

Nicholas R. Helms (they/them)
Assistant Professor of British Literature
Plymouth State University
English Program
Humanities, Cultures, and Communications

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Education

Ph.D. in English, The University of Alabama (2015)

Dissertation: "To Essay the Mind: Shakespearean Character and Theories of Mindreading"

Committee: Sharon O'Dair (director), Steven Burch, Jennifer Drouin, Tricia McElroy, Chase Wrenn

Outstanding Dissertation for The University of Alabama, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of English (2015-16)

M.A. in English, The University of Alabama (2009)

Thesis: "A Body of Suffering: Reading Shakespeare's Tragedies through Cognitive Theory."

B.A. in English, Philosophy Minor, Great Books program, Mercer University (2006)

Work Experience

Assistant Professor of British Literature, Plymouth State University (2020-Present)

Instructor of English, The University of Alabama (2015-2020)

Teaching Areas

British Literature, Early English, Medieval, Renaissance, and Modern

Cognitive Literary Theory

Disability Literature and Premodern Disability Studies

First-Year Writing

Global Literature, Ancient and Early Modern

Research Areas

British Literature, Medieval and Renaissance
Cognitive Literary Theory
Disability Studies and Disability Justice Design
Ecocriticism and Environmental Humanities

Refereed Publications

“Neuroqueering the Macbeths,” co-written with Bellee Jones-Pierce (Centenary College, Shreveport, LA). In *Neurodiversity in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Bridgett Bartlet, Bradley Irish, and Laura Seymour. (Work in Progress).

Watery and Cognition in Early Modern Literature, eds. Nic Helms and Steve Mentz. (Forthcoming, Amsterdam University Press 2024).

Review of Reneltha Arluk’s *A Community Retelling of Pawâkan Macbeth*, Oct 3-8, 2024, at the Neptune Theatre, Halifax, NS. (Forthcoming, Shakespeare Bulletin 2024).

“Seeing Brains: Shakespeare, Autism, and Self-Identification.” *Redefining Disability*. Ed. By Paul D.C. Bones and Jessica Smartt Gullion. Brill 2022. DOI: [10.1163/9789004512702](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004512702).

Helms, Nicholas, Kirby, Caitlin, and Asia Merrill. “Designing For Fatigue” *Hybrid Pedagogy*. <https://hybridpedagogy.org/designing-for-fatigue/> (Jan 2022).

Cognition, Mindreading, and Shakespeare’s Characters. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. Part of the Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance Series (eds. Bruce McConachie and Blakey Vermeule). DOI: [10.1007/978-3-030-03565-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03565-5).

“To Knit the Knot: Embodied Mind in John Donne’s *The Ecstasy*.” *The Seventeenth Century*, 23 Aug 2018. DOI: [10.1080/0268117X.2018.1485593](https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2018.1485593).

“Conceiving Ambiguity: Dynamic Mindreading in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.” *Philosophy and Literature*, 36.1 (2012): 122-35. DOI: [10.1353/phl.2012.0001](https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.2012.0001).

“‘Upon Such Sacrifices’: An Ethic of Spectator Risk.” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 27.1 (2012): 91-107. DOI: [10.1353/dtc.2012.0031](https://doi.org/10.1353/dtc.2012.0031).

“‘Where She Comes From’: Mindreading in Levring’s *The King is Alive*.” *symplokē* 19.1-2 (2011): 289-304. DOI: [10.5250/symploke.19.1-2.0289](https://doi.org/10.5250/symploke.19.1-2.0289).

Presentations (selected)

“Bleeding Bodyminds: Landscapes and Protest in Adaptations of Shakespeare.” Part of “Protest and Resistance in the (Early) Modern Era,” a seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference in Portland, OR, April 2024.

“Protest in Renelitta Arluk’s *Pawâkan Macbeth*.” Part of a roundtable entitled “Environmental Protests in the Early Modern/Colonial World,” chaired by Ivonne del Valle, U.C. Berkeley. Modern Language Association Conference. Philadelphia, January 2024.

“Caring for Lady Macbeth: Failures of Work, Failures of Affect.” Medieval and Renaissance Forum. Keene State University, April 2023.

“Making the Red One Blue: Bloodshed, Watersheds, and Disabled Identity in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.” *Watersheds*. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, 2022 symposium. The University of Delaware, June 2022.

“Making the Blue One Red: Watersheds, Bloodshed, and Disabled Identity in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.” [Shakespeare’s “Other Disability Plays.”](#) (part 2), a seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference 2022, Jacksonville, FL.

“Not for an Age, but for Autistics.” [Shakespeare’s “Other Disability Plays.”](#) a seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference 2021, online.

CPLC Lightning Talk, PSU Open CoLab, 4/29/21:
<https://colab.plymouthcreate.net/event/lightning-talk-nic-helms/>

“Watery Thinking: Cognitive and Ecocritical Perspectives on Water in Early Modern Literature.” Seminar co-organizer. Shakespeare Association of America, Denver (Apr 2020).

“Avoiding ‘Spring 2021: The Fatiguing,’” Jump Start and January Jamboree, PSU Open CoLab, two presentations from 12/2020 and 1/2021, second in collaboration with Caitlin Kirby and Asia Merrill:
<https://colab.plymouthcreate.net/resource/avoiding-spring-2021-the-fatiguing/>

Participant in “Teaching While Disabled,” a panel on disabled teachers, PSU Open CoLab, 10/30/2020:
<https://colab.plymouthcreate.net/resource/teaching-while-disabled/>

“Watery Thinking: Cognitive and Ecocritical Perspectives on Water in Early Modern Literature.” Seminar co-organizer. Shakespeare Association of America, Denver (Apr 2020).

- “Horrible Conceits: The Discomfort of Reading Shakespeare’s Characters.”
Shakespeare Association of America, Washington, D.C. (Apr 2019).
- “Cognition and Othering: Shakespeare’s Characters in *Othello* and *The Tempest*.”
Invited talk, Kennesaw State University, GA (Nov 2018).
- “Still Monarchs: Cognition and Decay as the Character of Shakespearean Monarchy.”
South Atlantic Modern Language Association, Birmingham, AL (Nov 2018).
- “‘The Mind’s Construction’: Cognition, Mindreading, and Shakespeare’s Characters.”
Plenary, Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference, Youngstown, OH (Oct 2018).
- “Corpse-Reading: Cognition, Corpses, and the Early Modern Stage.” Death and
Domesticity Conference. Atlanta (Sep 2018).
- “Inferring the Mind: Parasites and Monstrous Thoughts in Early Modern Drama.”
MSU Classical & Modern Languages & Literatures Symposium, “The
Metaphor of the Monster,” Starkville, MS (Sep 2018).
- “Concentration and Cutting Shakespeare.” Invited talk on Shakespeare and
Dramaturgy, University of Montevallo, Montevallo, AL (May 2018).
- “The Weight of Understanding: Teaching Shakespeare with Empathy.” Shakespeare
Association of America, Los Angeles (March 2018).
- “‘Though Sight Be Lost’: Staging Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*.” South Atlantic
Modern Language Association, Atlanta (November 2017).
- “A King of Infinite Space: Solitary Confinement in Early Modern Theatre.”
Shakespeare Association of America, Atlanta (April 2017).

[Presentations earlier than 2017 available upon request (nrhelms@plymouth.edu)]

Honors and Awards

Excellence in Service for a Full-Time Instructor, UA Department of English (2018-2019)

Outstanding Dissertation, University of Alabama (2015-2016)

Graduate Council Fellowship for Dissertation Research, University of Alabama (2013-2014)

Buford Boone Memorial Fellowship for Teaching Composition, University of Alabama
(2012-2013)

Professional Association Memberships

Modern Language Association of America member and conference participant:

<https://www.mla.org/>

Shakespeare Association of America member and conference participant:

<https://shakespeareassociation.org/>

Professional Development Activities

CPLC Season Three Participant, TWP/INCAP and Design Forward tracks. 2021-2022.

<https://colab.plymouthcreate.net/cplc/cplc/cplc-season-3-participants/>

Reading group leader on “Graveyards of Academe: The Necroliberal University” with Matt Cheney, PSU Open CoLab, 3/1/2021:

<https://colab.plymouthcreate.net/event/graveyards-of-academe/>

CoLab Reflective Practice Groups, one on general pedagogy, one on anti-racist teaching (Fall 2020)

Participant in anti-racism training from Academics for Black Survival and Wellness, Summer 2020: <https://www.academics4blacklives.com/>

ACE Framework participant, PSU Open CoLab, Summer 2020.

Program and University Service

Plymouth State University (2020-present)

PSU Chapter of the American Association of University Professors: Vice President, (2021-2022),
President (2022-2023)

Chair, Disability Studies Council (2022-present)

Member, Game Design Council (2022-present)

Scheduling Coordinator, PSU English Program (2021-present)

“Against Proctoring Software,” an open letter opposing student proctoring software at PSU,
4/7/2021: <https://colab.plymouthcreate.net/surveillance/against-proctoring-software/>

Founder and Organizer, Intersectionality Talks, Humanities Speaker Series on Intersectional
Approaches to Literature and Culture. Funded by HCC and the Open CoLab.
(2020-present) <https://colab.plymouthcreate.net/programs/intersectionality/>

Editor of *The Ellen Reeder*, the official PSU English blog: <http://english.plymouthcreate.net/>
(2021-present)

Gen Ed Sunset Renewals for English Program: EN 2490, Rethinking Modern British Literature;
EN 3515, Currents in Global Literature; EN 3425, Rethinking Medieval and Renaissance
Literature (2021, 2022)

Committee member, Sidore Lecture Series (2020-present)

Founder and organizer, Plymouth Union Caucus (2020-2023)

The University of Alabama (Instructor, 2015-2020; Graduate Student, 2007-2015)

Chair, Strode Instructor Committee: (2015-2020)

The Strode Instructor Committee promotes the various cultural offerings of [the Hudson Strode Program in Renaissance Studies](#)—lectures, films, performances, and conferences— to the undergraduate community at the University of Alabama and to the larger community of Tuscaloosa.

Co-organizer for the February 2018 Conference “Shakespeare In and Beyond the Classroom”

This conference featured papers that address teaching Shakespeare to non-English majors, whether those non-majors are students or member of local communities. We encourage papers from both academic and non-academic settings, including papers that consider dominant teaching philosophies and praxes currently in use in the university classroom and presentations considering various outreach programs.

Coordinator for The Hudson Strode Program’s Film Series (2015-16)

Artistic Director for the Improbable Fictions Staged Reading Series (see Theatre Work below)

Spoken Word Tent Coordinator, Kentuck Festival of the Arts (2016-17)

Assistant to the Director of the Hudson Strode Program in Renaissance Studies: (2009-2014).

This position involved event organization for guest lecturers and department symposia, publicity, podcasting talks, live video streaming, and alumni outreach. I arranged accommodations, transportation, and meals for all our guests. I also helped coordinate the Hudson Strode Milton Seminar and the Strode Graduate Student Conference

Advisor to incoming UA students, including freshmen and transfers: (2009-2014)

Teaching

Assistant Professor of English, Plymouth State University, 2020-present

ENDI 1320: Murder, Mayhem, and Madness: Reflections of the Self and Society, one section

EN 1400: Composition: Writing About Disability, one section

EN 1600: Studies in English, one section

EN 2490: Rethinking Modern British Literature, two sections

EN 3420/3425: Rethinking Medieval and Renaissance Literature, four sections

EN 3515: Currents in Global Literature, three sections

EN 4805: Single Author: Shakespeare For Social Justice, one section

Instructor of English, The University of Alabama, 2015-2020

EN 101: English Composition I, nine sections

First half of Freshman Composition, themed courses on “Film Review and Essay Writing”

EN 102: English Composition II, eleven sections

Second half of Freshman Composition

EN 103: Honors English Composition, one section

Honors course of Freshmen Composition, themed course on “Dystopian Science Fiction”

EN 205: British Literature I, two sections, online

Survey of early British literature, *Beowulf* to Johnson

EN 206: British Literature II, three sections, two online

Survey of late British literature, Blake to Beckett

EN 207: World Literature I, one section

Survey of early world literature, *Gilgamesh* to Shakespeare

EN 208: World Literature II, two sections

Survey of late world literature, Moliere to Soyinka

EN 215: Honors British Literature I, six sections

Honors survey of early British literature, *Beowulf* to Johnson

EN 216: Honors British Literature II, three sections

Honors survey of late British literature, Blake to Beckett

EN 333: Shakespeare, two sections

Upper-level course on Shakespeare's plays, arranged by genre and emphasizing character and identity

Theatre Work, Service to the Community

Advice to the Players, Sandwich (2022-present). Played Lord Talbot in Chapman's *War of the Roses: Part I* (2022) and participated in the staged reading series in Summer 2021.

PSU Theatre Program (2021). Neurodiversity consultant for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*.

Resurgens Theatre Company, Atlanta: (2019). Played Jasperino in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*; performances at the Atlanta Shakespeare Tavern, at the University of Southern Mississippi, Gulfport, and at The University of Alabama.

Improbable Fictions, a staged reading series, University of Alabama: (2010-2020). Since I co-founded the series with a fellow graduate student, Alaina Jobe Pangburn, Improbable Fictions has staged twenty-five plays. I acted as Artistic Director for the series, selecting the plays, appointing and assisting directors, and overseeing the major decisions involved in each production. More information can be found at nrhelms.org.

The Rude Mechanicals, a Tuscaloosa, AL Shakespeare troupe: (2009-2019). The Rude Mechanicals present two plays each summer at the Park at Manderson Landing on the Black Warrior River. Though the troupe has connections to the University of Alabama, its actors and audience members are largely drawn from the Tuscaloosa community.

Actor: *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

Stage manager: *Macbeth*.