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In the introductory essay for this special section, Jay Dolmage defined métis as "the rhetorical art of cunning, the use of embodied strategies…to transform rhetorical situations" ("What is Métis?", n.p.). While other ancient Greek terms prominent in the rhetorical tradition are often portrayed as immaterial qualities of discourse (e.g., logos as a synonym of "rationality"), métis resists abstraction from rhetoric's material context by returning attention to the body and its role in the production of identity, knowledge, and power. Contra traditional historiographies of rhetoric, which have positioned the disabled body as deviant and dysfunctional, métis recognizes that disability possesses "myriad meanings, many of them positive and generative" (Disability Rhetoric 149) and "provides a theory of embodiment that centers disability rather than marginalizing it" (Dolmage, this issue, n.p.). Métis is also a performative rhetoric, offering up "double and divergent" stories that celebrate the disabled body (Disability Rhetoric 8). Applied to the practices of academia and higher education, métis once again draws attention to the body in all its variations, resisting the abstraction of academic life into concepts and values rather than embodied interaction.

In this essay, I will describe what I call performances of métis rhetorics in scholarship from the field of Rhetoric and Composition (R/C): pieces of writing in which the author advocates for disability inclusion by narrating personal experiences of difference, discrimination, or exclusion in higher education. While the term "performance" has circulated in R/C (and social theory more generally) with many definitions, my usage of the term here is meant not to index a particular terminological or theoretical lineage but rather to let its
various meanings hang together loosely and rattle each other in the wind. I won't retain the popular connotation of performance as "fake," deceptive, or disingenuous. I want to keep, however, the sense of action directed toward an audience. After describing the origin and characteristics of these performances of métis rhetorics, I will discuss their significance in scholarship related to mental disability, especially in the writing of Margaret Price and Melanie Yergeau—writing which unsettles and uproots ideological assumptions in R/C about perceived intelligence, academic competence, scholarly participation, and meaningful access for faculty and students with all kinds of disabilities.

Performances of métis rhetoric are closely related to disability "coming-out" narratives. In a wonderful essay in the 2018 collection *Literatures of Madness*, Elizabeth Brewer examines scholars whose coming-out narratives bridge mad studies and disability studies. As Brewer writes, a scholar's disclosure of a disabled and/or mad identity is "an ethical and even epistemological decision" (15) in which "one risks discrimination, but stands to gain understanding, disseminate uniquely situated knowledge, and connect with others" (19). By virtue of their disclosure, scholars can increase the recognition of mad/disabled identities in academia and become "a crucial source of knowledge" for individuals and communities (Brewer 26). My essay seeks to complement and extend Brewer's analysis to examine sustained narration of experiences of ableism, typically after or in addition to a public disability disclosure.

By using métis as an analytical term, I hope to illuminate how first-person disability narratives document social and institutional barriers and transform understandings of who can be included in academic life. The writers discussed below lay out the experience of academic ableism and its implications, both in the field and in higher education writ large. In R/C scholarship, Jacqueline Jones Royster's 1996 CCC article "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own" could be viewed as a predecessor regarding issues of race. Using stories of her own encounters with racism as an African American scholar, Royster both identifies pernicious racial attitudes in academia (often hiding behind "good intentions") and challenges specific theoretical and practical norms in the field. As such, performances
of métis rhetoric combine accounts of the lived experience of oppression with rhetorical institutional critique. Brenda Brueggemann's 1997 *College English* article "On (Almost) Passing" may be read as an early example of a disability narrative performing métis rhetoric in R/C. Using the motif of mirrors and (self-)reflection, she describes a personal process through which she "came out" as a deaf person, personally and professionally, recognizing her former "passing" as "the art and act of rhetoric" (647). Along the way, Brueggemann creates a portrait of developing a disability identity, the interplay of personal and professional life, and the affective toll of ableism and stigma.

More recently, performances of métis rhetoric in scholarship have expanded to include mental disability. Foundational writing on mental disability rhetoric by Patricia Dunn, Catherine Prendergast, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson disrupt dominant constructions of intelligence, rationality, and communication by reflecting on the positionality of people with mental disabilities (Dunn; Prendergast; Lewiecki-Wilson). Rather than constructing mental disability as the absence or opposite of rhetoric, these writers call us to consider the lived experience of people with disabilities as a starting point for rhetorical theory. The two scholars I discuss next, Margaret Price and Melanie Yergeau, take up this call by narrating and theorizing their own lived experience of mental disability.

Margaret Price's 2011 book *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* is an extended analysis of "the subject of mental disability" in higher education—the circumstances which put that subject in precarity and liminality. In one sense, the book documents discrimination: Price traces the multitudinous, dynamic ableist discourses in the academy as they converge upon students, teachers, staff, and independent scholars. But that documentation is always tied to a deepening of understanding (and critique). Price shuttles between narrative and theory to highlight the ways that "some of the most important common topoi of academe intersect problematically with mental disability," including rationality, independence, presence, productivity, and collegiality (*Mad* 5).

The field of Rhetoric and Composition is not immune, despite its populist, student-centered self-image: it is full of what Price calls "kairotic spaces"
where students and professors with mental disabilities are disadvantaged and often dismissed. Most of *Mad at School* is not "first-person narrative," strictly speaking, yet Price consistently marks her personal connection to the subject matter even in literature reviews and discussions of terminology. For example, when introducing the consumer/survivor/ex-patient (c/s/x) movement, she considers her own position against those terms. Given her own privilege, she considers herself "the agent and director of my treatments," able to choose her own psychiatrist; she also acknowledges that "he, not I, wields the power of the prescription pad" (*Mad* 11). In the book's final chapter, which profiles independent scholars outside academia, Price writes, "I am studying my peer group: we all have mental disabilities; all of us are white; and all of us are queer. … I am attempting to align myself with them…in a move of solidarity" despite her own relatively privileged social and academic position (*Mad* 210). As she dis-composes the exclusionary practices of higher education, Price reminds us that she also is "the subject of mental disability," and the stakes are personal as well as theoretical. As she writes, "This book contains stories about my own experience, because I believe stories are one way of accessing theory" (*Mad* 21). I consider the interplay of institutional critique and personal reflection within *Mad at School* to be its own performance of métis rhetoric, demonstrating that the challenges mental disability poses to normative academic life are embodied; experienced in (crip) time; and very much present, now, in academia and R/C.

Another piece by Price, her 2015 *Hypatia* article "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," performs métis rhetoric more directly. Taking up Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's figure of the "misfit" in relation to mental disability, Price offers a "thought experiment" to explore how disability theory might be applied. She describes a seemingly hypothetical scenario: Person A, labeled with a mental disability, is experiencing "unbearable mental pain" and trying to get hold of an object to strike himself on the head; Person B is deciding how to react and "wishes to prevent Person A from experiencing harm" ("Bodymind" 272). The reader is implicitly invited to make an ethical judgment between the "two realities in the room" (273). Later in the article, Price transforms the reader's relationship to those events with a short phrase: "Person A is me" ("Bodymind" 277). When we consider the scenario, Price argues, "issues of intentionality, experience, and will are central to the
judgments made…both from the actors… and also by those who regard it from a more peripheral position" (278). The reader, presumably in that "peripheral position," may have felt she could be comfortably objective before, waiting for Price's "answer to the riddle." The purpose, however, was not finding a solution but making space for a capacious definition of care and interdependence. As Price writes eloquently,

care means moving together and being limited together. It means giving more when one has the ability to do so, and accepting help when that is needed. It does not mean knowing exactly what another's pain feels like, but it does mean respecting each person's pain as real and important. Finally, care must emerge between subjects considered to be equally valuable (which does not necessarily mean that both are operating from similar places of rationality), and it must be participatory in nature, that is, developed through the desires and needs of all participants. (279)

By masking the embodied stakes of the scenario in the language of a thought experiment, Price calls attention to the distortions inherent in a depersonalized "view from nowhere" while also enacting the situated knowledge of the subject of mental disability.

Like Price's shuttling between lived experience and theory, Melanie Yergeau's writing returns frequently to performances of métis rhetoric. With imagination and ever-present snark, Yergeau uses rhetorical theory to interrogate normative conceptions of autism and uses autism to interrogate normative conceptions of rhetoric. In a 2011 article written with Paul Heilker, Yergeau explains how connecting autism with rhetoric affords a different perspective:

Understanding autism as a rhetoric brings a certain level of legitimacy to what I might consider my commonplaces—repetitive hand movements, rocking, literal interpretation, brazen honesty, long silences, long monologues, variations in voice modulation—each its own reaction, or a potentially autistic argument, to a discrete set of circumstances. …from pitiful disease symptom into autistic discourse convention, from a neurological screwup into an autistic confluence of structure and style. (489)
By viewing her behavior in terms of rhetorical action, Yergeau challenges the cultural (and biomedical) pressure to stigmatize and eradicate markers of autistic identity. In the same article, she writes about encountering ableist documents and images from the organization Autism Speaks, whose logo includes a puzzle piece—a symbol that constructs the autistic person as a mystery in need of a solution. Yergeau writes that "Puzzle pieces have a special place in my heart. That is, I hate them" (494). Her comment is humorous, of course, but it also reveals the affective dimension of ableist messages and images for people with disabilities: they are not benign, even if they come from "charitable" organizations—these monuments to ableism traumatize disabled folks and cause all manner of negative emotions from despair to rage.

The negative effects of ableism both in society and in the medical system are made even more apparent in Yergeau's essay "Clinically Significant Disturbance: On Theorists Who Theorize Theory of Mind." She calls it an "autie-ethnographic narrative," playing on an academic genre to counter ideas from people who describe autism from the outside in. The essay opens with a description of her involuntary commitment: the EMTs restraining her and dumping her backpack; the therapist asking "why being committed was such a 'bad' thing"; their denial of her autonomy. Even though she studies, teaches, "breathes" rhetoric, "I am supposed to understand that autism prevents me from being a rhetorician" (n.p.). In this essay, Yergeau analyzes "theory of mind," which posits that autistic people are "mindblind" and cannot imagine another person's mental state; theory of mind is one source of the myth that autistic people do not have empathy. Using her own experience as a starting point, she challenges theory of mind's ultra-cognitive, disembodied, cis-male-coded discourse with feminist rhetorical studies, "examining the complex interplay of body, self, mind, narrative, and being" (n.p.). However, her continuing return to personal narrative makes clear that ableist systems literally disembody her—"gurney-style, classroom-style, hospitalization-style" (n.p.). As a faculty member with a mental disability in the intellectual and kairotic spaces that Price describes in Mad at School, Yergeau is not supposed to exist. Yet there she is. Her existence is resistance.
In her recent book, *Authoring Autism*, Yergeau states unequivocally that autism is not a "failure" of rhetoric (or anything else). Ableist rhetorics of psychology and education construct disability (and disabled people) in negative terms: "when disability is disclosed, failure and rhetoric take on different forms: the disabled person becomes marked as and with deficit, while the nondisabled interlocuter is marked as able, conversant, intelligent, and well, the goal to which the disabled person should aspire" (144). This recent book, like Yergeau's previous essays, builds theory directly from Yergeau's experience. She is "storying autism academically and rhetorically...living out, on the page, the paradoxical autos of autism in all of its glory" (14). This "living out"—out in the open, out in public, out *loud*—is a performance of *métis* rhetoric unabashedly calling out the discourses that would place people with disabilities outside the academy (physically and figuratively).

In Brueggemann's "passing" narrative discussed above, she writes, "I was always good at finding a way to pass into places I shouldn't 'normally' be." Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed makes a similar comment on entering academic spaces as a woman of color—"they aren't expecting you" (41). One value of figuring the writing of Price and Yergeau as performances of *métis* rhetoric is the opportunity to highlight how mental disability, alongside and intersected with other identities, dis-composes the most fundamental assumptions and expectations of higher education. *Métis* becomes a tool for strategy as well as analysis: we can recognize it in the world and use it to intervene in the world. If "disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher education" (*Academic Ableism* 3), disabled scholars like Brueggemann, Price, and Yergeau demonstrate that performances of *métis* rhetoric in academic scholarship have substantial power to *invert higher education* and transform its practices toward inclusivity—even if the university might not recognize itself afterward.

**Works Cited**


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