

Thursday, October 27, from 9:30–11:00 a.m. PT
South Hall 2510 and Zoom
(Link: <https://ucsb.zoom.us/j/83029848821>)

Intellectual Disability, the English Law, and the Fools of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries

This talk will examine how fools in early modern drama and literature were considered intellectually disabled, if viewed in the light of early modern criteria for intellectual disability. The English law was the discipline that most of all strove to conceptualize such a disability – they called it idiocy, and defined it as someone’s incapacity to manage property. Such thinking influenced the way literary characters were represented on the stage and page: hence, they showcase a tendency to be interrogated, to be on the verge of bankruptcy, and to be depicted as vulnerable victims of ruthless guardians. A historicization of literary fools as idiots will also be illuminated by insights from contemporary disability studies theory.

Dr Alice Equestri is a Lecturer (RtdA) in English literature at the University of Padua, as well as a Research Associate of the University of Sussex, where she held a position as Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow between 2017 and 2019. She has published two monographs: *Literature and Intellectual Disability in Early Modern England: Folly, Law, and Medicine 1500–1640* (Routledge, 2021), and *The Fools of Shakespeare's Romances* (Carocci, 2016), which was awarded the AIA PhD Dissertation Prize 2015. Her essays have appeared or are due to appear in venues including *Studies in Philology*, *the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, *Renaissance Studies*, *Notes and Queries*, *Disability Studies Quarterly* and *Cahiers Élisabéthains*. She has written several book chapters and participated as speaker at international conferences in UK, US, Ireland, Italy, France, Spain and Poland, and was a research intern at Shakespeare’s Globe in 2014. Her research interests include folly and intellectual disability in Early Modern English Literature, Shakespeare, Robert Armin, English translations or adaptations of Italian novellas, and law and literature.

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