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Narrating Disability in Literature and Visual Media: Introduction

Anita Wohlmann and Marion Rana

“[T]here’s a new definition of disability and it includes power,” crip poet Cheryl Marie Wade proclaims in “Disability Culture Rap” (Wade 1992, 15). Her call for disability artists to take the stage as “proud freedom fighters” and to talk about disability “from the inside out” (Wade 1992, 18) has resulted in a thriving disability arts scene (cf. Layward 2011; Johnston 2012) which finds its expression in performing arts such as sign language poetry and theater, visual arts (such as Joseph Cartin’s or Keith Salmon’s paintings) as well as literary genres such as crip poetry. Some of the key interests of disability art are to give voice to disability culture and its aim to reclaim agency, to deconstruct the linguistic, artistic and cultural conventions structuring the meaning assigned to disability as well as the patterns of response they evoke, and to reassign meaning to those structures and responses (cf. Linton 1998).

Yet many representations of disability in art and literature are less progressive. The disabled body is frequently represented symbolically or metaphorically and is thus used to stand for or compared to a divine punishment, moral corruption or malice, a lack, a resistance to a culture’s normative ideals or an exotic Other. Such symbols and metaphors of disability transcend the physicality of the body by invoking (often negative or problematic) abstract concepts and ideas. Simultaneously (and quite paradoxically so) they also lend a material, tangible body to such abstractions (Mitchell and Snyder 2013, 222). Disability is thus potentially “a multivalent trope,” however the predominant uses remain strangely restricted in their connotations because disability is primarily a “mark of otherness” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 9). Therefore, symbols and metaphors of disability and, more generally, representations of disability carry the risk of misrepresentation and of “an essentializing and mystifying characterization” of disability (Couser 2005, 142). As a mark of otherness, disability is an ideologically marked counterpoint of normalcy that meanders between opposite poles, such as the glorification of dis-abled heroes as “supercrips” and their objectification and deformation as “monstrous bodies”.

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With its questioning of normalcy and its strong focus on embodiment, disability studies is much more than a minority-oriented niche; rather, it can serve as a vantage point to exploring the human condition per se (see Davis 2010). In the literary context, scholars have focused on the metaphorical and stylistic importance of disability in literary writing such as the 19th century novel which, in Lennard J. Davis’s words, “promulgates and disburses notions of normalcy and by extension makes of physical differences ideological differences” (Davis 2010, 17) – a statement that can easily be transferred to other modes and forms of cultural production, too. In that sense, Cheryl Marie Wade’s claim that disability writing is writing from the inside out and crip poet and theoretician Jim Ferris’s conviction that it questions and rejuvenates traditional literary practice combine in a simultaneously political and literary agenda: “Disability is the quintessential post-modern concept, because it is so complex, so variable, so contingent, so situated” (Shakespeare and Watson 2002, 19).

This special issue on disability directs its analytical and critical focus to how the key questions of disability studies can be transferred to literary studies and how disability studies as an academic field – while shedding light on the literary and cultural construction of normalcy and otherness and the means by which disability is created and reconstructed in literature – can embrace and enrich other theoretical frameworks.

**Social Constructions of Disability**

Academic interest in disability literature and disability in literature is part of the growing discipline of disability studies, which is concerned with the social, medical and cultural constructions of disability. One of its key theses is the conviction that while impairment may be a physical reality, the question of when and how impairment becomes “disabling” is largely determined by society’s treatment of impaired people (cf. Waldschmidt, Berressen and Ingwersen 2014; Siebers 2006). While on the rise in Anglophone academe, disability studies in particularly the German environment, if practiced at all, is largely confined to sociology and pedagogy (cf. Wimdisch 2014; Jacob, Köbsell and Wollrad 2010; Waldschmidt and Schneider 2007; Weisser 2005). By contrast, in the US and the UK the discipline has transcended the sociological field and now also comprises literary and cultural disability studies, sharing the latter’s concern in concepts of (figurative and embodied) disability and its negotiation in literary texts and (auto)biographical expression.

“Look with care, look deep./Know that you are a cripple, too,” Jim Ferris asks of his audience in “Poet of Cripples.” On the one hand, this two-fold invitation asks readers with a disability to be forceful and self-confident in their self-identification; to not define themselves
as physically challenged, handicapped or any of the other euphemisms established and rejected over the years, but as a cripple, and as such, as part of a strong and forceful minority group. With a non-disabled audience in mind, on the other hand, the line sheds light on a major argument of disability studies: The difference between being disabled and not being disabled is not a binary one. Rather, disability and able-bodiedness are part of a continuum of the many things that people’s bodies and minds can or cannot do. The construction of disability is based on a deconstruction of this continuum: Defining someone as disabled means drawing a (more or less arbitrary) line of demarcation and denying the existence of embodiment as a continuum. Whether we regard disability as a one-way street or not, as the clear and decided opposite of able-bodiedness, disability studies argues that negotiations of disability affect all of us: Just like constructions of blackness also affect white individuals, or constructions of femininity also affect men, constructions of disability affect non-disabled individuals. Or, in the words of Lennard Davis: “[T]he very concept of normalcy by which most people (by definition) shape their existence is in fact tied inexorably to the concept of disability, or rather, the concept of disability is a function of the concept of normalcy. Normalcy and disability are part of the same system.” (Davis 2013, 2)

The theoretical debate on disability to date has largely been determined by two contrasting concepts: While the medical model focuses on disability primarily as a health issue and defines people with disabilities as patients – objectifiable, pitiable, and literally “placed under disability” (cf. e.g. Finkelstein 1991; Oliver 1996; Shakespeare 1996; Barnes 2012; Tregaskis 2002; Simmons, Blackwell and Bayliss 2008) –, the social model defines disability as a social construct. It identifies systemic barriers and negative attitudes, and targets excluding societal practices as the real “causes” of turning physical, sensory or mental impairments into disabilities (cf. Oliver 1996). In that sense, as Oliver has famously claimed, “disablement has nothing to do with the body” (Oliver 1996, 35). One of the consequences of the social model is the recognition that disability, in the light of human diversity, can be configured positively, while actions inspired by the medical model see disability as an exclusively undesirable condition, and mainly seek to “cure” people from disabilities. While the medical model concentrates on the individual as the locus of disability, the social model focuses on society as the place where impairment is turned into disability, advocating that “[r]ather than pursuing a strategy of medical cure, or rehabilitation, it is better to pursue a strategy of social change, perhaps even the total transformation of society” (Shakespeare and Watson 2002, 10).
The social model has also met criticism. The fact that it excludes, to a certain extent, the body from any discussion of disability and has thus discursively turned impairment into “the absent presence” (Shakespeare and Watson 2002, 14) has been criticized strongly as denying an important part of disabled people’s biographies (see e.g. Crow 1996; Thomas 1999; Shakespeare and Watson 2002; Köbsell 2010). While, so the critics argue, physical differences are made meaningful through social interactions, and societal interactions of people with and without disabilities (as well as institutional interactions of people with disabilities) are determined by stereotypes and (negative) preconceptions, there is also an inherent corporeal dimension to disability: “The materiality of bodily differences, made meaningful in social context though they are, cannot be deconstructed away” (Staples 2011, 555), John Staples argues. Jenny Morris concedes that “[w]e are different. We reject the meaning that the non-disabled world attaches to disability but we do not reject the differences that are such an important part of our identities” (Morris 1991, 17). Thus, while the medical model unjustly emphasizes the body – the non-normative, abject body – as the sole originator and agent of disability, and hence focuses on technicalized options of re-aligning the unruly body with the “norm”, the social model eclipses corporeal aspects of disability and dissociates it from physical reality.

The binary configuration of disability as either socially constructed or medically determined has come under question lately, and several theoretical contributions to the debate have tried to find a synthesis of these contrasting models or to reframe the debate itself and propose a completely new way of thinking about disability. A “cultural model” of disability has been suggested as an alternative concept that brings together the historical and social contingency of disability as well as the individual, embodied experience of disability (cf. Snyder and Mitchell 2006). Such a cultural model is attuned to the ways that a disability experience may entail different and highly subjective ways of seeing and knowing the world (Adams, Reiss and Serlin 2015, 8-9). In refocusing on individual approaches to configuring disability, this and other more corporeally centred models have thus been emerging within disability studies, taking into account the individuality of people with disabilities\(^1\) and the

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\(^1\) The social model has been criticized for other important aspects that do not interest us here, such as its oversocializing of causes of disability and impairment and misplacing responsibility for disability, for underspecifying difference and being too ideological and too far removed from everyday practice (see e.g. Terzi 2003).

\(^2\) We follow the “person first”-approach by referring to e.g. “individuals with a disability” rather than e.g. “disabled individuals”. While the latter focuses on disability as a social construct, the former highlights the idea that disability is only one of the identity markers of anyone living with a disability and should thus not take precedence in their characterization: Being disabled is a secondary marker of identity and should not be used to define the individual as a whole.
material and physical factors of both their disability and their individuality in terms of capabilities, backgrounds, histories and resources (cf. Padden 2005, 508-9).

**Literary Approaches to Disability**

Literary scholars who have used a disability-studies lens in their research have emphasized that disability is not just a topic or trope that reflects a culture’s values, norms and prejudices (Davis 2013, 9). Rather disability is considered a concept that permeates and constitutes literary texts, for example, because characters with disabilities are ubiquitous in literary texts. Whether they appear as minor characters on the margins of a story or as central characters, which is rarer, their existence is considered foundational to the narrative structure of literary texts and closely interwoven with literary history and questions of genre (cf. Davis 2013; Mitchell and Snyder 2013). Davis argues, for example, that disability brings to the foreground “a hegemony of normalcy” (Davis 2013, 10), which is, on the one hand, historically situated in 19th and 20th century’s discourses on demographic developments, statistics, eugenics, biological determinism and an increasing medicalization of the human body. On the other hand, this hegemony of normalcy impacts the structure of narratives and divides characters into those who fit within the definition of normalcy and those who do not (Davis 2013, 9). What novels do then in negotiating and performing this hegemonic normalcy is a continuous “processing, comparing, constructing, deconstructing images of normalcy and the abnormal” (Davis 2013, 10).

In suggesting the concept of “narrative prosthesis,” David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder go a step further in their conceptualization of the role of disability in literature and literary criticism. Disability, to Mitchell and Snyder, is a narrative device that has two functions in literary texts: on the one hand, it is a stock feature of characterization as it lends to a character a set of idiosyncrasies that stimulate “our appetites for the exotic” and make the character’s story tellable (Mitchell and Snyder 2013, 228); on the other hand, disability is a metaphorical device, to be used, for example, as “a signifier of social and individual collapse” or “of the body’s unruly resistance” to normalcy (Mitchell and Snyder 2013, 222 and 224). For example, it is Captain Ahab’s missing leg, the physical marker of his disabled body, that makes him into an extraordinary character and only because of his disability do his peculiar behavior and actions, his quest for revenge, become interesting and narratable. Disability in literature (such as Deb Wolfe’s hunchback in Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills*, to name another prominent example) typically presents a problem, crisis or deviance to be addressed, solved or fixed in the course of a narrative – either literally or figuratively or both.
Thus the crippled or “monstrous” body infuses a literary text with motivation, causality and a narrative trajectory. In this sense, as Mitchell and Snyder argue, disability is a narrative prosthesis, “a crutch upon which literary narratives lean” (Mitchell and Synder 2013, 224) and therefore it is closely interwoven with storytelling and literary analysis. Disability as narrative prosthesis plays a double role: on the one side, it can ascribe (and determine) meanings whereas, on the other side, it can also destabilize these meanings by challenging the ideals of normalcy and by staging the multiplicity and open-endedness of meanings that the disabled body encompasses (Mitchell and Snyder 2013, 224). Therefore, as disability scholars argue, disability is part of the structure of literary texts and is thus at the heart of literature studies.

More than just providing a trope, topic or theme of writing, disability can also manifest itself in the form of a written or performed text: Disability art and literature, whether we define it on biographical, topical, or, in fact, effectual terms (see Rana 2015, 544-547) is often strongest and most evocative when it actively questions and transcends traditional form. Crip poet Jim Ferris explains that his style of walking is fundamental and essential to his style of writing: “If my meters are sprung, if my feet are uneven, if my path is irregular, that’s just how I walk. And how I write” (Ferris 2004, 228). Similarly, playwright Charles L. Mee draws attention to the way his corporeality – or rather: the corporeal way he experiences the world – affects his writing:

I find, when I write, that I really don’t want to write well-made sentences and paragraphs, narratives that flow, structures that have a sense of wholeness and balance, books that feel intact. […] That is not my experience of the world. […] To me, sentences should veer and smash up, careen out of control, get underway and find themselves unable to stop, switch directions suddenly and irrevocably, break off, come to a sighing inconclusiveness. (Mee 2000, 182; qtd. in Ferris 2004, 228).

At the same time, we should be heedful not to make too linear a connection between the author’s and the text’s embodiment and structure. As Petra Kuppers explains, the focus on an author’s embodiment may stand in the way of receiving the text itself as text, without the burden of knowing “what’s the matter” with the author and how that may have influenced her work (cf. Kuppers 2007, 94). And it may be misleading in any case: How can we say for sure whether or not an author has a disability? Language poet Larry Eigner, whose cerebral palsy has frequently gone unnoticed by literary critics and scholars and who has only recently been added to the curriculum of disability writing, is a case in point: His poems can of course be read with a focus on atypical form and the reverberations this may have with disability, but in fact, it has been read without them through most of its reception. Hidden disabilities in particular question the biographical definition of disability writing and trouble a form-oriented reading of it (see Rana 2015, 543-545).
Disability and Literary Genres

The question of how literary genres impact the representation of disability has occupied disability scholars who have explored how disability is framed, for example, within the conventions of the sentimental novel, the black women’s liberatory novel, gothic literature, realist or naturalist fiction. In her seminal study *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), Rosemarie Garland-Thomson examines how Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps embed their disabled characters in sentimental novels. By reminding their readers’ of their duty as Christians to be compassionate and to open their hearts to the plight of the unfortunate, Stowe, Davis and Phelps render disability into a sign of vulnerability that objectifies characters into innocent victims or explains a disabled character’s moral corruptness. Problematically, the disabled characters’ status of “lack” is compensated for through the “benevolent maternalism” of the female protagonists (Garland-Thomson 1997, 17). Such displays of benevolence are interwoven with an underlying ‘conversion narrative,’ which likens the experience and (successful) management of disability to a religious experience, a turning point in the lives of the disabled, who leave their old, wretched lives behind and are reborn into new and better human beings (Hawkins 1990; Cantor 2009). As Garland-Thomson argues, disability in the sentimental novel is usually instrumentalized: it becomes a means to an end for the white, middle-class benefactresses who pursue their own agendas of gender equality and social, political and economic participation (Garland-Thomson 1997, 17). In the end, the sentimental genre frames the disabled body as one that is to be overcome or cured (if possible) or in need of caregiving by sacrificial, Christian women. Ultimately, as Garland-Thomson finds, sentimental novels reconfirm the social hierarchies rather than challenging the premises of normalcy and embodiment on which these hierarchies are constructed.

In similarly problematic ways, realist and naturalist novels intersect with concepts of disability. Drawing their inspiration from 19th century discourses on scientific progress and biological determinism, realist and naturalist writers such as Honoré de Balzac and Emile Zola claimed a scientific, objective authorial position which renders the disabled body into a medical problem to be cured or a scientific oddity to be measured and documented. Realist conventions also inform personal narratives about the horrors of experiencing an able body being transformed into a disabled one. As Christina Crosby argues in her autobiography *A Body, Undone: Living on After Great Pain* (2016), many narratives of chronic pain and disability are based on the premises of hope, the possibility of overcoming adversities, and the
focus on personal growth. For example, narratives of ‘inspiration’ or ‘triumph over adversity’ (Heideman 2015; Couser 1997, 2009), in which a person with disability fights against all odds and eventually succeeds, follow the ideals of self-reliance, acceptance, perseverance, growth and overcoming, thereby ignoring the interpersonal, social, political and historical dimensions of disability. Such “inspiration narratives” – sometimes polemically called “inspiration porn” (Heideman 2015; Grue 2016) – are highly controversial: while they do present a somewhat positive message about disability, they construct people with disability as “objects of inspiration,” as Stella Young puts it (Young 2014, n.pag.), and thus as ambivalent role-models who are to be admired but also pitied and whose fate, despite the attributed heroism, remains something to be feared. In other words, even if disability is narratively turned into a triumph, it remains a problem, an abnormality, a horror.

The gothic or horror genre has a similarly controversial relation to disability. Personal narratives of disability, like Crosby’s, foreground the shocking sides of becoming disabled and, in doing so, convey bluntly and mercilessly the literal horror of chaotic, non-linear and difficult experiences. At the same time, such horror stories risk turning into sensationalizing representations, inspiring pity rather than empathy and making able-bodied readers feel good about their own, normal lives (Heideman 2015). Sensationalizing representations of the “horror” of disability have a long history. In the US-American context, the freak shows of the 19th century staged the extraordinary otherness and deviance of, for example dwarfs, giants, or people without arms or legs, and transformed them into exotic spectacles. Disability scholars such as Rachel Adams (2001), Robert Bogdan (1988) and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1996) have studied the historical and cultural contexts and meanings of the freak show and its cross-media proliferations, as for example in films (e.g. Tod Browning’s horror movie Freaks, 1931), photography (e.g. Diane Arbus’ work) and drama (e.g. Tennessee Williams’ Glass Menagerie, 1944). These (audio-)visual media invite modes of seeing that have been conceptualized as “staring” (Garland-Thomson 2006). In contrast to Laura Mulvey’s concept of the “gaze” (1975), “staring” implies “a constantly dynamic, delicate dance of mutual scrutiny, adjustment, call, and response,” which may hold opportunities for “mutual transformation” of starer and staree (Garland-Thomson 2006, 177 and 189).

Audio-visual representations of disability, such as television series and science-fiction films, are fascinating platforms to further investigate genre conventions and narrative devices and their potentials (or limits) to destabilize simplistic narrative templates of inspiration, decline, and conversion. Science-fiction films, for example, imagine alternative worlds, in which (super-)heroes use scientific and technological developments in new and potentially
inspiring ways (Allan 2013, Smith 2016). TV-series are based on open-ended, episodic narrative structures that enable narrative spaces and temporalities that, arguably, more adequately represent the chronic, incurable nature that defines many disabilities (e.g., Oró-Piqueras and Wohlmann 2015; Wohlmann and Harrison 2018). In this special issue, two contributions further develop these ideas on genre and narrative form: The first article by Gesine Wegner explores the freak show’s particular mode of staging disability and engaging our stare in “Relocating the Freak Show: Disability in the Medical Drama,” in which Wegner elaborates on the freak show’s involvement in mass entertainment and its more recent proliferation in such television programs as Grey’s Anatomy and House M.D. The second article, Olga Tarapata’s “Writing Disability/Disabling Writing: ET Russian and the Fragmentation of Texts and Textures,” examines the potential of zines and thus techniques of collage, fragmentation and intertextuality in ET Russian’s The Ring of Fire Anthology, in which the artist investigates the fluidity of the disabled human body and the ambiguity of disability experience.

**Disability Life Writing and Identity**

People with disabilities have increasingly reclaimed literary and audiovisual forms of representation and, in doing so, they have transformed their lived experience of being othered and rendered hypervisible as exotic objects into more active and self-determining subject positions. Autobiographical self-representations have been a privileged mode of expression for the disenfranchised and marginalized since the mid-20th century when new genres such as autopathographies or illness narratives became discursive forms for voicing protest, building a community and sharing experiences and advice with other patients or people with disabilities (Hawkins 1993; Couser 1997). Overlapping to some extent with self-help books and illness narratives, disability life writing has been on the rise since the 1980s (Couser 2013, 456) and has enabled disability writers to exert more control over their stories. These autobiographical narratives – as for example Jean-Dominique’s The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (1997) which recounts the authors experiences with locked-in-syndrome – challenge the boundaries of tellability. Today, there are numerous autobiographies, for example by people with advanced dementia (e.g. Cary Smith Henderson’s Partial View, 1998), whom one would consider incapable of telling their own stories. Apart from destabilizing the boundaries of the narratable and tellable, such narratives give a forum to those who have previously been silent or silenced. The third contribution to this special issue, Mita Banerjee’s article “Towards a Science of the Self,” discusses Temple Grandin’s autism autobiography, or “autiebiography”
(Couser 2013, 457; Rose 2008, 48), *Animals in Translation*, and demonstrates how Grandin turns the tables on medical or “neurotypical” discourses by suggesting that an autistic’s different ways of relating to and seeing the world affords new scientific insights that would be impossible without it.

Research on life writing and disability echoes some of the claims about the mutual enrichment of literary critique and disability studies. To G. Thomas Couser, an able-bodied experience does not necessarily inspire storytelling whereas it is “the marked case – the scar, the limp, the missing limb, or the obvious prosthesis – [that] calls for a story” (Couser 2013, 457). The wish to learn the story of a body’s deviance goes hand in hand with the modes of introspection, self-interpretation and self-presentation that are inherent in autobiographical texts. In this sense, life writing can turn the social burden of self-explanation, which people with disability often experience, into a creative, self-determined agency that allows for altering and refusing existing scripts of disability (Couser 2013, 458). However, even if the gaze is redirected and the narrative rewritten, vulnerability remains a central concern in disability life writing, particularly when relatives, caregivers or health care professionals write about a disabled dependent (cf. Couser 2003). Therefore, as Irene Rose argues, life narratives problematize the singular subjectivity of autobiography and negotiate “the tension inherent in the simultaneous functioning of the individual and collective in life writing” (Rose 2008, 46). By drawing attention to the specificities of the literary production process and by intertextually referring to a communal experience of a particular disability and its collective record, the writers of autism life narratives, for example, explore the entanglement of community and individual experience while foregrounding their identity as experts of their own experiences (Rose 2008, 47 and 52).

Identity theories and identity politics are therefore another important site in the literary representations of disability. Within disability culture (defined as the entirety of expressions of art, performance, political activism and community by individuals living with a disability that propose a social identity of empowerment and awareness), identity is an ambivalently coded concept. Early disability rights activists’ focus on disability identity is diametrically opposed to more recent endeavors to normalize disability: To advocate profound identity differences between individuals with and without a disability ultimately relies on concepts of difference that have been questioned by the social model of disability for years. Not surprisingly, therefore, questions of identity are a recurring topic in artistic, social and academic discussions of disability.
A definition of disability as an identity category, like gender, race or age, brings promises and problems: It risks essentializing disability into a defining characteristic, rather than an inherently unstable, contingent and fluid point on a continuum (Adams, Reiss and Serlin 2015, 5). This instability of disability identity comes into sharper relief when representations of disability play with concepts such as passing and masquerade. Whether they are explored as a literary trope, a cultural practice or “strategy of social interaction” (Siebers 2008, 117), passing and masquerade reflect on and render visible the artificiality and arbitrariness of disability as a defining identity category, thus forcing us to reconsider “the ongoing performative and contingent nature of disability as a marker of identity” (Samuels 2015, 137). One of the promises of understanding disability as a distinct identity category lies in the ways that embracing a disability identity can entail more positive, affirmative meanings, in which disability is a subjective state, a unique way of being in and perceiving the world (Adams, Reiss and Serlin 2015, 8). As Marion Rana demonstrates in “Deafness and Ethnic Identity: The Idea of a Deaf State and its Resonances with American Exceptionalism and Frontier Ideology”, the fourth contribution in this issue, many deaf people consider themselves a culture of their own, with a shared history, language and heritage. With the Deaf community’s diachronic perspective, their claims for a disability identity are closely interwoven with core themes of American cultural studies and history, such as exceptionalism and American identity politics, as Rana’s article illustrates.

The joining of identity studies with disability studies highlights parallels and differences that can be productive for developing both fields. For example, queer studies scholar Robert McCruer sees “Compulsory heterosexuality . . . intertwined with compulsory able-bodiedness” and draws attention to the fact that the crisis of heterosexuality and its authority can be productively furthered and exacerbated by an incorporation of disability and queer studies that both challenge and destabilize normative categories, institutions and practices (McCruer 2013, 375). The intersections between gender studies and disability studies have been explored by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson who argues for a “feminist disability theory” because both (dis)ability and gender are informed by “structuring institutions, social identities, cultural practices, political positions, historical communities, and the shared human experience of embodiment” (Garland-Thomson 2013, 335). With their shared interest in representation, body concepts, identity and activism, disability studies and gender studies can mutually enrich one another.

“Narrating Disability in Literature and Visual Media” continues this line of research and explores how premises and theoretical frameworks of disability studies can be made
usable for literary studies. Our introduction has mapped some of the scholarship that explores the potential of such a reciprocal enrichment; the four articles that follow focus on literary texts and visual media and illustrate how they inspire new insights for literary criticism and disability studies.

Acknowledgments
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