a rough patriot, violent and keen to provoke a fight with Austria with his repeated threats. For instance Stone-Fewings' Bastard squared up to Austria to repeat his threats in 3.1, and in 1.1 kicked his legitimate brother hard in the abdomen after offering to shake his hand.

Espousing my autistic reading suggests that performing Bastard as an aggressive person cements undesirable stereotypes about autistic people being prone to violence. My reading calls for a significant shift in the way he is represented on stage, taking the exuberance that is so often part of his characterisation in performance and turning it away from violence and towards a joyful and generative autistic rhetoricity. Bearden reads disability in terms of early modern valorisations of 'sprezzatura', a playful and stylish excess in speech, fashion, and behaviour (2019, 33–78). Conserving Bastard's repetitions as a disabled language gives us all the opportunity to revel in autistic rhetoric. I hope that future scholars and performers will read *King John* – including in ways very different to those I have outlined – for neurodiverse meanings, and resistance to meaning.

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