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DISABILITY: LITERARY PORTRAYALS AND SOCIETAL REFLECTIONS FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

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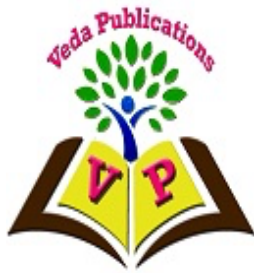
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ABSTRACT



Disability as a term has always served literature as both potent and transparent. Various literary works from ancient mythological and sacred texts to the contemporary literary fictions bring out the change involved in the area of disability study from divine will in ancient mythologically constructed imagery of the disabled to the psychological aspect of recent narratives. With time, disability in literature has reflected a continuous shift towards understanding of otherness, togetherness, and identity. Disabled portrayals also celebrated resilience and social contributions, not only chronicling the struggles of disabled people but offering poignant commentary on what it means to be human as well.

Keywords: *Disability, Literature, Ancient, Modern, Soietal Refections.*

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In ancient texts, disability was often infused with symbolic meanings: The lame Hephaestus in Greek mythology was a perfect coexistence between physical disability and extraordinary craft; Tiresias, the blind prophet that had no rival in spiritual insight. These stories simultaneously conferred both extraordinary privilege on and also labelled as deficient people who differed from the standard in some way or manner, with reference to cultural and religious values available then (Hesiod 29–34; Homer, *Odyssey* 8.62–70). As literary traditions switched, so did accounts and references about disability.

In medieval times, disability was largely confined within a theological framework. It was taken to be either a result of sin (and the sufferer in need of redemption) or a divine test of faith. These depictions matched the predominant moral and religious themes of the Middle Ages (Metzler 45). Furthermore, saints who suffered from physical maladies and who were martyred under pagans, such as during the Diocletian persecutions, often appear in hagiographic texts where miracles serve to confirm both God's intervention and one's deliverance of salvation (Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* 112).

During this period, reason and scientific thoughts advanced on the one hand while disability was still misconceived. A scientific shift in the socio-cultural realm marked a revolutionary change in terms of perceiving and defining disability in medical terms rather than moralistic ones, viewing it as a medical condition that could be treated through intervention. A beginning of humane values shone forth in literary works. For example, Shakespeare did away with the moralistic norms of his age when he

wrote Richard as a hunchback; Dickens presents us with Tiny Tim, a delicate child full of compassion—what happens when this tiny flower inevitably withers away? Meanwhile, as Leila Zerani points out in her book on Africa and the Hispanic Caribbean, Latin American literature taken as a whole has not yet—as it has in North American Anglo and Western European writings—made an issue of physical differences with which certain characters struggle for identity politically (Zerani 8).

Both Davies and Davis report that, no longer symbolic of something beyond human beings, their stories now knitted the lives of actual people slipshod and five shillings down here for someone else's fun upstairs accommodating with good results. Disability was coming out of the closet, laying itself bare before society—not just as an impersonal force. What reforming literature found was that disabilities are a matter of flesh and blood, not abstract estimations based on esoteric definitions (Davies 42; Davis 145–146).

In the modern world, the representations of disability are diverse and complex, echoing back multiplied times the revelatory force from rights movements and social progressivism. In recent years, scholars have seen through the values of society and accepted that no disability can be associated with tragedy or an individual's fault. Thus, they begin to write in which disability is seen as a part of identity. Their characters can now have life, ability to act independently and subtly shaded motives—themes that relate directly to belonging and justice are being discussed. Modern literature uses disabled persons as a mirror through which to reveal society's shape



and diversity from human lives (Haddon 134; Morrison 87).

The evolution of disability in literature, from allegories in antiquity texts to present-day literary works, is approached here. In doing so, we aim to show how literary representation reflects and shapes the understanding of society. Generalizing from the ways literary works have tackled concepts such as otherness, empowerment, and evolution denotes that narrative can both foster transformation and insight. One obvious example comes from outside literature but remains relevant today: should we assume that people are not definite identities? This article insists on the opposite, believing our different perspectives produce or again confirm what is almost always being discussed over—without reference to boundaries within human experience which change with every generation and even each person you meet.

DISABILITY IN ANCIENT GREEK LITERATURE

The complexity of humanity is presented from numerous aspects in Greek literature. It also includes representations of disability. From the epic poems of Homer to the plays in theatres crammed with an audience, to philosophers; disabled characters appear in ancient Greek literature as allegories, examples to live by, or characters within divinely originated stories. An analysis of these stereotypes reflects attitudes demonstrated by society towards the physically or cognitively different. It is possible here to shed light on the beliefs and concerns of its time. By taking a critical attitude, current expounding is both sensitive susceptible to these stereotypes and challenges their content eventual interpretations. These works all invite new interpretations that widen

our understanding of what it meant to be an individual with disabilities in Ancient Greece.

Physical disability in Ancient Greek mythology and literature was commonly held to represent celestial intervention—whether by way of retribution or special attention. The god Hephaestus well illustrates this ambiguity. Disabled in bodily form—lamed either from a birth defect or his expulsion from heaven after brawling with a suite of gods—yet an extraordinary craftsman, key-making things for other people's temples and the gods' most secret-headed counsellors (Hesiod 29–34). This ambiguity—marginalized yet absolutely essential—reflected a cultural paradox: while disability spoke of imperfection, quite incomparable talent did not bar itself.

In Homer's epics, blindness carries a deeper significance. Tiresias and Demodocus may not have eyes, but they possess extraordinary insight. Through divine insight, Tiresias can see what other people have no means of observing. Demodocus, driven by Apollo, carries into song a creative vision which is exceptionally sensitive (Homer Iliad 23.650–665; Odyssey 8.62–70). Though enfeebled as a body, Homer draws a picture of the soul as one capable of reaching insights inaccessible to others. As intermediaries between humankind and the divine, their disabilities became representations of spiritual insight, turning their drawbacks into privileged links to the higher realms.

In Greek literature, disability is often used as a means of expressing moral lessons about hubris, fate, and resilience. In Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Oedipus blinds himself after realizing that he unwittingly killed his father and married his mother.



His self-inflicted disability represents the transformation of a person's soul—acknowledgement of moral failure and accepting spiritual salvation—resulting in suffering, knowledge, and redemption all being interwoven (Sophocles Oedipus Rex 1250–1260).

Similarly, Sophocles' Philoctetes discusses isolation through the wound of its protagonist, who becomes socially as well as physically excluded by his festering wound. His condition spotlights human vulnerability and the process of society alienating those who do not fit in, prompting questions of communal ethics and what is owed to sufferers (Sophocles Philoctetes 102–105).

The modern analysis returns to these stories and digs deeper beneath their symbolic interpretations to investigate the social implications of disabilities. Martha L. Rose's *The Staff of Oedipus: Altering Disability in Ancient Greece* suggests that disability was not uniformly derogatory in Greek culture but contingent upon context. She challenges the assumption of intrinsic negativity by showing how disabled people played significant social roles (Rose 23–34). Others propose that whilst the attitude was there, modern analysis reveals a more nuanced truth: coexistent acceptance and marginalisation. Looking at historical representations through social and political frameworks lets us understand them in new ways.

By reinterpreting racialized and disabled bodies in Greek art and literature, Sarah F. Derbew points out the links between physical difference and social hierarchy. Also pointed out is how impairments were often a manifestation of more general worries about power, self-identification, and belonging in the

polis' Plebeian world (Derbew 112). Lennard J. Davis, scholars of Critical Disability Studies, believe that in Greek portrayals of disabled characters, the societal norms are reaffirmed: these people are depicted as others. This in turn legitimizes the able-bodied ideal's physical and moral superiority (Davis 45). A third line of investigation looks at disability's implications for the polis. Civic virtue and public participation were linked to bodily fitness and wholeness. In his *Politics*, for example, Aristotle explicitly ties reduced value within the public sphere to physical impairment, reflecting society's cherished view of the body as central producer of the surplus (Aristotle 7.13). However, figures like Hephaestus complicate this picture. In many cases, people who were physically disabled embodied endurance, creativity, and indispensability. All of which erodes simplistic images. Scholarship today on these points argues current ingrained stereotypes are in fact only one more version of the past: they are not perforce even what your own eyes would see past them into history. If we appreciate this varied portrayal of disability throughout ancient Greek literature, we will find that disabled characters have various roles and functions indeed within a society. They are represented as the will of heaven, critiques of current society against its ethos, and unexpected mavericks of any sort. And it is the recent fine studies that add depth to these different portrayals, cropping their simplicity down to a more subtle shape. Modern and ancient readers alike can take heed of these tales, which present the still-current great problem in human life: how to live with difference in oneself and one's belongings.



ROMAN LITERATURE

In Roman literature we find disability has been depicted in various dimensions. Classical literary authors in various ways have mirrored their own reactions to individuals with disabilities. Some Taran Myths, some historical or fabulous theatrical performance all became enlarged societal messages. This is, most significantly, reflected in the part they played on stage. Through modern analysis, it can be observed that such portrayals of disabled characters in form of theatrical performances, actually reflect still popular notions about the disabilities, but scholars today need to re-examine these mythologically constructed perceptions and deconstruct meaning of their depictions. Taking Roman literature as a case in point, scholars have contextualised these works into historical context by applying contemporary disability theory and have thereby achieved more acute comprehension (Brundtland). Thus, narrations were used to thinly critique social prejudices.

Roman mythology and epic poetry often used disability to communicate divine will, human weakness, or community norms. For example, in the Aeneid of Vescio, the bleeding Aeneas, which marks his life's Yangs, arrives in the final battle makes him human indeed as well as a being who can keep going (Virgil 12.411–16–24). In the view of Christian Filebold, Aeneas' brief defeat mirrors the ideal of unchanging his body that we find in Rome, joining his individual process with the historical mission of worthy successors (Filiberto 218). Others have also argued that Aeneas's temporary disability represented symbolically the means by which Rome came through hardship; sources demonstrate that

Aeneas's antemortem disability reflects on the whole Roman people to accomplish what it's impossible for just even one man—much less a common citizen. Aeneas's affliction was, then, Virgil deliberately introduced disability to signal the epic grandeur of battle and to stress down-to-earth humanity behind this legendary hero.

Vulcan, the Roman counterpart of Hephaestus, provides a vivid example of how disability can be glorified in mythology. Though we disagree on the details, every version of events presents Vulcan's limp—Juno threw him off Mount Olympus after his birth because he was becoming tall (Ovid 4.171). His face, however, simply became dirty from weeping with his leg bones lengthening at intervals; or there is another explanation entirely—as initially marginalized him. Yet being a master craftsman ended up as what brought him back, because he made indispensable devices and potent weapons with which the gods could overcome their enemies effectively. Vulcan's unique status as a disabled person, Sarah Derbew argues, would challenge conventional romances about disability in which an unbelievably happy outcome is taken for granted. Rather, she stresses that by showing off his unique abilities and triumphing over hardship, Vulcan has turned an apparently disadvantaged fate into one of great significance (Derbew 90). Vulcan's story reminds us that ability comes in many forms and that when people always confront their powerlessness with skill, these in the end become their strengths.

Roman historians and biographers often used physical disabilities to comment on the virtues and vices of political figures. In Tacitus's Annals, Emperor Tiberius's deteriorating health is depicted as



symbolic decline of his authority and moral decay. This echoes references to his limping gait earlier in the book (Tacitus 6.38). Similarly, in Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars*, Emperor Claudius is reviled for his stutter and lame leg; yet he also has demonstrated clarity of mind enough to take up administrative decisions (Suetonius 30). Garland suggests that these portraits reflect an all or nothing link between outer appearance and adopted moral character within Roman society (Garland 103). Davis extends this criticism, explaining how disabled characters were often depicted in Roman literature as anomalies or symbols of societal decay (Davis 64).

The comedy and satire of Roman times often found humour in disability, either as a source of or as metaphor for moral failure. For instance, in Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus*, characters with speech impairment or physical deformities played the role of clowns (Plautus 4.1.45), a stereotype that ultimately kept disabled people marginalized. Similarly, Juvenal's *Satires* used disability figuratively, as an allegory for societal corruption and moral decay (Juvenal 6.485). Commentary on modern portrayals of such characters has highlighted their implications in trivializing disability. Garland writes that humour of this kind is symptomatic of social distaste for physical variation, using ridicule to paralyze the different (Garland 104). Davis claims these images reflected society's ideal of physical perfection, creating a binary opposition between normal stature and the odd, unnatural (Davis 64).

In Roman works, disabled soldiers are often treated as respected but marginalized characters. Lucan's *Pharsalia* describes mutilated veterans coming limping home from battlefields (Lucan 7.45).

Their bodies are the morbid evidence of Rome's expansion. These injuries symbolized a great deal of energy used up, sweat blood, and pouring down for no better purpose than shaping new provinces out of barren land (Lucan 7–8). While these injuries were regarded as marks of honour, the veterans who bore them were often excluded from civic life because of their physical defects. Such veterans, Chris Goodey notes, were admired for their courage and yet prompted unease as reminders of fleshly frailty, challenging Rome's ideals of strength and achievement (Goodey 96). The conflict of this situation is at once a tribute to them and an effort to keep cultural ideals intact.

Modern approaches from disability theoreticians and classics scholars have brought new light on our understanding of Roman portraits of impairment and call reduced analyses for what they are: extremely simplistic portrayals in allegory, claiming these images represent living reality itself only insofar as they signify allegorically. Laes stresses that diligence in context is indispensable. This definition draws disability out of its black-and-white prison: not "a disabled person," but someone more like "one-armed" or "blind there" depending on their job scope. One could not throw the same stones at all four corners simultaneously to break up our intersectional social edifice (Laes 78).

The work of Derbew is seen against an earthly canvas. A trained print journalist, she comes with an enquiring mind to the task before her and asks questions. It works towards elucidating deeply embedded injustices in society through thorough analysis not usually conducted into works such as these (Derbew 90).



Davis gives Classical texts a modern twist with modern disability theory. He has pointed out that disabled characters often serve to “deflate” ideals, providing a contrast to highflying physical and moral standards (Davis 64).

Garland examines the political, sociological, and even linguistic implications of this issue, showing how Roman literature itself, both fed parasitically on and contributed to public perceptions about what was ordinary or not in the realm of disability (Garland 104).

MEDIEVAL AGES

In medieval times, impairments were frequently interpreted through religious beliefs, either as punishment for sin or proof of divine will. Literature from the period often reflects such viewpoints: disabled persons being portrayed as embodiments of moral lessons, or else charity cases with begging bowls. Hagiography, biographies of saints: healed crippled people that in Roman times, when the worship of gods was fashionable, people merely abandoned to their miserable lot in life. This type of story once again demonstrates that impairments must have appeared as transient things--again enabling theologians and preachers to comfort themselves with the idea of a world to come where we will all be free from such ills. It is clear from all this, then, that these traditions went a long way toward shaping mediaeval (and indeed modern) attitudes towards disability and attitudes about فادية (the Arabic word for disability).

The association between disability and the implication of divine rejection is at least partially rooted in the Bible texts that were analysed and used

within the Middle Ages. It is this very line that to some extent affected medieval theology, toward a view that impairment could serve as a divine metaphor rather than being simply punitive in nature. There certainly are other biblical texts that associate the condition with impaired moral credibility, stigmatizing disability ever further (Metzler 48). Evangelical disability theory in the Middle Ages posited that disabled individuals were a metaphor for stunted spirits. Theologians such as Augustine contended that limitations of the body stood for moral corruption in one's soul; hence it seemed only appropriate to need spiritual redemption aligning bodily imperfection with such necessity (City of God 1.8).

Medieval literature captured the conflict between traditional Christian caring for the sick and disabled and the domain of pity and charity this strongly fell within. In his *Canterbury Tales* (circa 1400 AD), Geoffrey Chaucer presents his readers with figures such as the Summoner who encounter disabled people. These depictions reflected medieval mores, which held that compassion towards disabled individuals accrued considerable religious credit. Hagiographies also reflected the same ideas. Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* recorded miraculous healings of disabled people. St. Martin cures a paralysed body. Such events were seen as divine interventions, affirming both the sanctity of the protector and moral as well as physical change in subject. Such stories transferred afflicted persons to positions where they could receive grace passively, underscoring a need for their spiritual salvation as well as physical.



Hagiography religious performs this function of measuring saintliness and faith's ability transform ugliness into beauty. Healing unsafe in a physical sense but worthy of admiration would be attributed to miracles (such as those recounted in *The Life of St Cuthbert*). It is a characteristic of such stories that central torments are usually described as subsidiary and temporary setbacks, overcome at a later time by supernatural intervention, thus reinforcing the idea that disadvantage and ideal humanity are at odds.

As Catherine J. Kudlick saw it, such images trended to naturalize the sense that disabled individuals ought also to strive towards being 'cured' rather than being accepted of who they are. By linking physical recovery to spiritual redemption, hagiographies perpetuated the notion that disability was a deviation from both the natural and the moral laws.

Attitudes towards disability began to change with the beginning of Renaissance and, more significantly, Enlightenment. Although religious allusions continued, literature increasingly turned to physical explanations for disability rather than being concerned simply with a moral/spiritual condition.

The Renaissance brought human anatomy and the scientific study of anatomy to a new height. Figures like Andreas Vesalius, whose *De humani corporis fabrica* completely changed the teaching of anatomy and led to its modern form, questioned any old belief that disability was a mere matter of divine or moral failure. Literature from this time began to reflect this new learning.

In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the hunchback that adorns this king's foul mouth is a physical device

that encapsulates and markets his infamous moral and political cowardice (*Shakespeare Act 1, Scene 1*). However, critics such as David T. Mitchell argue that Richard's disability goes beyond medieval prejudices to offer commentary on the convergence of power with appearance and societal role (Mitchell 78).

Bertha Mason, as depicted in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, is a haunting figure who is also described by one character in the novel as "mad." Because of her mental instability, which is demonstrated by violent fits at irregular intervals, she has been confined inside an attic forevermore. But in creating this vision of madness, Brontë also entangles the ability/gender complexes, colonial exploitations, and social mechanisms for exclusion which nowadays we might call women's studies or race theories. For example, some critics believe that Bertha was abnormal because of her disability combined with a background that was profoundly different from Jane's normality and virtue (*Gilbert and Gubar 362*). This was actually a reaction to Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* being used as a realist lens to study disability. It is a work that offers more than just compassion for the poor and destitute. In this tale of woe, we can see how Fantine's ill health is just one measure on top of all her other misfortunes (that have been heaped up by society long before she was born) represented by Hugo as symptomatic for vice versa part two. Not only is she not traditionally "disabled"—in today's terms at least—but rather her pitiful condition somehow seems to reflect the greater vulnerability of people who are neglected by society. He employs her full tragic decline to expose society's callousness, which places its intent purely



on profit rather than human welfare, showing her as a martyr to social ills (Hugo 112).

While examining disability issues in her novels, Eliot also portrays Philip Wakem. He is a physically disabled man whose intellect and emotional depth mark him out as exceptional despite suffering from the physical impairment imposed on him during his birth. His love for Maggie Tulliver illustrates the biases and barriers confronting all sorts of disabled people. Philip's sufferings help Eliot critique Victorian society's rigid, superficial norms. Deborah Epstein Nord points out that it is through this very disability that he becomes a lens for examining themes of physical difference, isolation, and tenacity (Nord 53).

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë expressed Heathcliff's vulnerabilities—his physical ones and the emotional ones inherent in those situations. Heathcliff was not disabled, yet his marginalization and distress caused him to be seen as an outsider. Discrimination due to social class and race further compounded his plight. This is consistent with the tendency in nineteenth-century literature to interpret marginalization as intersectional. Authors like Julia Miele Rodas argue that Heathcliff metaphorically represents the dysfunctions within societies. So while he appears an outsider, his heartache also underscores how unadaptable people are, and for so long exclusion endures (Rodas 87).

TWENTIETH CENTURY AND CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

This period witnessed a fundamental shift in perception and portrayal of disability in literature influenced by emerging Disability Rights movements

and changing societal values, contemporary scholars began to see disability not as a moral failing or mythologically constructed divine punishment, but as an individual's identity. It was the time when we observe a shift in literary characters who began to emerge and provided them with active roles and resisted the stereotypical portrayals, reflecting the varied experiences of people with disabilities. By placing disabilities within the main discourse of human reality, these works contradicted ableism's cultural underpinnings and led toward a more inclusive understanding.

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is one example of this trend, the protagonist is Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old boy with autism spectrum disorder. Christopher's rigorous and logical narrative presents a deep inside. With this story, we see as much about the way things are to him, and our subjectivity toward those same events. Everything tells of keeping close to home in a world carefully organized for his benefit. But despite this distorted lodging, why should it not be called entirely lamentable housing or rather constructed according to his needs? This embrace of diversity ramps up, as Julia Miele Rodas points out that "the novel extends and reflects neurodiverse practical considerations in social history terms," also encouraging others to re-examine social norms. Yet it is Haddon's portrayal of Christopher which places him at the very center: through this book, he puts a human face upon autism and questions just who it is that puts barriers in his way (Rodas 89).

Drusilla Brooks's *The Lives Entwined* (2015) offers a multifaceted representation of disability, focusing on the daily ups and downs of living



experiences for youngsters at an institution that houses disabled people. Through its varied perspectives, this book reveals the iniquitous way disabled individuals are treated as well as marginalized by society. For example, one character, Isabel Hernandez, who has been hit by a wheelchair (Brooks 79), is no stereotyped helpless woman; totally the reverse of what she tries to model for readers and neighbors—by organizing for her own benefit a cooperative among acquaintances that serves all those involved with various impairments. A disability advocate and ableist critic, Brooks opposes the prevailing attitudes within mainstream society of how people become disabled. As Susan Williams says in a review of this book, the novel stresses this point continually: "This emphasis on connectedness runs contrary to popular notions central to ableist ideologies of individual rights and the importance of group" (Williams 199). A more nuanced portrayal of disability than one would find in cliché-ridden media stories and sales pitches.

In Yoko Ogawa's novel *The Memory Police*, an elderly man confined to a wheelchair can be seen as a symbol of resistance towards authoritarian efforts at erasure through memory work. As the regime eradicates memory, his paralysis becomes a sign connected with the theme of disobedience in the novel. Ogawa presents the coexistence of abilities and disabilities, while Mitchell and Snyder argue that the novel uses its disabled characters to demonstrate the freedoms beyond time-space limitations (Mitchell and Snyder 45). The old man's function as a carrier of memory scores a point for the value of diversity in counter-cultural cleansing.

LITERATURE REFLECTING ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISABILITY

Throw Out Perfect Crips Even the Literature has always been, throughout history, a mirror reflecting dominant societal attitudes about ability and difference. Ancient Greco-Roman authors portrayed disability both as physical condition and literary trope. Tiresias, the blind prophet, and Hephaestus, the lame god, were both characters representing in dramatic ways basic human truths. Although his disability caused Hephaestus to be rejected on Mt. Olympus, it also caused the production of exceptional works of art in its own right, showing how disability can serve as both a limitation and source of power. Similarly, menstrual craves' obstinacy or denial as occurred to Tiresias suited him well for the role of seer. This allocation of predictions with wisdom enabled blindness to become an equalizer which conferred discrimination in no way whatsoever upon those who were thus singled out. So much for elasticity and grace (Garland 103).

Disability is something that can be embedded in stories themselves. For Virgil in *The Aeneid*, Aeneas experiences his climactic battle with an injury, "a sign that this ships must go" (Virgil 12.318–325). This is highlighted by the temporary nature of his falling wounded to death; but it also suggests both vulnerability and determination in fulfilling his fate. *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius critiques or defends leaders like Emperor Claudius for their physical defects, such as stutters or limps (Suetonius 30). These works made disability into a narrative tool and a cultural metaphor, and so have continued to influence literature right down to the past. By examining literary works, perceptions



towards disability and the development thereof one can perceive how they both reflect and mold cultural attitudes, uncovering the way narratives interact with people's lives. Through literature's dual attitude of both propping up and criticizing established norms, it was possible for disability and difference to be criticized. Davis observes that it is also contested (Davis 64).

In medieval Europe, disability was often conceived as a symbol of sin or divine will and hence must be endured for God's reward if not punishment. This had a profound impact on the terms in which communities perceived and dealt with disabled people. Hagiographies, allegories, and other stories everywhere authored disability as a burden to be relieved through charity or equally as a spiritual test in which it was told that mankind must reap the rewards (Metzler 45).

In the 19th century, realism marked a turning point, critiquing societal structures that disabled people unevenly faced. The world of Charles Dickens and George Eliot in *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, of course portrayed such systemic injustices through characters such as Tiny Tim and Philip Wakem. Instead of disability being merely personal weakness, their work showed it to be a reflection of the unfairness in society (Dickens 45; Eliot 123). By existing as disabled people, rather than as objects, and telling their stories interwoven with class, gender, and morality, 19th-century literature established a base for more varied characters in later works.

The 20th century and beyond has seen even greater diversity and depth of disability representation. Contemporary poets like Mark

Haddon or Susan Nussbaum have displaced disability as a mere occasion with which fiction lets us live, moving it into becoming integral aspects of identity. These narratives cast disabled characters as active subjects, not simply reactive props. The works promote themes that today seem self-evident, and they suggest a resistance to expressions of pity and repression (Rodas 134).

These narratives undermine stereotypes and question able-bodied assumptions. They offer a multidimensional view of disability rather than inviting exclusion, depicting it as an experience common to all humanity that prompts understanding of others. Since referencing differing angles and problems, literature studying these pictures across the ages illuminates shifting cultural norms. Critics claim that literature molds society's concept, carrying conventional attitudes while allowing for imaginative remoulding. Historically, narratives often reflected current mainstream opinions; at times they magnified limited types of human experience through theological or state-sponsored summits illuminated by anecdote (Garland-Thomson 87).

More recent literary representations are not just artifacts of advocacy during the era of disability rights movements; literature now often spells out that disability is more than just a misfortune since it emphasizes inner depth rather than external overtness. By challenging assumptions and celebrating differences, contemporary narratives attempt to account for the various forms human variability can take. Whether reflecting or modifying social attitudes, literature involves itself throughout an ongoing dialogue of societal view and individual experience (Davis 78).



The capacity of literature to alter social significance remains central. While ancient works often made disability a pretty object through ableist eyes, contemporary authors are now confronting these norms, highlighting the many forms of human kindness. As awareness of intersecting oppressions has grown, literary portrayals increasingly present diverse voices and recognize that there are multiple valid ways of being. Literature continues to represent disability as one aspect within a full human life.

If traditional models of disability in Western culture and literature are to be scrutinized more carefully, then their biases and limiting assumptions will become clear. Such narratives provide rich insight into earlier societal paradigms. However, they cannot adequately capture the full range of disabled peoples' lives and experiences today. A reconstruction model based on scientific validation and disability studies emphasizes inclusion over simplification.

By respecting the agency of disabled people in a variety of social contexts, this approach is one way to do that. It is perhaps more obviously applied to developing a project within a given community so they've given us really powerful data. By challenging stereotypes and broad-brush statements, literature reveals nuanced understandings. Davis critiques the "normate" ideal that marginalizes those who fall outside perceived norms, while Garland-Thomson portrays disability as a natural part of humanity and asserts its essential role (Davis 64; Garland-Thomson 90). Reevaluating literary heritage from an advocacy perspective can make works take on a whole new appearance. Imagining characters like Tiresias and Tiny Tim as rounded figures instead of mere plot

devices opens up paths unheard of until now for understanding both in their period but also away from them. Modern perspectives need to be integrated into historical study – only this way will a canon worthy of our contemporary values of diversity come to be recognized. As traditional presentations of disability risk mirroring us in old ways of perceiving the problem, re-envisioning such narratives offers more inclusive opportunities. Embracing disability as an ever-fluid identity piece is critically important; literature sheds time-bound attitudes more naturally than other mediums can.

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