

Representation of Disability in English Literature

“One is not born, but rather becomes”



Asst. Prof. Dr. Awfa Hussein Al-Doory

aofahosaen@tu.edu.iq

Tikrit University

What is Disability ?

A disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions).



Disability Studies



Disability studies is an academic discipline emerged out of the disability civil rights movement in the late twentieth century. Early scholarship distinguishes the medical model of disability, which locates physical and mental impairments in individual bodies, from the social model in which society is what places limits of disabled individuals, not their disability.

Disability studies examine the meaning, nature and consequences of disability and its effect in the context of social, ethical, political and cultural factors. This allows for a variety of methodologies and approaches to be applied to the study of disability. Some of these include narratives of disability, analysis of representations of disability in literature, in arts, in law and media.

Literary Disability Studies

What For???

The unknowability” of disability consolidates the need to tell a story about it. Disability narratives offer an account of the causes and consequences of the disability; they bring the disability from the margin into the center of the story; and finally, they cure, rehabilitate, or eliminate the deviance in some way, restoring a sense of order.

The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability (2017) explains that

Disability is everywhere in literature. Whether in the bodies that populate countless narratives containing physical disability, or in the mental difference that informs so much detail about character and psychology, disability features in literary production as a constant presence.

Narrative Prosthesis

Narrative Prosthesis, introduced by Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, both of whom are key theorists of critical disability studies, discusses the way narrative makes use of disability as a tool of representation or metaphor. **Disabled characters** are employed a “**crutch** upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p. 49).

- **Stock feature of characterization (Stereotyping)**
- **Opportunistic metaphorical device. (materiality of metaphore: visual metaphore for juicy inner turmoil)**

Disability, Culture, and Identity

Disability is linked to notions of inequality of power and hegemony of disability.

The concept of health is central to modern identity. Disability is culturally produced. Contemporary cultural representations of impairment generate disabling representations of the impaired body. These disabling images are every bit as oppressive as environmental or other material barriers.

Society has become increasingly 'healthiest' and body conscious, so the politically correct body has become lean, strong and physically fit. Impairment and ill-health are no longer seen to arise as a consequence of bad luck or misfortune, but of an individual's failure to live right, eat well, exercise and so on. This individualization of health can lead to stigmatization of any who do not conform to the professionally determined 'norms'.

The disability movement, emerging during the 1970s and 80s, took on the task of raising political consciousness so that limiting ideologies could be challenged and disabled people could develop a far more positive identity. Unless disabled people can agree about what it means to be disabled and what the political goals of the movement should be, it may be very difficult to achieve significant progress.



All contributors are agreed that the oppression of disabled people has rested, in large part, on the imposition of negative and stigmatizing cultural identities. The struggle for social justice, then, involves a question for cultural recognition as well as economic redistribution.

Disability Poetics

Disability poetics speaks powerfully because it articulates the resistance of bodies and minds to the erasure, commodification, convenience, and disposability articulated all around disabled and that they struggle against. **Disability literature means to resist.** Disability poetics foregrounds the experiences of people with disabilities. Through disability literature, disabled people define, shape, and maintain their relationships with disability.

In "Missing Larry: The Poetics of Disability in the Work of Larry Eigner," Michael Davidson defines a poetic of disability as that which "defamiliarizes not only language but the body normalized within language



Disability Poetry



Disability poetry can be recognized by several characteristics:

a challenge to stereotypes and an insistence on self-definition

foregrounding of the perspective of people with disabilities

an emphasis on embodiment, especially atypical embodiment; and alternative techniques and poetics.





Do not label me by my state,
Don't let my disability dictate,
The words you choose to represent,
Me as a person, not just my impediment.

Discrimination comes in many forms,
From the ableist views that society norms,
To the hurtful language that we hear,
That implies our value is not clear.

Please don't say "that disabled guy",
As if it defines all of my life,
I am more than a label or a tag,
And my abilities are not what I lack.

See me for who I am inside,
Look past my wheelchair or my stride,
And recognize that I have something to give,
To this world that we all try to live.

So let's break down these walls of shame,
And embrace diversity without blame,
For when we learn to love and include,
We will create a world that is truly good.



SHARING
IS
CARING

