

***The Analysis of Representations of Disability in Western  
Culture within a Feminist Framework***

***by  
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***A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the  
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## *Abstract*

### *The Analysis of Representations of Disability in Western Culture within a Feminist Framework*

*by*  
*Josephine Pedersen*

This thesis examines the representation of disabled people in Western culture within the context of feminist theoretical analyses to compare images of disabled people with the representations of women's bodies that are found in cultural representations. The body of the thesis is comprised of six chapters which explore images of disability in six major cultural sites for such images: charitable advertising, popular women's magazines, literature for children, film, biblical narratives and pornography. My analysis of these sites suggests that there are parallels between the ways in which women's bodies and the bodies of disabled people are represented.

In Chapter 1 I analyse the discourse of charity advertising and the ways in which it presents disabled people in feminised scenarios. In Chapter 2 I examine the ways in which disability is allied to gender in popular women's magazines where certain bodily specificities and disabilities are associated with female characters. I consider in Chapter 3 the ways in which disabled characters in literature for children are presented as morally inadequate and lacking in self-control, exactly as female characters are depicted in Western culture. In Chapter 4 I address the identity of disability in film as a construction and in some respects as an illusion, as well as the role of disabled characters in the Freudian narrative of psycho-sexual development, and equate this with the role of the female in cultural expressions. In Chapter 5 I examine the cures of the New Testament and the ritual purifications of the Old Testament as a means to eradicate difference from the ideal of the male body. I argue that biblical narrative establishes women and disabled people as a violation of the ideal male body through their categorisation as unclean. In Chapter 6 I analyse pornographic representations of disabled women to investigate the ways in which disabled characters are positioned, like female characters, as the object of the gaze and as such as castrated and fetishised figures. The Conclusion summarises the argument of the thesis and briefly analyses some of the issues that arise around general concerns about the representation of disability.

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## *Introduction*

This thesis explores the issue of how disabled people are represented in Western culture<sup>1</sup> and the ways in which such representations are similar to, or different from, representations of women. I make the connection between the representation of women and the representation of physically disabled people because I perceive both to be firstly constructed in specific and particular ways in Western culture, and secondly, focused on the body (Morris 1993: 85).<sup>2</sup> In some senses, both the female and the disabled body become the texts that are inscribed upon them (Brush 1998: 25). They are “social constructs predicated upon physical characteristics” (Morris 1993: 85). In order to explore these connections, I shall start by defining the terms disability, gender and representation.

### Defining Disability

In the 1970s, Her Majesty’s Stationary Office (HMSO) and the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) used definitions which differentiated between disability, handicap and impairment (Barnes 1991: 2). Impairment was defined as “lacking part or all of a limb or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body” (UPIAS 1976: 3-4). In 1976 UPIAS defined disability as “something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from all participation in society” (UPIAS 3-4).

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term Western culture to refer to the high and popular forms of literature, art, music, film, images, photography and non-fictional narratives that are generated in Europe and North America (Williams 1976: 87-93). For a full discussion of the term, see Raymond Williams’ *The Long Revolution* 1965: 57-88.

<sup>2</sup> Feminism has long held that “society defines women in terms of their biological potentiality rather than as social beings” (Morgan and Scott 1993: 11), but all humans are “*embodied* creatures - not Cartesian minds that happen to be located in biological matter in motion” (Harding 1986: 661) although female and male embodiment constitute differing experiences (Harding 1986: 661).

The term handicap fell out of use as it was no longer acceptable to disabled people (Barnes 1991: 2). From early on in the disability movement then, a distinction was made between the physical element of impairment, the meaning of which remains apparently universal (Martin, Meltzer and Elliot 1988; Wood 1981), and the “social situation” (Oliver 1996: 25) of disability which may be attributable to social causes (Abberley 1987).

Medical models of disability tend to prioritise pathology; they often associate impairment with sickness (Oliver 1996: 28) and with aberration, with having “something wrong” (Oliver 1996: 30). Texts and organisational accounts that use a medical model usually focus on the disabled person as the point of origin of the disability (Finkelstein 1980). Social models of disability conversely perceive disability as a “social and political category” (Barton 1996: 8). Such models might define disability as stemming from the “failures of a structured social environment to adjust to the needs and aspirations of citizens with disabilities, *rather* than from the inability of disabled individuals to adapt to the demands of society” (Hahn 1986: 128). The social model views disability as originating in social oppression and institutional discrimination rather than in the individual (Crow 1992; Oliver 1996: 31). More recently, an attempt has been made to integrate the two models, and recover the body in definitions of disability (Hughes and Paterson 1997: 325-40). Tom Shakespeare has widened the definition of disability to accommodate prejudice (that is, intolerance or discrimination) in representation, language and society, as well as material exclusion (1996: 191-214). It is this wider definition which incorporates the acknowledgement of impairment within a socio-cultural framework by prioritising material and non-material discrimination as a fundamental factor in the experience of disability, which I intend to use within this thesis.

A word on prevalence: there are 450-500 million disabled people world-wide (Wilson “Leeds Castle Declaration...” 1983: xi),<sup>3</sup> and 6 million in this country (Morris 1993: 91). In

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<sup>3</sup> This constitutes approximately one in ten of the population (OPCS 1992).

Britain, most are women,<sup>4</sup> and in industrialised countries, where 30% are over 65, disability is linked to age (Wilson “The Scale of the Problem” 1983: 2). Therefore, “impairment is not something which is peculiar to a small section of the population; it is fundamental to the human condition” (Campbell and Oliver 1996: xii). Further, as the World Health Organisation (WHO) now defines health as “the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease” (Fenton 1989: 10), not only is this model apt to consider most people to be disabled at some time in their lives, it is also appropriate to regard disabled people as no less healthy than able-bodied people.

### Defining Sex and Gender

In this thesis, I shall use the terms sex and gender to denote discrete aspects of personhood. In the former category, female and male refer to “biological categories arising in a specific system of reproduction” (Connell 1993: 66). Many writers, feminist or otherwise, distinguish between sex as a biological description (Oakley 1972: 158) and gender as a cultural and psychological classification (Stoller 1986: 2; Busfield 1996: 32; Connell 67). But they disagree about the relationship of sex to gender (Flax 1987: 627; Graddol and Swann 1989: 8). Definitions of gender generally seek to challenge biological determinism.<sup>5</sup> Joan Busfield for example sees gender as “an analytical category designed to refer to and aid the understanding of the social and cultural origins of male-female difference in personal characteristics and behaviour” (32). In the same vein, R. W. Connell suggests that the “social relations of gender are not determined by biological difference but deal with it” (139-40), while V. Plumwood writes that gender is “the social meaning of sex embedded in social practices” (1989: 8).

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<sup>4</sup> In 1988, there were 3,656,000 disabled women and 2,544,000 disabled men in Britain (OPCS).

<sup>5</sup> Some works have celebrated the assumption that sex determines gender (Daly 1978; Eisenstein and Jardine 1979) while others have denied the validity of that differentiation (Butler 1990).

However, technological advances have fundamentally questioned the intrinsic link of sex to gender that is widely assumed (Bray and Colebrook 1998; Chinn 1997: 299; Flax 1987: 634).<sup>6</sup> Since one can now, up to a point, seemingly construct one's body in accordance with one's desires (Brush 25), the "female (or male) body can no longer be regarded as a fixed, concrete substance, a pre-cultural given" but it "has a determined form only by being socially inscribed" (Grosz 1995: 2). Transsexual surgery demonstrates that one can cross either sex or gender or both - one may choose (Prosser 1997: 309). Many people who call themselves transgendered claim that "it's a gender, not a sexual identity" (Prosser 10). Cross-gender identification in the forms of butch lesbian or gay drag queen, for example, may be the outcome of the knowing separation of sex and gender (Raymond 1993).

However, the usefulness of the category of gender has also come under attack (Jackson 1992: 31). Some have claimed its redundancy based on the widely held assumption that there is no distinction between sex and gender (Edwards 1991: 1-12). Gender has also been criticised as it divides the world into dualistic and binary categories as sex does - the meaning being generated through opposition and "founded on comparison and contrast" (Busfield 34). Others have celebrated it as a "linking" concept (Connell 140) which is more neutral than sexual terms (Scott 1986: 1056). In the late 1980s a new way of thinking about gender arose which examined the possibility of gender as a proactive event, rather than a passive acquisition. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, coined the phrase gender performativity to describe sex roles, stressing the presence of knowingness and agency. In her later book, *Bodies that Matter*, Butler clarified these notions by pointing out that gender performativity is not so much a matter of volition as of the "forcible citation of norms" (1993: 232), the enactment of culturally prescribed roles. According to Chinn, "performity [sic] is something everyone does in order to inhabit a gendered identity, without which one can't be a

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<sup>6</sup> Texts such as *The Naked Ape*, *The Imperial Animal*, *The Selfish Gene* and *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus* show that in our society, there is a marked assumption of specific sex/gender relations.

meaningful subject” (294). Butler claims that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1993: 25). It is neither natural nor optional instead “acts, gestures and desires” create an illusion of “an interior and organising gender core” (Butler 1993: 136). The self and sexual identity are constructed through the performance of gender (Chinn 300). Gender incoherence - drag queens, for example - shows “how women imitate femininity . . . and what hard work it is” (Chinn 300), and so reveal the *constructedness* of gender. In her transition from transsexual man to woman to lesbian feminist and beyond, Kate Bornstein provides living evidence of the pitfalls of an attachment to a gender identity which seems to require “a single or abiding ground” (1995). This is “invariably contested by those identity positions or anti-identity positions that it excludes” (Butler 1993: 5).

Mindful of these debates, I shall, for the purposes of this thesis, retain the notion of a relationship between sex and gender since cultural representations confer the latter upon the former: “we live in a world in which gender is a constituting social relation and in which gender is also a relation of domination” (Flax 1987: 637).

### Defining Representation

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines representation primarily in terms of resemblance but *not* sameness, as “an image, likeness, or reproduction of a thing”. Similarly, feminist writing has stressed the lack of direct correspondence between people and their depiction in texts (Bonner *et al* “Introduction” 1992: 1). The process of re-presentation involves some kind of modulation or interpretation (“Introduction” 1992: 1-2) which is, in itself, productive of meaning (King “Making Things Mean...” 1992: 15). A seminal work by E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*,<sup>7</sup> explores this process of creation by the artist to classify

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<sup>7</sup> In this work he also repeatedly asserts that no artist can “paint what he sees” (quoted in Allen 1992: 24).

and register our experience in terms of the known (1960: 144). Like later writers in the same field, he holds that the meanings we derive from images are based on shared assumptions between the producer and viewer, rather than on any inherent truth in the image itself (Allen 1992: 22).<sup>8</sup> The context of an image is essential to the meanings it gives rise to: framing and focusing (conscious or unconscious), the background and the cultural associations of the people and objects within (Allen 1992: 21-3).<sup>9</sup>

While it is the case that no producer of images “can be aware of all the meanings inherent in the images they produce” (Edholm 1992: 158), it may be that there are preferred meanings that the producer seeks to secure. Thus a producer of images selects a particular instant, event or image to represent out of the infinite number available (King “The Politics of Representation” 1992: 131). This choice refers directly to the aspect of representation which is “the performance . . . or depiction of a character” (OED): a reference to the agency and construction which is an integral part of the image (Kuhn 1985: 13). Because representations bear a complex relation to the “real” world, our interpretation of them will depend upon our cultural background. Any viewer carries a whole baggage of “social knowledges, assumptions, values” (Parker and Pollock 1987: 125-6) to decipher meaning.<sup>10</sup>

The complex relationship of representation to the real world is evidenced in the pornography debates which raise the question of whether or not women are abused in pornography (Allen 1992: 35). There is evidence to suggest that such representations convey the message that women are sexually available to men and invite domination and abuse (Dworkin 1981: 199-202). More insidiously, and this holds for pornography as well,

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<sup>8</sup> For a specific version of this argument in relation to literary representations see Ermarth (1998) and Fish (1980).

<sup>9</sup> See Barthes for extended discussions of this (*Image, Music, Text* 1982).

<sup>10</sup> There is much discussion on the topic of meaning; Dale Spender (1983) and Shirley Ardener (1993) assume that meaning is generated by social experience and therefore varies between the male and female, while for others such as Rosalind Coward (1984), meanings are created by the medium; for one account see Cameron and Frazer 1993: 116-17.



representations can limit people's possible subjectivities by depicting them in stereotypical roles (Kaplan 1986: 85) which are "immediate and economical" (Dyer 1993: 22).<sup>11</sup> However, Foucault's work has demonstrated that there is a possibility of considering representations to be a factor in discourses of power. If, as Foucault writes, "I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others" (1988: 39), the potential for change exists since "I" and "other" are placed in a dialogic relation which is not fixed.

Finally, the OED refers to representation as the idea of "standing for, or in place of, another" and it is in this sense that I use the term in this thesis, containing as it does, an acknowledgement of the inauthenticity of the image, and of its claim to embody the original (Parker and Pollock 125-6).

### Background to the Thesis

I was prompted to undertake this research by issues which arose from my undergraduate dissertation "Pornographic Representations of Disabled People" (Middlesex 1992) which itself was prompted by the work of Joel Peter Witkin, an able-bodied photographer whose principal subject is erotic images of the disabled (1995). This piece of research gave rise to a number of questions that could not be examined within such a narrow context, such as: is there a gender pattern to the representation of disabled people in Western culture and what is it? What status do disabled characters have in representation? What impact has the genome project and genetic engineering had on the instance and representation of disability? How does feminism address the issue of disabled women? How does abortion affect the relationship between gender and disability politics? In this thesis I have sought to address some of these questions, and in particular the first one, by focusing on a variety of

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<sup>11</sup> Dyer writes that most stereotypical representations of oppressed groups are "a relentless parade of insults" (1993: 1).

representations of the disabled body.

### Literature Review

As previously stated, the literature dealing with disability tends to adhere either to a medical or to a social model (Oliver 1993: 21). The medical model of disability prioritises pathology and imposes a presumption of biological or physiological inferiority upon disabled persons (Hahn 1988: 89), emphasising loss, inability and dependency (Barton 1996: 8). These works often associate disability with ill health (Shells 1982), and frequently promote prevention, rehabilitation and cure (Breachin and Liddiard 1981; Henderson 1983; Wilson *Disability Prevention* 1983). Much writing by disabled people similarly emphasises both the physical and the individual (Campbell and Oliver 37).<sup>12</sup> For example, Paddy Doyle's *The God Squad* focuses on the author's experience of childhood disability without reference to the social circumstances of the time (1988).

Paul Hunt's *Stigma*, a collection of essays published in 1966, was the first text to offer a critique of the medical model approach. It was succeeded by a number of works which, following Marx, presented a materialist account of disabled people's oppression.<sup>13</sup> These included Vic Finkelstein (1980);<sup>14</sup> Mike Oliver (1990); Paul Abberley (1987); and D.A. Stone

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<sup>12</sup> Other similar texts are Crossley and MacDonald (1982); Davis (1989); Doyle (1988); Hocken (1977); Keith (1994).

<sup>13</sup> Works such as Anderson and Clarke (1982), Donner (1976), Fenton, Fitton (1994), Frank and Maguire (1988) all follow this pattern.

<sup>14</sup> Finkelstein's work referred to social policy on disability and was followed by other works like Glendinning (1991); Hahn (1986); Morris (1993); Oliver (1993); Wolfensberger (1989).

(1984) who all perceived disability to be an inevitable problem of industrial society (Barnes “Theories of Disability” 1996: 44).<sup>15</sup>

During the same period, the 1980s, there also emerged an analysis of disability based on observations of non-material forms of oppression, although the “social model of disability” was not identified as such until Oliver’s 1983 work *Social Work With Disabled People*. It was around this concept that the disability movement became politically organised (Oliver 1983: 26). The unifying trend of these works was to cite society, rather than the individual, as the origin of disability (Hahn 1986: 128).<sup>16</sup> From this standpoint there has developed an extensive body of works which promotes self-help within the movement and focuses on the politics of personal identity, in much the same ways as the feminist, lesbian and gay, and civil rights movements have done (Barton and Oliver 1997; Groce 1985; Shakespeare 1993; Sutherland 1981).

In the 1990s, there have been several attempts to integrate the medical and social models.<sup>17</sup> Works by Hughes and Patterson, Spence, Alexa Wright and Tom Shakespeare on gender and representation have all striven to incorporate the living experience of disability, the lived body, with the politics of the disability movement, and this is at present a developing field. A further development from the personal identity and integrated model strands involves accounts which attempt to understand simultaneous oppression arising from disability and other issues such as race, gender or sexuality (Campbell and Oliver 125).<sup>18</sup>

The social model of disability also gave rise to a field of work on the representation of

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<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that disability did not exist in pre-industrial societies (Barnes “Theories of Disability . . .” 49), but that one of the effects of industrialism was to create a necessity for a devalued labour group (Wolfenberger).

<sup>16</sup> Barnes (1990, 1991); Barton (1996); Campbell and Oliver; Hahn (1988); Jenkins (1991); Oliver (1996); Ryan and Thomas (1980).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Hughes and Patterson.

<sup>18</sup> See Abberley; Begum (1992); Deegan and Brooke (1985); Fine and Asch (1982); Lorde (1984); Morris (1991); Shakespeare (1996).

disabled people.<sup>19</sup> The first, E. Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, published in 1963, suggested that disability in Western culture denotes moral inferiority. This was followed in 1964 by "Deviance, Disavowal and the Visibly Handicapped" by F. Davis, which continued along the same lines. The issue of representation was left there until the 1980s and 1990s when interest in the topic started to arise again. A stream of published material is now available.<sup>20</sup>

Literature on the topic of the body has a similarly recent history.<sup>21</sup> The first<sup>22</sup> significant work to be extensively concerned with discursive representations of the body was Bryan Turner's *The Body and Society*, published in 1984.<sup>23</sup> Turner draws extensively on Foucault's work: a series of texts on the relationship between discourse and power as evidenced through regimes controlling the body (1967; 1973; 1977; 1980; 1988).<sup>24</sup> Both Turner and Foucault are concerned with issues of control and surveillance which may become population policies, public health measures, censuses or customs control in modern social orders (Morgan and Scott 14). Sociology has further contributed to the field with works that maintain the constructed nature of the physical body (Featherstone et al 1991; Shilling 1993; Stafford 1993). They typically critique the idea of the body as a fixed or concrete given, and point out that the meaning of the body is generated through social context (Grosz 1995: 2; Connell 1987). A parallel strand of analysis, medical sociology, emphasises the role of social context in the construction of illness.<sup>25</sup> However, these theories have been accused of effacing the

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that there is a close affiliation between writers such as Oliver and Shakespeare, for example, as the former writes within a materialist and the latter within a non-materialist framework (Oliver 1996: 26-30).

<sup>20</sup> Ainley *et al* (1986); Barnes (1990; 1991); Biklen and Bogdana (1977); Cumberhatch and Negrine (1992); Garland-Thompson (1997); Gartner and Tom Joe (1987); Hevey (1992); Pinton; Reiser (1990).

<sup>21</sup> The body is "in" in both academic and popular culture (Frank 1990: 131).

<sup>22</sup> Prior works such as Armstrong (1983), Douglas (1966), and Foucault (1967, 1973, 1977, 1980) were newly taken up in the late 1980s and 1990s as part of the interest in body regimes.

<sup>23</sup> According to Morgan and Scott, prior sociological works had sought to distance theory from the body as it was felt to represent essentialism, for example Durkheim's *Suicide* (2).

<sup>24</sup> These works refer to the body as the "inscribed surface of events" and conceive of the body as a text (Brush 25).

<sup>25</sup> See Armstrong (1983); Herzlich (1973); Radley (1994).

“physical presence” of the body (Brush 41). Therefore, like disability theory, theories of the body have come to a point of reappraisal of that which they sought to deconstruct.<sup>26</sup> Some works of the 1990s have been more concerned with the presence of the physical body (Game 1991; Garber 1993; Scarry 1993; Scott and Morgan 1993; Shaviro 1993).

Feminism’s engagement with the body has been crucial to the increased academic interest in the subject (Frank 1991). Most first-wave feminism necessarily considered the female body to have a significant role in sexual inequalities: de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* sparked a debate on essentialism.<sup>27</sup> Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* also proposed that the female potential for motherhood defined women’s status (1972). Feminist debates have often focussed on issues related to women’s bodies (Grosz 1995: 31-3; Morgan and Scott 10) such as: abortion;<sup>28</sup> maternity;<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, there has been a resurgence in the science of biology generally, until recently a poor relation of chemistry and physics (Chatfield 1999: 137).

<sup>27</sup> The conviction that biology is destiny formed the basis of Nazism, racism, sexism, and slavery. The opposing theory, social construction, has been questioned in gay studies, where it is deemed to have complex political implications (Schippers 1989; Wieringa 1989).

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of the abortion debate see Chapter 2.

<sup>29</sup> Firestone (1972) and Oakley (1984) initially problematised the “myth of motherhood”. They had been preceded by the birth control movement which had emphasised a right to voluntary motherhood (Dubois and Gordon 1989: 40-1; Gordon 1976; Kingdom 1985; Reed 1978). In response, Rich (1979) argued that it is not the experience of motherhood that is destructive to women, but the institution of motherhood that devalues their work and isolates them in the home. Concern in the eighties shifted to test-tube reproduction (Arditti *et al* 1984), and then to surrogacy (Oakley 1984; Zipper and Sevenhuijsen 1987), maintaining the debate in the field of radical feminism (O’Brien 1981; Treblicot 1984). From a psycho-sexual perspective, Dinnerstein and Chodorow argue that women having exclusive responsibility for child rearing results in oppressive gender relations (1977; 1978). The contemporary debate is concerned with the multiplicity of demands that are made on women to have successful careers, manage domestic arrangements and take responsibility for their children, as well as on single motherhood.

sexuality;<sup>30</sup> pornography;<sup>31</sup> body image;<sup>32</sup> rape;<sup>33</sup> prostitution;<sup>34</sup> domestic violence.<sup>35</sup> In the 1980s technological interventions in the female body tended to be viewed with scepticism by feminist theorists (Arditti *et al*; Corea 1985; Savage 1986; Stanworth 1987). These texts demonstrate some ambivalence towards medical “progress” which centres on the manipulation of the female body. Douglas’s *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, among others, explores the spacial restriction of women’s bodies.<sup>36</sup> The

<sup>30</sup> The “sexuality debate” is well covered in two collections: *Pleasure and Danger*, edited by Carol S. Vance, and *The Sexuality Papers*, edited by Coveney *et al*. Other significant works on female sexuality are: Dworkin 1974; Snitow *et al* 1983; Stimpson and Person 1980; Valverde 1985; Vicinus 1982. More recent works include Jackson 1999; Jackson and Scott 1996; Stanley 1995; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1993.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the pornography debate see Chapter 6. Two important texts are Itzin *Pornography* 1993 and Lederer 1980.

<sup>32</sup> The feminist debate around body image initially focussed on weight (Boskind-Lodahl 1976; Caskey 1986; Chernin 1981; McKenzie 1980; Munter 1989; Orbach 1978; Ulanov 1979). There are those that refer to disability as an aspect of body image (Campling 1981; Galler 1989). See also Birke 1999; Bonner *et al* *Imagining Women* 1992; Bordo 1995; Shildrick and Price 1998.

<sup>33</sup> Brownmiller famously argued that rape is the mechanism by which “*all men keep all women in a state of fear*” [her italics] (1975: 5). She suggested that the legal framework for rape is derived from property laws, in which the crime is that against husband, father or brother. The British legal system seems to put the victim on trial (Adler 1987; Brophy and Smart 1985; Smart 1989). For Smart, the judicial process in cases of rape is “a process of disqualification” that fails to challenge notions of male sexuality and female capriciousness (1989: 35). Like Brownmiller, Griffin characterises rape as a crime committed by some men, but beneficial to all (1979) and other radical feminists also read rape as an instrument of patriarchal oppression (Clark and Lewis 1977; Dworkin 1988; Medea and Thompson 1974; Parrot and Bechhofer 1991). The American “rape crisis” (Fox-Genovese 1991; Roiphe 1993) of the seventies and eighties culminated in a series of “Take Back the Night” marches (Roiphe 8-50). Similar marches were held in the UK, for instance in the context of the Yorkshire Ripper period. These were motivated by “campus” feminists who extended the definition of rape to “whenever a woman has sex and feels violated” (MacKinnon 1987: 82). The new crime of date rape, which was to hit the UK several years later, has had extensive coverage in feminism (Dworkin 1988; Fox-Genovese; Parrot and Bechhofer; Warsaw 1988). In response, there have been criticisms of what is seen as self-inflicted victimhood (Estrich 1982; Friedan 1981; Roiphe). The very recent concern has been with the extent to which rape is committed during war. During the Kosovo and Chechnya crises, rape seems to have been endemic.

<sup>34</sup> Women in the nineteenth century were concerned with the abuse of women in prostitution and the policing of women in the face of the spread of venereal disease (Bristow 1977; Dubois and Gordon; Epstein 1981; Gorham 1978; Hyam 1990: 56-79; McHugh 1980; Vicinus 1972; Walkowitz 1980, 1984; Weeks 1989: Chapter 5). Although we may consider their family protection movement to be conservative now (Dubois and Gordon 42), the issue of commercial sex and its relationship to autonomy or oppression remains complex (Walkowitz 1984: 57). There have been a number of works calling for the legalisation of prostitution (Pheterson 1989; McLeod 1982) but others have disagreed (Barry 1984, 1991; Brownmiller; Grobbith 1991; North 1970), arguing that there is a “fundamental exploitation” in prostitution (Edwards 1981: 89). Several auto/biographical works of the lives of prostitutes are in publication: Jaget 1980; Marcus 1971; Roberts 1986, and have contributed to discussions of coercion in prostitution.

<sup>35</sup> Women’s vulnerability to violence in the home has been attributed to their unequal position in marriage (Brophy and Smart; Clark *et al* 1987; Dobash and Dobash 1980; McCann 1985; Smart 140-1). The difficulty in legislating for the private sphere has contributed to the problem of protecting women and children from male violence (Pahl 1985). The usual solutions may be more traumatic than the abuse (Smart 144). See also Lees (1997) and Hearn (1998).

<sup>36</sup> See also Ardener (1993); Grosz (1995); Hey (1986); Imray and Middleton (1983); Rogers (1988).

1990s feminist work on the body has been diverse.<sup>37</sup> Feminism has recently sought to distance gender from the female body, and therefore it is common to find works which problematise this link.<sup>38</sup> In *Powers of Horror*, for example, Julia Kristeva proposes that the maternal body is a source of fear and repulsion for both men and women. Others see much that is to be celebrated in the body's potential for self-construction and change (Balsamo 1992; Davis 1993). For Cixous and Irigaray "women's corporeal experiences can be the source of a rich culture" (Waterhouse 1993: 110) and Moi describes Cixous' work as "writing and voice . . . woven together. The speaking woman is entirely her voice: she physically materialises what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body" (1985: 114).

### Key Texts for Analysis

Of those listed above, there are three texts which have significantly influenced me during the course of this thesis: David Hevey's *The Creatures Time Forgot*, Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* and Susan Suleiman's *The Female Body in Western Culture*.

Published in 1992, *The Creatures Time Forgot* brought together a number of related issues at stake in visual representations of disabled people. Hevey starts with an identification of the wealth of representations of disabled people which our culture generates (9) and demonstrates that overwhelmingly the locus of control remains with an able-bodied producer (9-11). He recognises the widespread use of disability in high and popular culture to signify evil, bitterness, inadequacy and self-destruction (12-13), as well as the antithesis of civilisation (13). Uniquely,<sup>39</sup> he also includes characters such as Frankenstein's monster in his analysis (12). This is relevant to my analyses since many forms of representation utilise covert images of disability, such as figures who are misshapen rather than disabled in the narrow sense of

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<sup>37</sup> See Gatens (1988); Holland and Ramazonaglu (1992a); Martin (1987); Sawacki (1991).

<sup>38</sup> See Bruno (1992); Clover (1992); Jaggar and Bordo (1992); Mulvey (1991); Ussher (1989; 1997).

<sup>39</sup> I discuss this aspect in some depth in the Conclusion.

the word. My chapter on children's literature examines this issue through the images used in the *Goosebumps* series, and the characters drawn by Roald Dahl. Hevey writes two chapters examining charitable advertising (18-52), arguing that it is based on a medical model of disability (3) which is beneficial for the charitable organisations themselves (19-20) and the able-bodied people who control them (22). Some of the key issues he raises in the context of charitable provision are the allocation of expenditure, negative and nihilistic images of disability and the sub-agenda of what Hevey calls "eugenics" (30-1) which is probably more familiar as genetic engineering. The second half of Hevey's book explores the differences between the self imagery of disabled people and able-bodied image makers' use of photography to create freakish depictions of disabled people (53-74), using them as "'other' for the consumption and alleviation of able-bodied fears, guilt and collusion in [their] oppression" (4). Hevey discusses his own photographic texts (75-93), and the extent to which his experience of disability has influenced his work (90-3). I develop these premises in my chapter on pornography, exploring the parallel between the construction of women and disabled people as "other". In my conclusion, I refer to his exploration of how this objectification may be changed by disabled artists (94-119). He seeks to develop a "theory of practice" (6) with which to address oppressive representation (105-6) by looking at the work of two artists, Jo Spence and Jessica Evans, who are working to create and promote positive images of disability (120-41). Hevey concludes by calling for "*image mapping and subject/object interaction*" [his italics] which binds the abstraction of representation to the lived experience of disability (118) and makes the representational issue central to the political disability movement (119), a theoretical move that is necessary if the disability movement is to address discrimination on all levels. In this thesis I have analysed representations of disabled people as Hevey has challenged.

Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* approaches, rather than defines, the notion of the abject



(1982: 1). She develops her themes of otherness, the prelude to abjection (1982: 10), and of primal repression (1982: 1-15), wherein lies the origin of the structures of religious defilement and sanctity as well as perversity generally (1982: 15-8). Referring to Celine,<sup>40</sup> Dostoyevsky, Proust, Joyce, Borges, Artaud, Plato and Aristotle (1982: 18-31), Kristeva identifies in the work of each a different articulation of the abject. Although she does not explicitly refer to disabled people in her work, her theories can be understood to be applicable to any group that is perceived as “other”. This analysis is therefore relevant to my work in its reference to objectified images of women and the theories of the psychic origin of repulsion. A further dominant theme of the work is Kristeva’s analysis of biblical abjection: the biblical presentation of the feminine as unclean (Lechte 1990: 164). I have applied this analysis to the disabled body in my chapter on biblical representations of disability. Kristeva identifies the incest prohibition in biblical and modern society as emblematic of “a specific economy of the speaking subject” (1982: 68), and ultimately of primary narcissism (1982: 63), but as based both in the desired and the forbidden (1982: 56-69). Detailed biblical references contribute to Kristeva’s argument that sublimation and perversion intersect in religion (1982: 89); organised around the pure/impure: male/female distinction, religion negotiates this polarisation via the act of sacrifice, so connecting the oppositional categories by violence (1982: 94-5). The boundaries between the categories which appear so distinct are shown to be fragile after all (Lechte 164-5) and it may be their vulnerability that contributes to the rigidity of the symbolic categorisation. Dietary prohibitions divide the natural world into a “system of logical oppositions” (Kristeva 1982: 99) ordered by the divine (1982: 95-104), a logical opposition that is carried on in gender distinction and, I argue, in abled/disabled

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<sup>40</sup> Chapters 6 to 11 relate the work of Louis-Ferdinand Celine to Kristeva’s concept of the abject (133-210). Celine’s “taming of abjection” (1982: 148) is identified by Kristeva in his fascination with suffering, horror, the scatological and the maternal body (1982: 148-56). She finds his work rich in maternal significance (1982: 157-73), linguistic authenticity (1982: 188-206), and “rage against the symbolic” (1982: 174-87). Kristeva’s final chapter draws together her themes of the “struggle of literary inscription” (1982: 208) and the abject (1982: 207-10).

distinctions. The biblical insistence on the impurity of blood extends to the female body and thus to the maternal body (1982: 103-4), so that women are denoted as polluted and polluting. Through food and the maternal body, the abject undergoes a process of “interiorization” (1982: 113) in the New Testament (1982: 114), which becomes the burden of sin (1982: 119),<sup>41</sup> carried within the body (1982: 120-1). I consider how this burden of sin becomes symbolised by disability. Kristeva details the defiling relationship of excrement and maternity as significant for sexual difference (1982: 71). Language and culture, she writes, set up a “separation” and “order” which negates “maternal authority” (1982: 72). It is this structure of separation and order that contributes to the construction of the bodies of women and disabled people as oppositional to the standard male body.<sup>42</sup>

Suleiman’s edited collection *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* informs this thesis in its exploration of the “place(s)” which the female body has in the Western imagination (Suleiman 1). Her study is wide-ranging, as is mine, taking in literature, religion, history, visual art, film and medical discourse. The thematic subheadings that Suleiman chooses reflect her perception of the “problem” of the representation of the female form: love, death, maternity, illness, image and difference. There is a clear overlap in these subject areas with the representation of disabled people who are also depicted as ill and different. Various essays in the collection relate to chapters of this thesis. Carol Armstrong and Mary Ann Caws both examine “objecthood” (Armstrong 1986: 223) in the work of Degas and Surrealist Art respectively (1986: 223-42; 1986: 262-87). Their concern with the exchange between the producer of the image and the viewer is something I share,<sup>43</sup> and

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<sup>41</sup> The supremacy of language is asserted through the confession of sins: the speech act eclipses all other acts of atonement (131).

<sup>42</sup> Kristeva has been criticised on a number of counts. Her work can be interpreted as essentialist since she refers to the feminine as identified with the female maternal body (Flax 1987: 632). Irigaray seeks to validate a feminine language (1985), while Kristeva sees danger in this approach.

<sup>43</sup> Nancy Vickers’ essay in this collection is also concerned with the notion of exchange and competition (1986: 209-22).

explore in Chapter 1. Noelle Caskey (1986: 175-92) associates obesity with female sexuality, a connection that I have also found in the tabloid press (see Chapter 2). Mieke Bal (317-38) analyses the first chapters of Genesis, perceiving a progression routed through choice, sinful action and punishment in the form of bodily self-awareness. This impulse is also evident in the narratives of disabled characters in the Old Testament (see Chapter 3: The Disabled Body in the Bible). One of the issues I consider in Chapter 4 of this thesis is the apparent relationship between femininity, passivity and disability exhibited in some Victorian literature for children. Ellen Bassuk also examines this relationship in her essay on the Victorian rest cure (1986: 139-51). Mary Ann Doane analyses this same relationship of the feminine to the pathological in her essay on films of the 1940s (1986: 152-174). Janet Bergstrom (1986: 243-261) in addition notes the expression of evil in physical deformity.<sup>44</sup> Vickers' (209-22) analysis of Shakespeare's *Lucrece* further sees monstrosity as a punishment for, and therefore a mark of, sexual sin (220), a thematic link that I explore in several chapters.

### Structure of This Thesis

The organisation of this thesis reflects a trend towards heightened genderisation across different kinds of representations of disability. The thesis moves from depictions of disability in the advertisement of charitable provision, in which gender is of comparatively less overt significance, to the representation of disability in certain types of pornography, where gender is perhaps *the* fundamental issue.

Chapter 1 analyses the discourse of charity advertising. I examine campaigns by The Multiple Sclerosis Society and by Scope, which raises money for people with cerebral palsy. Both cerebral palsy and MS are highly visible, and both charities are prominent in advertising

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<sup>44</sup> She looks at the films of Murnau, notably *Nosferato* (1922) and *Faust* (1926). I explore the ideas noted here in Chapter 5: The Disabled Body in Film.

and in the media. They are very conscious of the images they portray: Scope has undergone a deliberate change of public image to distance itself from the negative connotations of The Spastic Society and MSS uses “glossy” advertising. Each organisation has to deal with the particular difficulty of portraying a disfiguring disability in an engaging way. This chapter explores the representations that they use to engage the viewer, and the implications these have.

In Chapter 2 I consider the role of women’s magazines in the individualisation of disability. Using examples from *Best*, *Eva*, *Chat*, *Woman*, *Take a Break* and *That’s Life!* I examine the use of “readers’ stories” of disability. I link these representations to the now extinct circus freak show in their use of the grotesque to engender excitement and in the use of humour in the depiction of disability. Feminist deconstructions of women’s magazines are central to this chapter, offering insights into the representation and marketing of the female body to women and into the underlying constructions of texts aimed at women. I explore how these insights may be adopted to analyse images of disability in popular magazines and the significance such images may have for the disabled political movement.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the depiction of disability in children’s literature. There is much material in Victorian literature for children: *Heidi*, *Treasure Island* and *The Secret Garden* all feature disabled characters. In this chapter I investigate the disabled characters’ part in the narrative as well as their significance in the light of contemporary concerns with psychoanalysis, muscular Christianity<sup>45</sup> and empiricism<sup>46</sup>. Later literature for children, works such as *Masks* and the *Goosebumps* series, continue to depict disabled characters as thematic focal points. Considering these, I explore society’s concern with the developing child and how one’s own (practised or aspirational) values are expressed in what we write for our

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<sup>45</sup> A “Christian life of cheerful physical activity” (OED).

<sup>46</sup> Empiricism developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “stimulated by the rise of experimental science”. It denies a priori concepts but attributes all knowledge to sense-experience (OED).

children. The contribution of feminist criticism to the field of criticism on children's literature has been substantial and I draw on these critiques for my argument.

Chapter 4 examines the representation of disabled characters in film. Looking at two films, *The Usual Suspects* and *Boxing Helena*, feminist film theory is applied to their depictions of disabled narrators, comparing the role of disabled characters in film with that of female characters. Unusually,<sup>47</sup> a disabled character is the protagonist in both these mainstream films, thus offering an opportunity to explore in some detail the meanings that are conferred on disability in film, its relationship to the narrative, its function in the text and its purpose in relation to the subject. These films address the identity of disability as construction and in some respects as illusion.<sup>48</sup> In their use of performance, both protagonists' roles allow a consideration of the knowingness and agency implied in representation.

Chapter 5 focuses on the ambiguity of the disabled body as it appears in biblical narrative. As the Bible has been a powerful influence on Western culture from *Paradise Lost* to *Citizen Kane*, the representation of disability in the Bible will necessarily be a significant indicator of the origins of some of the stereotypes of disability. I consider both the Old and New Testaments in this discussion, acknowledging their historical and narrative differences. In this chapter I am concerned with the relationship of physicality to spirituality: with the bodily metaphors that are utilised to demonstrate the experience of the non-material world, the character of the Jewish or early Christian Church, and the nature of the divine. As I shall demonstrate in this chapter, the Bible genderises disability by depicting male and female characters as afflicted with differing conditions or illnesses.

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<sup>47</sup> There have been other films such as *My Left Foot*, *Children of a Lesser God*, *Shine*, which also feature a disabled central character. It is worth noting that such characters are often presented as extraordinary beings, "compensating" for their disability by being exceptionally beautiful, perceptive, or in some other way marked out in addition to their disability.

<sup>48</sup> This will be more fully explained in the relevant chapter.

The final chapter analyses pornographic representations of disability. I examine the ways in which pornography depicts disabled women. Feminism has examined pornography extensively, investigating the structures of the genre to reveal the mechanisms of misogyny which have contributed to women's position in society. I have applied these feminist analytical frameworks to pornography that depicts disabled people in order to explore the parallels between the two. Theories of psycho-sexual development clearly have significance in this arena, allowing a combined analysis of gender and physical ability.

It is from these strands: representational work on disability, the body, and women, that this thesis arises. I have decided to analyse a variety of representations which reflect the diversity of imagery of disability that exists in Western culture. Some depictions of disabled people are very clear: the lepers of the Old Testament, those with sensory impairments in the New Testament, Clara of *Heidi* and those depicted in charitable advertising have disabilities that the viewer/reader can easily identify. They have clearly stated moral meanings which draw a parallel between the physical and moral states of the individual. Other representations depict covertly disabled characters, such as the monsters in children's fiction,<sup>49</sup> and these present more insidious moral analogies. Many depictions fall somewhere between these two extremes, such as Colin of *The Secret Garden*, Keyser Suzet of *The Usual Suspects* and those depicted in the tabloids. These characters have conspicuous physical disabilities but the exact nature of the disabilities' origin is often vague: the hub of these narratives lies in their resolution through moral or medical redemption. By choosing this spectrum of representations I emphasise the extent to which Western culture draws on a wealth of imagery of disability to reference its ethical landscape. The feminist analyses of representations of women in culture encompass the range of moral meanings that are invested in women's bodies. These analyses offer a device for investigating the significance of the disabled body

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<sup>49</sup> A further example of this type of representation is Frankenstein's monster.

and material for drawing comparisons between the disabled and the female body.

Semiology enables the viewing of all cultural phenomena as sign<sup>50</sup> systems (Barthes 1977: 17; 1967), comprised of the signifier<sup>51</sup> and the signified.<sup>52</sup> The relevance of Saussure's<sup>53</sup> semiology to my work is the transformation of signifier (for example, the disabled body) into a sign through its investiture with signification. Roland Barthes uses the example of a bunch of roses to illustrate this transformation: a bunch of roses as a horticultural object is a signifier, but once inveighed with signification of love, passion, or marriage it becomes a sign (Barthes *Mythologies* 1982: 113). I contend that the disabled body undergoes the same development from a physical entity to a sign connoting a plethora of meanings: moral inadequacy, lack of character, evil, victimisation, alienation, spiritual darkness, lack of self-control, dependence, suffering, frustration, freakishness, otherness, masochism and castration. This contention is a development of the work of feminist theorists who have been concerned with the significance of women's bodies as semiotic object (Bloomingdale 1972; Brooke 1985; Brooke-Rose 1986; Clover; Jay 1987; Kristeva, 1982, 1986; Bal 1990; Modleski 1988; Mulvey 1985, 1991; Russo 1986).

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<sup>50</sup> The sign is "a basic element of communication, either linguistic (eg: a letter or word); or non-linguistic (eg: a picture, or article of dress); or anything that can be construed as having a meaning" (Baldick 1990: 205), or "the union of a form which signifies – the signifier – and an idea signified – the signified" (Stam *et al* 1992: 8).

<sup>51</sup> The signifier is "the concretely perceptible component of a sign as distinct from its conceptual meaning (the signified). In language, this may be a meaningful sound, or a written mark such as a letter or sequence of letters making up a word" (Baldick 1990: 205), or "the sensible, material, acoustic or visual sign which triggers a mental concept" (Stam *et al* 8).

<sup>52</sup> The signified is "the conceptual component of a sign, as distinct from its material form, the signifier" (Baldick 1990: 205). It is the "absent mental representation evoked" (Stam *et al*: 8).

<sup>53</sup> The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) founded semiology (Saussure 1966), the study of the sign system in which "the relationship between the signifier and the signified is ... arbitrary; that is, based purely on social convention rather than on natural necessity" (Baldick 1990: 205). John Locke had also referred to "the doctrine of signs", stressing their subjective quality in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). The two other terms that are central to semiology are *langue* and *parole*; *langue* being "the language system shared by a community of speakers" and *parole* being "the individual speech acts made possible by language" (Stam *et al* 8). This aspect of Saussure's work is known as "the social contract" (Graddol and Swann 5-6) and is not a dimension I have dealt with in this thesis.

## ***Chapter 1: The Disabled Body in Charity Advertising***

This chapter is concerned with images of disabled people in advertising. I shall look at two charities and their marketing methods: Scope<sup>1</sup> and the Multiple Sclerosis Society<sup>2</sup> (MSS), which cater for the needs of people with cerebral palsy<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> What used to be the Spastics Society exists to aid people with cerebral palsy, their families and their carers (*Campaign for Change*). Scope's Mission Statement is: "We believe that every individual has the right to control his or her own life and to share in the opportunities, enjoyment, challenges and responsibilities of everyday life. We believe that care and concern for each and every person and respect for their human rights is central to any caring community. We believe that people with a disability are handicapped by the attitudes of others at home, in the community, at work, and in national and local government" (Scope 1997: 1).

<sup>2</sup> Formed in 1953, the Multiple Sclerosis Society (MSS) provides support for people with multiple sclerosis, their families and professionals who work in this field (MSS 1995: 15). The society provides financial assistance to its users, including help with the purchase of equipment, mobility and communication aids, home adaptations and respite care (MSS 1995: 17). With over 360 branches in mainland Britain and Northern Ireland, MSS counts most of the 80,000 people in the U.K. with multiple sclerosis (MS) as members, as well as their families and carers (MSS 1994: 16 and 24). The Declaration of the MSS is: "We declare ourselves to be an association of people and organisations throughout the four nations of the United Kingdom who work together in pursuit of the common goals set out in the following constitution. We are registered as a charity, and operate under English law and the requirements of the Charity Commission. As a charity, our beneficiaries are people with multiple sclerosis and those affected by it and by allied conditions, including carers, families and friends. We are committed to equality of opportunity. Everyone affected by MS is encouraged to benefit from our services and to support or participate in our activities, without regard to age, health status, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, colour, race or religion. As multiple sclerosis is a condition without respect for national boundaries, it follows that we work at an international level wherever it is appropriate to achieve our goals. Our ultimate aim is the eradication of multiple sclerosis. Until that is achieved we commit ourselves to work with all the skills and resources at our disposal, and within the powers and means set out in our constitution. We will work in partnership or on behalf of everyone with, or affected by, multiple sclerosis to secure the fullest possible independence, dignity and self-determination. We welcome the co-operation of all who subscribe to our objects and the participation of all who agree to work in accordance with the means set out in the constitution and the policies established by our governing body" (MSS, *Our Constitution* 1994: 1).

<sup>3</sup> Cerebral palsy is a "group of nonprogressive neurological disorders manifested by motor impairment in young children" (Murphy *et al* 1993: 13). It is a physical impairment resulting from a failure of part of the brain to develop, either in childhood or before birth (*What is Cerebral Palsy?*). There can be several origins of the condition: infections such as rubella in pregnancy, infections in early childhood such as meningitis or encephalitis, genetic inheritance, complications in labour, extreme prematurity, bleeding or blocked blood vessels (*What is Cerebral Palsy?*). The disability usually takes the form of movement impairments, with people experiencing problems in walking, talking, feeding themselves, using their hands, although some are hardly affected (*Campaign for Change*). In some cases other parts of the brain are affected and the person experiences learning difficulties and sensory impairments (Blair and Stanley 1985: 616). About one quarter to one third of children and one tenth of adults with cerebral palsy have epilepsy (*What is Cerebral Palsy?*). Cerebral palsy is a highly visual disability: many people with cerebral palsy use wheelchairs, but perhaps the most salient feature of the condition is the inability to control movement or facial expressions which often occurs (*What is Cerebral Palsy?*). Currently about one person in four hundred is affected (*Scope for You!*), a slight increase on past decades as improvements in maternity services and developments in neonatal care have meant that more premature babies survive (*What is Cerebral Palsy?*).



and multiple sclerosis<sup>4</sup> (MS) respectively. I have chosen these two disability charities from the vast number that exist as they have a high market profile and mission statements which acknowledge the importance of representation (see footnotes 1 and 2 in this chapter).<sup>5</sup> This chapter explores the similarities and differences in the use of the disabled and the female body in advertising discourse. I examine here the extent to which both categories of person are represented in very specific and often negative ways (Hevey 16). Since depictions of the female body have been the objects of extensive feminist critiques, these critiques may usefully be applied to other depictions of bodies such as the disabled body in charitable advertising (Hershey 1994: 16; Dickey 1987). At issue is the question of what can and cannot be represented in the public domain (Moore and Harris 1996: 37), and the extent to which charitable advertising seeks to tread a line between impact and repulsion (Ray and Wilkie 1970). In these questions, a central concern is the physical ability of the implied audience (Burnett and Paul 1996: 47; Hopkins 1994: 165) as the identity of the implied audience informs the content and tone of the advertising campaign (Kraus and Stoddard, quoted in Burnett and Paul 49-58). In a parallel context the gender of the audience is central to issues of representation of women.<sup>6</sup>

Modern charities are in part derived from charitable trusts which were established in medieval times (Gerard 1983: 49). These were recognised in law with the Statute of Charitable Uses of 1601, an act which sought to encourage donations to societies which were

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<sup>4</sup> MS is a disease of the nervous system caused by the scarring of the myelin sheath that covers the nerve fibres in the brain and spinal cord. This scarring inhibits some of the impulses travelling through the system resulting in changes to the bodily functions. The resultant disabilities range from speech, sight or movement impairments to incontinence and complete paralysis (MSS 1995). MS is characterised by a pattern of attacks and remissions; it is often progressive, although only about fifteen per cent of people with the condition will become severely disabled (MSS 1995). For others, attacks may be severe but frequently widely spaced and the main disability experienced may be extreme fatigue (Frank and Maguire 1988: 171). The age range is large: 16 to 64 years old, but most diagnoses are made when people are in their twenties or early thirties (Frank and Maguire 1969).

<sup>5</sup> In 1994, The Spastics Society became Scope in an attempt to move away from the derogatory aspects of its previous name which had been used discriminatorily (*Anything is Possible*).

<sup>6</sup> For example, daytime radio often assumes its audience to be women working in the home and tends to lack the political and social content of the evening slots (Karpf 1987: 169). For a discussion of this issue see *The Female Gaze*, edited by L. Gammon and M. Marshment.

committed to alleviating “social unrest, vagrancy and potential disorder” (Gerard 51-2). From the onset, charitable trusts reflected a concern not just for the relief of poverty for altruistic or religious reasons, but fundamentally for reasons of national security: to ease the financial burden of the state and in so doing to reduce the risk of insurrection. Even in later centuries, the poor were considered to be in need of regulation, in order to secure their “spiritual health” and to avoid the possibility of idleness (Tawney 1926: 257). The relationship of charitable organisations to the political structure has an interesting history: although in the seventeenth century there was an overt connection between the state and charitable trusts, by about 1900 political action was held to be non-charitable (Gerard 64). However, the law has relaxed again since 1969, and charities may now be politically active (Gerard 64-5), although it is assumed that this will take the form of anti- rather than pro-governmental action.

In the centuries since 1601 a significant alteration has occurred in the expected object of charitable donations. The charitable trusts of the Renaissance principally addressed the problem of poverty, but in subsequent eras, these organisations have taken advantage of the “*cy-pres*”<sup>7</sup> doctrine in charitable status which allows charities to specify new objects of charity (Gerard 51). The “typical” user of charity now is usually physically impaired or ill: of the 170,000 charities in the U.K., the top one hundred have a combined income of over £1 billion, and medicine and health charities account for over half of this amount (Hevey 18).<sup>8</sup>

During the nineteenth century, in the wake of the Poor Law, a boom occurred in the number of charities established, largely inspired by the church (Lonsdale 1990: 31). Of the charities established between 1850 and 1900, over three quarters owed their existence to evangelism (Thane 1982: 20). One of the largest and most influential of these was the

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<sup>7</sup> The *cy-pres* doctrine, in law, is the principle of following as near as possible to the intentions of a testator or donor when their intentions cannot be precisely followed (OED).

<sup>8</sup> There is also a clear alliance of disability and charity: virtually all sufferers of MS in the UK are members of MSS (Wolfenden Committee 1978: 39).

Charitable Organisation Society, instrumental in replacing outdoor relief<sup>9</sup> with a system of individual assistance called case-work (a system now used by social services) (Lonsdale 31). This system and its emulators emphasised the personal nature of poverty, and the role of the individual in providing for themselves in the future; it encouraged sick clubs and friendly societies as other methods of self-help (Thane 22). It is in this atmosphere that the charities of the twentieth century communicate with their users, members, workers and donors.

Sweeping changes occurred in state welfare provisions during the 1980s (Williams 1989: 141; Barry and Jones 1994). In this decade, charitable organisations were expanded to take over many responsibilities previously managed by the public sector, the intention being to create an “ideological harmony” of private-for-profit and private-not-for-profit sectors (Hevey 1992: 20). The overt aim of this was to facilitate a shift from public provision towards private donation, emphasising the philosophy of personal choice and individual responsibility (Cox 1998; Radley and Kennedy 1992). This was underpinned by tax concessions and reforms of covenant laws (Williams 1989: 141). However, the subtext of these manoeuvres was the intention to relieve the state of its financial responsibility for key services (Hevey 22). The pressure since then has been on charities to raise more money from non-governmental sources to fund additional projects (MSS 1994: 16). As a result, many charities have appealed to the commercial community (Blume 1981, for example) to provide the experience in communication that would, they hope,

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<sup>9</sup> Outdoor relief was a nineteenth-century system of financial help given to people who were not provided for in a workhouse (OED).

raise their income to meet demand (Dyer 1996: 5).<sup>10</sup>

Although charitable organisations have always made use of the media, it has never been as planned, sustained or sophisticated as in recent years (Haley 1996: 19).<sup>11</sup> Advertising charities often seek to blur an uncertain boundary between the disabled person and the charitable organisation by collapsing the boundary of company and disease: sign to product (Goldman 1992: 6). One way in which this boundary is blurred is the emphasis on the goodness of charities. The MSS “Tear” Campaign of the early 1990s began with an account of impairment only; no requests for money, no conspicuous mortise (the mortise is the piece of writing second in prominence to the title. It frames the image by “telling the viewer what aspect of it to attend to” (Gombrich 67-8)). Hevey describes this as “designer modesty” and suggests that the intention is to imply that the charity is not making claims for itself, but merely raising public awareness (1992: 34). In this way the charity has begun to establish itself as the source of truth<sup>12</sup> - it has disguised any other motivation than supporting positive change that it might have;<sup>13</sup> it fuses “the concern of a doctor with the divinity of a nun”

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<sup>10</sup> However, the world of marketing draws a distinct line between profit and not-for-profit or non-loss organisations, although many charities seem to adhere to the same processes, restraints and goals (at least in terms of practical outcomes) as for-profit businesses (Lancaster 1994: 187). Marketing theorists find several aspects of the non-loss organisation problematic (Lancaster 188). Firstly, most charities practice an “open” policy where many individuals have a say in the decision-making, and this can mean that there is a conflict over goals; the 1993 Annual Report of the Charity Commissioners advised that policies should be more regularly reviewed and mission statements re-assessed to ensure effective direction (Hind 1995: 93). Secondly, the open policies can lead to internal conflicts over the processes required to achieve set goals and over the extent to which these processes fall within the ethics of the charity (Lancaster 188). Thirdly, it can be hard to decide if goals have been met, especially if these goals are of the informative or awareness-raising type, and they often have less clearly defined criteria for success or failure (Lancaster 188). Finally, the management structure is often perceived as ineffective by virtue of having multiple stakeholders, diverse core financing and a combination of voluntary and salaried staff (Billis and Glennerster 1998: 85). The Charity Commission found in 1993 that some charities showed an “absence of direction to employees, unclear responsibilities, improper delegation and lack of adequate internal control” (1994, paragraph 83). It further suggested in the same report that charitable organisations should take more ideas from corporate governance (Hind 7).

<sup>11</sup> Advertising is the form of marketing most commonly favoured in the charity industry (MSS 1994: 17).

<sup>12</sup> The use of photographic images in adverts implies “an avowal about reality” (Goffman 1963: 14) and appears as a genuine depiction of events that have transpired (Goffman 15-17).

<sup>13</sup> While “the organisation is typically viewed as an open system in constant interaction with its environment” (Morgan 1986: 24), two systems theorists, Humbert Maturana and Francisco Varela, challenge this view. They argue that “all living systems are organisationally closed, autonomous systems of interaction that make reference only to themselves” and that in addition “the aim of such organisations is ultimately to produce themselves: their own organisation is their most important product” (Morgan 1986: 236).

(Hevey 35). This is a fictional unification of the charity and the disabled person (Wernick 1991: 31), since the money received from donations will be spent on research, advertising, administration, development, management and investment (MSS 1994: 17-8; Scope 1997: 14).<sup>14</sup> However, for us as readers of the advertising campaign, it becomes a “fact” that giving money to the charity is the same as giving money to the people who have the impairment - better in fact. The possibility that the advertising lies is not as realistic an option as say, in car adverts, as we do not tend to assume that charity advertising is misrepresentational.

The image that charitable organisations project of not being motivated by profit, and of not intervening in the movement of cash from donor to disabled person, is no longer truthful. In the search for funding in an ever more competitive world, I would suggest that charities are ultimately self-referential and self-propelling, operating not primarily for the good of the users, although this may be a bonus, but for the employment of a workforce and the occupation of a staff of volunteers. Although charities provide employment in the same way as the for-profit sector, many of the people who work for charities are employed on a voluntary basis (Billis and Glennerster 1998: 85-6; Pearce 1993; Radley and Kennedy 1992; Mocroft 1983; Quereslin *et al* 1983). Their motivation is not entirely altruistic: a study showed that the most common reason to undertake voluntary work is to improve employment prospects (Sherrott 1983: 75-82).<sup>15</sup> R. Sherrott concludes from this study that many people volunteer to “gain access to caring relationships” (140), or to control and structure the nature of caring relationships (141). This evidence suggests that the employees of charities are principally concerned with self-interest in either a pecuniary sense, for example as a career move, or sentimentally, as for example, when the motive is a “feel good” factor. The prevalence

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<sup>14</sup> For MSS the largest single outgoing is on research: in 1993/4 MSS spent nearly £3.4 million on research out of a total of £7.7 million expenditure (MSS 1994: 17). Scope’s largest single outgoing is on advertising and publicity: in 1996/7 this constituted 18% of its expenditure (Scope 1997: 14).

<sup>15</sup> Other reasons include: as a substitute or supplement to work (Sherrott 1983: 65-74; 88-9), to make friends (91), as a hobby (95-100), or even as an appeasement of guilt (137-9).

of the latter is revealed in the most common cause of dissatisfaction among volunteer workers: not being appreciated by the users (Mostyn 1983: 38). In this context, the attractive models and stereotyped images of disability are the necessary elements of corporate image, which concentrates on the individual, not a sign of concern with the transformation of attitudes.<sup>16</sup>

Charities are economical with the truth in other ways. In the case of the MSS adverts (Figs 1 and 2), the medical assertions that the charity makes are largely groundless. The adverts state that the disease is incurable, devastating and random. This is not true: MS usually strikes people in their late twenties or early thirties (a relatively narrow band), affects about 80,000 people in the UK (a small number compared to cancer or arthritis), and will profoundly disable only about 12,000 people (MSS 1995). The remainder, about eighty-five percent, will experience some impairment, increasing in severity during an attack and abating afterwards, a pattern which will occur all through their lives but which may not degenerate.<sup>17</sup> To launch a campaign based on slogans such as “tears lives apart” and “a hope in hell” (see Figs. 1 and 2) is entirely inappropriate and potentially destructive in terms of the self-perception of people with MS and their abilities as perceived by other people, including employers. Like all forms of advertising, charity advertising relies heavily on creating a sense of inadequacy in its audience (Dyer 1996: 2-3). It is essentially de-stabilising and anxiety inducing (Berger 1972: 143). The solution to this anxiety is then presented as purchasing the

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<sup>16</sup> When marketing agencies do undertake the goal of attitudinal change, they allocate their time and money to areas where the probability of success is high. That is, they restrict themselves to investing under circumstances where belief modification is likely to occur. Generally, this is most probable when beliefs are closely connected to a person's self-concept or closely connected to other attitudes which are strongly held, for example, social mores (Allen 1989: 87-8). In advertising charity therefore, the usual approach is to engage with the viewer's self image by threat: you could be like this/suffer from this, or by appealing to the self-image as caring, or by associating the donation with social philanthropy (Nightingale 1973: 136-7). The MSS ad (Fig. 1) threatens the self concept by asking the viewer to imagine themselves in the situation of having a “mental age of thirty and a physical age of one”.

<sup>17</sup> MS is also geographically and racially specific, affecting mostly white races and being more prevalent in North America, Europe and Australasia than the Orient, Arabian Peninsula, Africa, South America or India (Compston 1998: 101-2). Within the UK an individual is significantly more likely to have or contract MS if they live in North East Scotland than in any other part of the British Isles (Compston 101-2).



**How  
does it feel to have  
a mental age of  
thirty and a physical  
age of one?**



IF YOU'D LIKE TO MAKE A DONATION WRITE TO: THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY, FREEPOST, 25 EFFIE ROAD, FULHAM, LONDON SW6 1EE TELEPHONE: 071 736 6267

Figure 1

**If Multiple  
Sclerosis shattered  
your life,  
we'd be there to  
pick up the pieces**



**Multiple Sclerosis is a disease of the nervous system.**

**It strikes at random often with paralysis, impaired sight or speech, and is as yet incurable.**

**Please complete the coupon.**

I/we enclose a donation to The Multiple Sclerosis Society of £.....  
Receipt required ☐

Name.....

Address.....

**MS**  
Society

To: The Multiple Sclerosis Society, Prescott, 25 Elm Road,  
London SW6 1YJ. Tel: (071) 736 6267. Giro Bank No. 8140365. Charity No. 207496.

THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY **A hope in hell**

Figure 2



lack by purchasing the product (Wernick 35). In the case of charity advertising, the anxiety is pity, created by exaggerated portraits of disabled lives, or fear of the same fate, which can be warded off by donations. The reward is self-satisfaction and an understanding that we are buying the values and stereotypes portrayed (Wernick 22).

The relationship between the charitable organisations and the world of advertising has been a difficult one (Hevey 32). Charitable advertisement is a representation that plays out the contradictory positions of charitable organisations and of the agenda of advertising agencies.<sup>18</sup> When engaging with the project of advertising charitable organisations, an agency must overcome the disincentive of the public to give without affection for the recipient (Nightingale 1973: 136-7). This is achieved by stressing the moral satisfaction of donating, humanising the appeal and playing on a parental approach (Nightingale 136-7). These strategies are directly influential on the construction of adverts that present disabled people as isolated and dependent individuals who can be appropriately patronised. Advertising is not concerned with realism but aspiration: “you’re not selling somebody a car, you’re selling them the reason why the car should be important to them. Making a space for it in their lives” (Myers 1986: 78). Likewise, selling charity is a matter of persuading the viewer to contribute to their own satisfaction or peace of mind, the construction of which represents a switch in emphasis from producer to consumer (Myers 1986: 79). The necessity for the viewer to “be magically induced to buy things through fantasy situations and satisfactions is because advertisers cannot rely on rational argument to sell their goods in sufficient quantity” (Dyer 1996: 7-8).

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<sup>18</sup> The relationship of marketing to charity may also be complicated by a moral mistrust by non-loss organisations of the advertising industry. In marketing, consumer orientation is dominant, a stance which may conflict with the mission which a charity sets itself. For example, the Vegetarian Society’s basic goals would preclude the use of marketing which responded to people’s taste for meat, as the society starts from the premise that this taste is mistaken (Lancaster 1989: 189). Although all advertising is based on selective premises, for the advertising company that premise may be based on consumer opinion whereas for the charity it may be based on ethical issues. It is within this fraught environment that charities engage in advertising.

The conflict between the advertising purpose of generating profit and the charitable purpose of disseminating funds can be seen in charity advertising.<sup>19</sup> Advertising has an agenda of its own (Betts *et al* 1994: 51)<sup>20</sup> and must fulfil its own objectives in its engagement with a particular charity. The focal point of advertising is the campaign, in theory a joint endeavour between the advertising agency and the client, in practice an established agenda (Hevey 3).<sup>21</sup> Ideally, the selling issues will be decided by market research of the consumers or in the case of charities, their equivalent: donors. But research is expensive and therefore “the advertising platform is most commonly based on the opinions of personnel within the firm and of individuals within the advertising agency” (Dibb *et al* 409). These opinions are likely to be unfamiliar with non-pecuniary strategic aims and the political implications of representations.<sup>22</sup>

Advertisements are created by agencies predominantly for commercial purposes, and to that end contain messages of an informational and value-laden nature which are treated so that they will be attractive to the target audience. However, such communications are not closed: “the meaning of an advertisement is not something there, statistically inside an advert, waiting

<sup>19</sup> I have stated earlier that charities primarily exist to reproduce themselves. However, they do have other aims such as the distribution of funds which are necessary parts of their professional activity.

<sup>20</sup> The agenda includes the following objectives: to support sales, to encourage trial, to create awareness, to inform about a feature or benefit, to remind, to reassure, to create an image, to modify attitudes and to gain trade and sales staff support (Betts *et al*: 51).

<sup>21</sup> The campaign has three parts: the identification and analysis of the advertising targets, the definition of objectives and the creation of the advertising platform (Dibb *et al* 1994: 408). The platform is the foundation of the campaign; it describes the major issues in the selling process which will be emphasised over a period of years.

<sup>22</sup> Once the campaign is running, an agency would hope to measure its success using the criteria of impact, persuasion, message delivery and liking. The latter criterion may be replaced by meaning or relevance as in the case of the RSPCA ads which are not pleasing but may be judged as meaningful (Betts *et al*: 60). In the long term, success can be measured by brand/product awareness, imagery associations and attitudinal change, which in many cases are assessed using tracking studies (Betts *et al*: 60). Marketing agencies are reluctant to undertake attitudinal change as a primary goal, as this is notoriously difficult to achieve, but for charities, this may be a prime objective. When the Spastics Society became Scope, it was motivated by a need to change the image of the organisation (Hind 93); the promotional literature states that the change occurred “because our name was offensive and hurtful to the people we work with” (*Campaign for Change*). However, there may have been other factors at work: Scope’s annual report for 1996/7 shows that that year was the first in fourteen years that an operating surplus had been generated (Scope 1998: 2). Clearly, the change in the organisational image was as much to do with the courting of prospective able-bodied donors as with offering a satisfactory service to the users.

to be revealed by a correct interpretation” (Dyer 1996: 8). Instead the meaning of an advert to some extent “depends on how it operates, how signs and its ideological effect are organised internally (within the text) and externally (in relation to production, circulation and consumption and in relation to technological, economic, legal and social relations)” (Dyer 8). But, in order for advertising to deliver, these meanings must then be read by the receivers who must be relied upon to decode them in a set process (Burton 1990: 118).

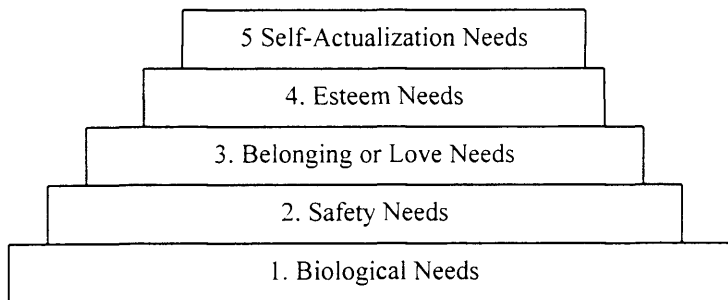
The receivers are targeted as a presumed audience by advertising agencies, as the MSS adverts clearly reveal. The first stage of the MSS “Tear” Campaign established the “Tear”: a representation of a rip in paper across the eyes or down the spinal column of the model pictured which denoted the possible physical effects of MS: the rent in the fabric of the sufferer’s life. This appeared to be a direct quote from the Silk Cut cigarette adverts of the time which showed a cut in purple fabric in various abstracted contexts, the abstraction necessitated by the restrictions on tobacco advertising. Such restrictions have driven the cigarette industry, most notably Benson and Hedges, the doyen of abstract advertising,<sup>23</sup> to position their promotional campaigns ever higher up the Maslovian hierarchy. This hierarchy of needs (Table 1) which has been a seminal work in advertising philosophy (Moran 1997: 30), categorises needs into five ascending classes: food, security, love, esteem and fulfilment

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<sup>23</sup> The tobacco industry uses images which, being obscure, force the mind to “problem solve”. In solving the riddle, which is the brand of cigarette, the individual feels some satisfaction, associated with the product (O’Barr 1994: 8-10). Other tricks of the industry are to sponsor sporting events which associate smoking with health, success, and achievement. Anti-smoking groups such as ASH are very concerned about the psychological subtlety which the adverts demonstrate.

(Maslow 1943), as detailed below.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**



Source: [http://www.cbc.cc.tx.us/acdem/social/psyc2301/exam\\_1.html](http://www.cbc.cc.tx.us/acdem/social/psyc2301/exam_1.html)

In citing the Silk Cut ads, the “Tear” Campaign associates itself with established products that are connected to a specific target market. With the expansion of the manufacturing industry and the growth in the number of products available, the advertising industry’s concern with the consumer rather than the product shifted in the 1970s (Myers 47). In marketing terminology, the consumer is referred to in terms of their level on the National Readership Survey of Social Grades (Table 2). This is comprised of six levels, A, B, C1, C2, D, and E with A being the most affluent (Myers 1986: 52), but it is the lifestyle that people

<sup>24</sup> The first need is considered redundant in any society advanced enough to have advertising (Moran: 33); the second is reflected in ads such as those for insurance: “for the future you don’t yet know”; the third stage is when the ad tells us that a product will make us more loveable: “when a man you don’t know buys you flowers, that’s Impulse”; the fourth stage is selling us the idea of courting others’ respect: Ferrero Roche at your party to emulate an ambassador. Stage five comes when we are offered self-fulfilment and spiritual harmony, the Calvin Klein perfume ads being a prime example. According to Maslow, these needs progress in pace with affluence, becoming more sophisticated, less material, and so the advertising that is based on this theory sells qualities to the wealthy, not practicalities. The higher up the scale the ad is positioned, the more detached it becomes from the product, so that perfume ads, aimed at the more affluent, rarely mention anything as base as the aroma, and the other mainstay of that category, cars, are offered as vehicles of self-actualisation without (too much) mention of miles to the gallon. The style of Silk Cut, Benson and Hedges, and the MSS ads falls into the higher category of needs. The distance between image and product is great in the three cases. The government health warning obligatorily carried by tobacco ads seems almost vulgar in such a rarified framework.

aspire to, rather than their economic class, which is relevant to the advertising campaign (Myers 79).

The MSS “Tear” Campaign appears to be marketing to those in society who aspire to the A and B category, or are already there; the spelling out of the number, for instance, in Figure 1, is an educated practice, designed to appeal to the literate classes. Scope targets the same group (see Fig. 3). These people are perceived to have disposable incomes and the need for esteem and fulfilment that are offered in the veiled request for donations.

**Table 2:** National Readership Survey Classification of Social Grades\*

A High Managerial, administrative or professional

B Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional

C1 Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional

C2 Skilled manual

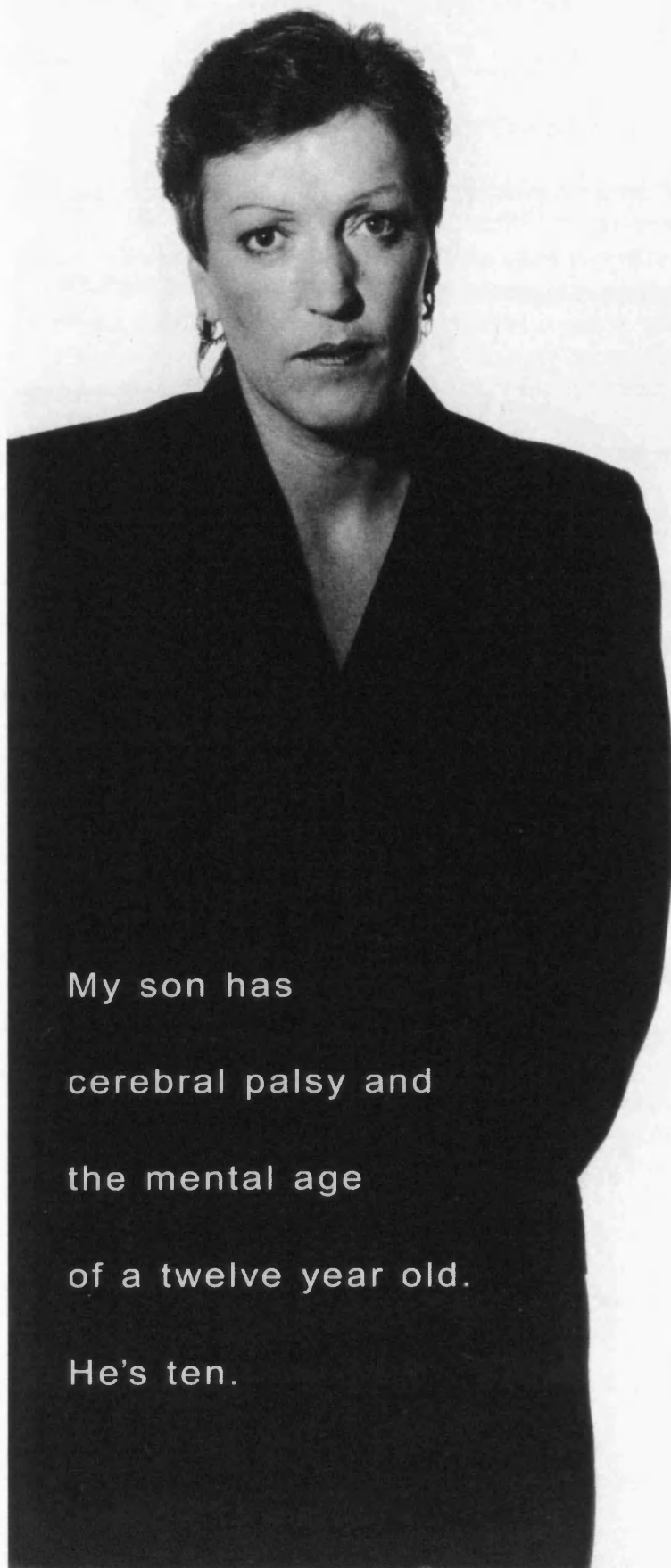
D Semi-skilled and unskilled manual

E Those at the lowest levels of subsistence, pensioners, widows, casuals and the unemployed.

\*This is based on the occupation of male head of household or female if single parent families.

Source: Myers 1986: 52.

The mortises in the ads of the “Tear” Campaign contain the MSS logo and short phrases under tears, such as: “a hope in hell” and “tears lives apart”. The very small print underneath completes the message of the whole: the society requires the donations from the audience to give hope - the audience is cast as the redeemer. This campaign is scrupulously stylised. The actors are obviously actors who do not have MS. We are asked to use our imagination to identify with people who do have the disease but at a double remove, a safe distance: we can



My son has  
cerebral palsy and  
the mental age  
of a twelve year old.  
He's ten.

41

I hate the way people automatically  
assume that he'll be stupid, just because  
he's got cerebral palsy.

Like when he was five. The authorities  
decided that he should go to a special school,  
because it would be easier for him.

It was. Too easy. And me and his father  
realised that, for his sake, we had to get him  
into an ordinary school as soon as possible.

Have you ever tried persuading your local  
authorities that they're wrong?

So we spoke to The Spastics Society and  
they put us in touch with our local group.

They've always helped with the special  
needs of people with cerebral palsy.

They still do.

But things have changed.

They're now called Scope. Because  
everyone with cerebral palsy, however  
severely disabled, has to be allowed the  
scope to live normally.

In the end, we got our way. And our son's  
been able to show that he's nobody's fool.

But everyone else still has a lot to learn  
about cerebral palsy.

Call Scope, local rate, on 0645 486 487.

**SCOPE**  
FOR PEOPLE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Formerly The Spastics Society

Figure 3

appreciate the idea while not becoming too involved; we can appreciate it in our own private horror.

During the establishment of the “Tear” Campaign, the ads typically carried an aesthetically pleasing photograph and a caption. The posters featured “beautiful people living in nothing but their destroyed beauty” (Hevey 37). In one advert from the campaign a young, fit, handsome man is supported under the arms by a young woman (Fig. 2). He is naked and limp; he might be dead. The woman has her face concealed. Her arms are visible, uncovered and relaxed; his eyes are open but his face is expressionless. This image is difficult to interpret immediately. The young man may be dead, alive, paralysed, or drugged. He is displayed and naked, signalling vulnerability (Allen 1992: 25). It appears that the woman is holding him but on close inspection this is not possible: there is no tension in her arms or stress on his armpits and she is not tall enough to carry him in that position. Her position then, is predominantly sexual. In fact, had this been in reverse and he was behind her in this position, it would be a picture of a woman swooning in sexual passion (Goffman 68). The physical contact implies that the two are “together”: linked in an intimate relationship (Goffman 54), but in this case the relationship is a burdensome one. The length of his hair,<sup>25</sup> hers tied back, and the position of her hands, together with the lighting effects, make the gender unclear at a distance, and closer attention reveals the image as a parody<sup>26</sup> of passion, a distortion of normality; it is he who is passive, and not in passion but in sickness or death. Behind his neck her head is bent, depicting overwhelming emotion, possibly fear or shame; she hides her face from the source of the threat (Goffman 57).

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the meanings of hair see Edmund Leach “Magical Hair”. *Myth and Cosmos*. Ed. E. Leach. Natural History Press: Middleton, 1967.

<sup>26</sup> Parody is “a mocking imitation of the style of a literary work or works, ridiculing the stylistic habits of an author or school by exaggerated mimicry” (*OED of Literary Terms* 161). It is “related to satire in its punishment of eccentricities”, and to burlesque in its “application of serious styles to ridiculous subjects” (Baldick 1990: 161).

The mortise identifies the threat: MS. The copy is in white, in stark contrast to the gloom of the image, but matching the supporting hands and the head of the woman. The subtext reads: if someone shattered your life by contracting MS, this charity will support you. The implication that the viewer might need the charity is thus established through the implication that another person's illness might become a burden and that what is to be feared is the need to care for someone, not the illness itself, from which the viewer is miraculously immune. This allows maximum shock - "it strikes at random often with paralysis, impaired sight or speech, and it is as yet incurable" - while prohibiting identification with sufferers, the identification with the partner of the "sufferer" having already been established in the headline text. This then is an advert which represents an exchange between the trustees, or managerial team, of the charity, who are able-bodied, and a specified non-sufferer in the viewing public, with the image of the disabled person as the object of consumption.

Figure 1 similarly offers no hope - its words are black. The caption is in the form of a question: "How does it feel...?". The question is addressed to the audience. The structure of the question makes overt what is implicit in charity advertising - that the audience is not considered to be a user.<sup>27</sup> By implication, users are not perceived to have disposable income and/or the power of decision-making to dispose of it.<sup>28</sup> They are not considered as active viewers of advertisements but as objects within them. The question is addressed to those who have no physical disability; money and disability would seem to be mutually exclusive, in order to allow greater engagement by those who are associated with MSS at removed level - carers, partners, families. The thrust of the "Tear" campaign is firstly that MS strikes "at random" and secondly that it shatters the lives of those affected. The effect of the "at

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<sup>27</sup> Interestingly enough, this is problematic because it is fundamentally untrue: the emphasis on the able-bodied consumer is misplaced as most medical charities rely on legacies, which are largely bequeathed by sufferers (Wolfenden Committee 1978: 268).

<sup>28</sup> The question is also non-sensical; to state the obvious, it is impossible to have a physical age of one after the age of one, so the intention is not to create an unusual metaphor but to associate disability with childishness and dependence, and therefore powerlessness also.



random” emphasis is predominantly fear: “it could be me”, and then, “thank God it’s not” and finally, “my money can improve sufferers’ lives”. This thought process engages the viewer with the charity.

Semiology argues that just by reading an advert, the viewer enters into a contract with it, which is halfway to buying the advertised product (Myers 102; Wernick 22). In this sense, we are all implicated as participants in a contract that asserts polarised differences: abled/disabled, work/leisure, useful/useless, included/excluded. These divisions do not represent reality: women’s work often takes place in the home (Williamson 1986: 103); for disabled people social relations are not necessarily difficult; disability is a relative term; many disabled people are employed (OPCS), have families and friends. Advertising, like photography, is not concerned with the demonstration of an empirically researched social trend, but is about the manipulation of an image for a particular end (Burgin 1986). However, one of the outcomes of these images is the expression and approval of prevailing values, which are consequently used as persuaders and justifiers of the enforcement of appropriate behaviour (Coward 76-7). Disabled people, like women, have the limits of their potential prescribed in the perpetuation of objectified images. In advertising images, ultimately the people with disabilities are irrelevant. In many adverts, the organisation is obviously portrayed as supporting carers, partners, and families rather than the disabled person and at least tacitly acknowledges that the interest groups may at times have conflicting needs (*Building for the Future* 1998: 4). The producer is the charity: the product is the cultural value. The person with MS has the same role as the woman on a car in a car advert - to be an object of consumption.

Social knowledge is required to read these ads (Parker and Pollock 1987: 125) and this act, which might be viewed as an exchange between the producer and the receiver via recognisable signs (Kuhn 6; Allen 1992: 22), is not without ideological meaning (Robert and

Gunther 1988: 12). The image of a woman will often represent abstract qualities (Warner 1995); a reading which is used by advertisers to endow their products with associated characteristics - an attractive woman enjoying Special K breakfast cereal - also denotes health, control, success, slimness. Advertisements are thus constructed to point to particular contextualised meanings (Goldman 5) through the use of objectified images. John Berger suggests that adverts are about constructing envy in the viewer, that “publicity is about social relations, not objects” (132). This is in direct contrast to the perception of the business world where “advertising . . . is a discourse through and about objects . . . this discourse concerns a specific and seemingly universal relationship: that between people and objects” (Jhally 1990: 1). But these two statements are not mutually exclusive; in our consuming culture, if people are not objects, then certainly their images are, and for that culture to thrive it depends on us having an insatiable appetite for them (Featherstone *et al* 178).

Feminist groups such as Women Against Violence Against Women see a continuation from advertising images of women to rape, the former reducing women to available objects, and providing the pre-requisite for exploitation and abuse (Myers 89). Even if this continuum is perceived as extreme, the images of women as seen in adverts remain formulaic:

the women are almost invariably non-identified or those whose personal identity is irrelevant. They have similar faces and bodies; they are overwhelmingly white, young, bland and passive. Either they do nothing or they do nurturing, caring, domestic things. Although these women are often alone, they are seldom self-sufficiently alone, independent or autonomous. The images almost invariably display considerable self-consciousness, an awareness of being looked at, of there being someone outside looking, gazing. The images, then, depict absence and lack, through the presence of an absent, significant other, the viewer, the person she is supremely conscious of, and

often looks out at, for whom she is waiting, by whom she is completed; the man (Edholm 155).

Impairment charity advertising tends to adhere to much the same criteria: the models are similar - average build, white, alone, appealing to an acknowledged viewer. The Scope advert (Fig. 4) features a young, white, attractive woman whose only sign of disability is the wheelchair in which she sits. She is conspicuously alone against a blank, stark whiteness; she has literally and figuratively no background, just a white infinity of emptiness in which she exists with her wheelchair. Dispossessed, she exhibits none of the accessories of a working, socially integrated life: there is no briefcase or business suit to signal a job, no family, friends or even photographs which would point to a life history and a place in the social order (Goffman 32-9; O'Barr 3-4). She does not even possess speech, but instead her thoughts are recorded in print, or rather, thoughts are attributed to her, because the long address which is written in the first person has a detachment and formal structure which belies its claim of direct speech. Her face is immobile and expressionless, creating an even greater distance between the written words and the supposed addressee while also confirming the obstacles to communication that mar the relationship of viewer to model. The problematics of effective social intercourse between people with cerebral palsy and people who do not have cerebral palsy, are underlined, confirmed and aggravated through these devices. This is in direct opposition to the stance the advert superficially takes. Far from encouraging the viewer to try harder to understand speech disabilities, as the text states, this advert emphasises the difficulties of communication and directs the interested viewer, not to people with the condition, but to the organisation Scope, who will act, like the writing on the advert, as a buffer between the disabled and non-disabled community.

I know it's difficult to understand what

I say. But it would be easier if people tried.

It's the muscles in my jaw and my tongue that are affected, not my mind. That works as clearly as you're reading this.

And I don't care how many times you ask me to repeat myself. I'd rather you do that than just nod and pretend you understand. For all you know, I might have just told you that you've got a face like a bulldog sucking a wasp. Not that I would.

The worst thing is when people just ignore me and look the other way.

Schools, employers, local authorities. I've been ignored by them all.

And like everyone else with cerebral palsy, I'm tired of it.

So are the Spastics Society. That's why they changed to Scope. Because it's about time that everyone with cerebral palsy, however severely disabled, was allowed the scope to live normally.

Which means not having our rights and abilities ignored.

Scope are as keen to talk to you as I am.

Call them, local rate, on 0645 486 487.

**SCOPE**  
FOR PEOPLE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Formerly The Spastics Society

Cerebral palsy  
often impairs the  
ability to  
communicate.  
Yours, not mine.

Figure 4

Scope favours female models despite the fact that the prevalence of cerebral palsy is greater among men (Blair and Stanley 1982; Murphy 1993; Perlstein 1964; Pharoah 1989).<sup>29</sup> The choice of female model signals an invitation to look (Mulvey 1985: 11). The “crushing weight” of female images in the public domain (King “The Politics of Representation” 1992: 134) encourages the viewer to gaze unproblematically upon the female form (Mulvey 1985: 11). In Figure 3, the female figure’s femininity is signalled by the first words of the large caption, written on the body of the woman: “My son has . . .”. Her relative status is thus central to her textual existence (Hall 1979: 15-31). Her function in the text is to refer to her son. She does not smile, as women in adverts usually do to signal mollification (Goffman 48), nor does she reveal her hands, another ritual of female imagery (Goffman 29-31). Her formal dress and short hair are rather masculine, business-like and dark, as is her stance and direct gaze (Goffman 68; 75-7). As her expression is blank, it directs the viewer to the caption, but it also allows the viewer to project emotion onto the image.<sup>30</sup>

In Figure 2, the female image is also knowingly ambiguous. The photography has occluded any libidinous implications by omitting the usual signifiers: the woman, although she appears in fragments, has no long, varnished nails, no legs, no lips, no buttocks and the picture is framed to exclude the genitals. Her head bent behind the man’s neck is ambiguous - is she hiding, kissing, crying, biting? But it is the caption that explains the reason for the lack of erotic intention: multiple sclerosis. The male figure too is feminised. He is on display (Gatens 1997: 84; Millum 66); he is passive (Millum 1975: 99; O’Barr 4); and he is dependent. The photograph and caption together illustrate that sexual passion is rendered impotent by the disease, and that masculinity is threatened by the condition. This assertion is not borne out by facts: in female children incidence is almost three times higher than in males,

<sup>29</sup> The incidence is also far higher in black children, although the advertising features predominantly white models (Blair and Stanley 1982; Murphy; Perlstein; Pharoah).

<sup>30</sup> This is reminiscent of those psychometric tests which present the candidate with non-descript photos and ask for their interpretation, such as the Thematic Apperception Test or the Tree House Person Test.

the difference decreasing with age and remaining at a ratio of two females to one male in adulthood (Compston *et al* 1998: 105-6); it is largely women who are threatened by MS rather than men.<sup>31</sup> The prevalence of male models functions as a further threat to the self-image of the male viewer; it establishes MS as a symbol of able-bodied masculine crisis.

By focussing on able-bodied images, these charities evade the representation of disabled individuals. Scope, like MSS, tends to prefer the able-bodied model, or even no model at all, in their advertising (see Fig. 5). This relates directly to the issue of what is representable in advertising. Ideas of what is showable (particularly in relation to bodies) are highly contextualised: until very recently, contraception advertising for example was medicalised, appearing in hospitals and doctors' waiting rooms, and featuring disembodied and desexualised reproductive parts (Sarch 1997: 31-48). In this sense advertising "appropriates things from the real world, from society and history and sets them to its work. In doing so it mystifies the real world and deprives us of any understanding of it. We are invited to live an unreal life through the ads" (Myers 85). As well as creating a sense of alienation through specialised images, the act of selecting appropriate portrayals betrays an anxiety about the excluded mystified representations and their potentials. Consider the case when President George Bush threw up on Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and then collapsed into his lap in 1992 (Edelman 1993: 167). The press described the Japanese Prime Minister's response to President Bush as he "cradled his head" (Wines 1992: 1), as "pregnant with symbolism of America's current need for help from Japan" (Tase 1992: 11). The point of stressing the symbolic aspects of the scene was to deflect attention from the physicality of it. The pursuit of this, however, served to make the physical even more visible (Edelman 1993: 168). The actual throwing up, "the moment of impurity that is stigmatized for bearing the figural burden of the body's implication in a presymbolic materiality" (172), the action now referred to as

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<sup>31</sup> It is thought that this is primarily connected to hormonal rather than genetic differences (Compston *et al*: 105).

Pillock  
Nerd  
Spastic  
Moron

Spot the odd one out. If you didn't, maybe you'll appreciate why The Spastics Society has changed its name. People with cerebral palsy have enough to deal with as it is. And having the word spastic used as a term of abuse doesn't help. There are a lot more things we, as Scope, intend to change.

**SCOPE**  
FOR PEOPLE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY  
Formerly The Spastics Society

Figure 5

“bushusuru” among the Japanese, has been written out of the video tapes for reasons of taste. The action itself cannot be seen. This represents a rupture. In this sequence the body reasserts itself, even the President’s body, the body of the supreme subject, as a thing as well as a signifier, in its visible weight which the Japanese struggle to support (172).

Opinions vary as to whether the viewer is turned off (King “Feminist Arts”), or on (Ray and Wilkie 1970; Henthorne *et al* 1993) by “shock” images and adverts, or even permanently traumatised by them (Hyman and Tansey 1990). A recent study of responses to adverts seems to indicate that although individuals vary as to whether they like extreme images or not, they all “experienced some mild degree of enjoyment of the negative emotional ad” (Moore and Harris 45), a finding which would seem to support the “blunter is better” approach. Taken in conjunction with the commonly used advertising ploy of fear: the threat that the viewer might suffer from the disease eventually and be saved by their own donation, this could produce powerful advertising. Many disabled people would support the view that current advertising “conceals the ‘true’ condition of life, true needs and social wants, replacing them with a glamorous and ultimately inaccessible fantasy world” (Myers 85); one MS sufferer wanted to urinate in Piccadilly Circus to highlight one of the lesser known symptoms of the condition, but the society vetoed his intention (Nightingale 190). However, the idea of rushing a dying boy around the country to raise funds and demonstrate the severity of a condition, as the Muscular Dystrophy Society of America did (Nightingale 190), would seem intolerably exploitative, regardless of truth value.

At the aesthetic extreme, the “Tear” Campaign features the naked body in many of its advertisements. On one level this represents the progress of the disease, stripping those who contract it of identity, job, possibly money and family, ultimately existence. These naked bodies are unmarked in any way that might associate them with a sickness; it is only in their behaviour and in the caption that it is apparent. This is in direct contrast to the way in which



our society conceptualises disease: as always physical and discernible. This is clear in the Scope ads: the disability must have a physical expression, must be signified, must be seen to reside in the body of the individual, not in society or in the assumptions of the viewer. This keeps the disability “body-centric” (Hevey 1992: 39) and also at the level of visibility.

The body is central to both Scope’s and MSS adverts. Figure 6 features a character with cerebral palsy. This is signalled in several ways: his right hand is bent uncomfortably, he has a rather odd hair cut, and a strange facial expression. His face signals that he is smiling but his open mouth suggests laughter - the result is a disjointed expression. Coupled with this, the source of his amusement is inevident. His drink is also dissonant: the dark liquid in a cup suggests a hot drink but the straw signifies a cold one. The text is written in the first person and obviously meant to be the young man’s words. His insistence on the difficulty of everyday tasks may offer an explanation for his silence: there is an implication that speech may be difficult. It would be reasonable to suppose that he may have a learning disability, as up to 82% of people with cerebral palsy have (Blair and Stanley 1985; Lipkin 1991; Murphy *et al* 1993; Nelson and Ellenberg 1978). However, Scope’s adverts contain no references to other disabilities, even though most people with cerebral palsy have other disabilities such as learning disabilities, epilepsy or sensory impairments (Murphy *et al*; Lipkin). It is hard to account for this except in terms of market competition: other charities such as MENCAP or RNIB might have a claim on the prospective donor’s money if different disabilities were mentioned. The absence of an explanation for the man’s context results in a patronising and triumphalist tone: this man has spent ten months practising making coffee and yet he is not bored or frustrated. His life is presented visually as so empty that it can be filled by the repetition of the mundane act of making coffee daily. This is possible because his disability signals his lack of an internal landscape, his difference from an able-bodied person.

**There are times when  
you really  
appreciate a coffee.  
Like when you've  
spent ten months  
learning  
how to make it.**

You'd think I'd hate making coffee; after practising day in, day out. But when cerebral palsy affects your movement, you appreciate everything you can do, no matter how mundane it may seem. Scope knows this. So they encouraged me all the way. By calling them on 0800 626 216 they could help you to help yourself too.

**SCOPE**  
FOR PEOPLE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Formerly The Spastics Society

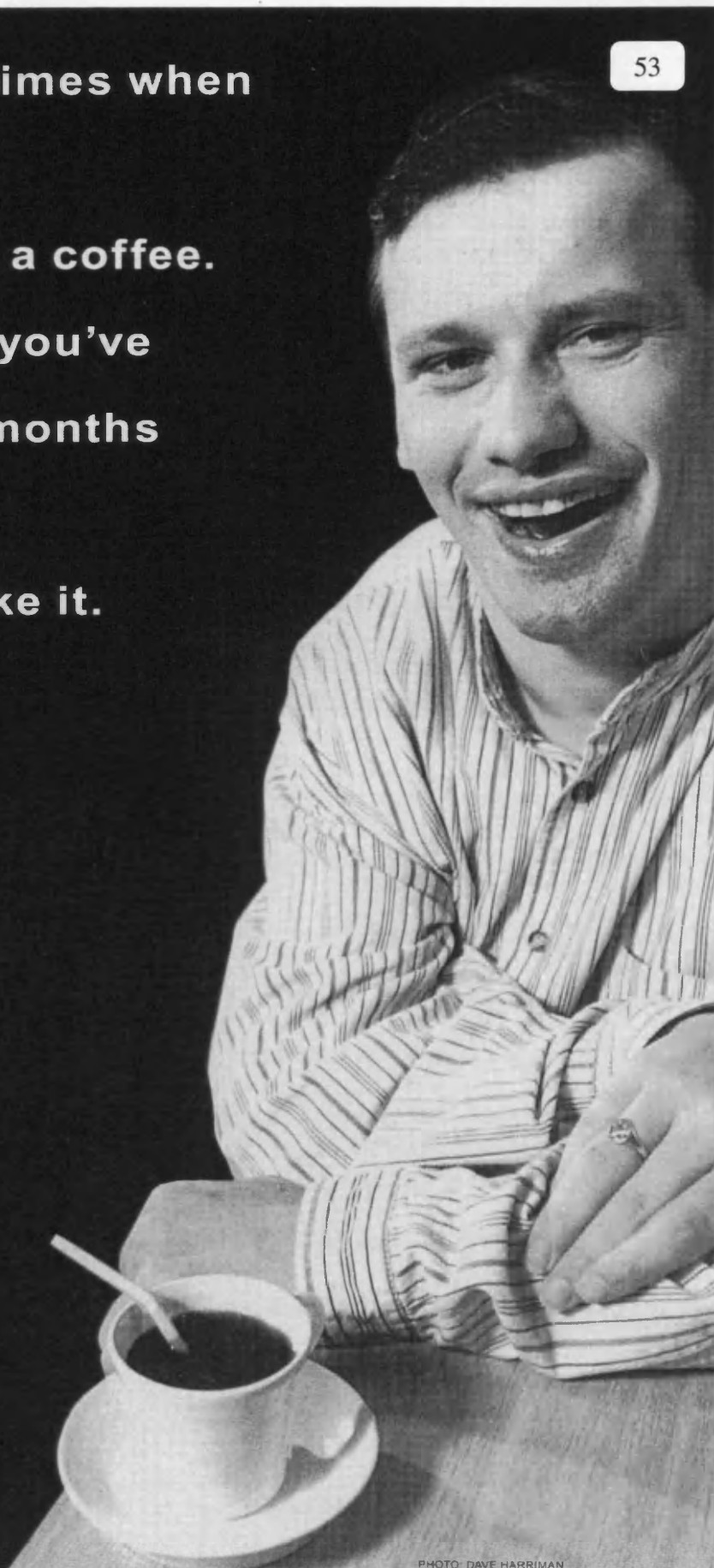


PHOTO: DAVE HARRIMAN

Figure 6

The establishment of difference is crucial to the construction of women and the disabled as objects, as other.<sup>32</sup> Williamson suggests that women are created representationally as what men are not, so that in mass culture, woman signals *not* politics, class or work (Williamson 1986: 103). The category of woman acts as a repository for the values that society wants to believe it holds; by locating caring, family values in the sphere of leisure, and therefore women, society can lay claim to these while excluding women (Williamson 1986: 106). When considering images of the disabled, it may be that we, as a society, have ideals such as the caring, supportive nuclear family which provides for the vulnerable and dependent, that we believe that disabled people should be cared for within the framework of an inclusive culture. However, in the prevailing economic climate, despite a change of government in 1997, there is still no place for the physically disabled.<sup>33</sup> The disability charity fills the gap between cultural ideals and governmental provision, the gap originating in the refusal of the able-bodied population to pay the bill for the ideals we believe we hold. What is ultimately on sale is the ideal we want to believe in, and the image, exclusionary and exploitative, is the desirable object that, with the help of the captions such as “How...”, draws the viewer into this contract. The nature of this contract then, is to alleviate guilt in the viewer, which is engendered by the advert, image or caption. The presentation of the plight of disabled people, either visually or literally, is a nudge to the conscience, a reminder that people live less ordinary lives, an appeal to alter the situation, ultimately an appeal for money which, the viewer is assured, will make a genuine difference to somebody’s life. The captions of the charity ads direct the audience to this, the desired interpretation. In the isolated world shown

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<sup>32</sup> The subject has been introduced by De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* and taken up by a number of feminist theorists concerned with issues of representation, including Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies*, Moira Gatens in *Imaginary Bodies* and Julia Kristeva, who is referred to throughout. A relevant collection of essays is *Representing The Other*, edited by Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger.

<sup>33</sup> There have been several cases in the summer of 1999 of children with Down’s Syndrome being refused medical treatment (Marsh and Joseph 1999: 5).

in the advert, this charity will be there to support those affected by MS or cerebral palsy,<sup>34</sup> relieving us of the burden.

Such a drama is played out in Figure 1, in which a woman bends over a bathing man, perhaps to kiss him, or comfort him, perhaps to hear him better. She is wearing slightly dated clothes and seemingly has a 1950s haircut; the bath is free-standing, and the photograph is sepia, giving an overall impression of the past. The relationship is unclear - she may be the man's mother or wife or even daughter, as it is impossible to guess the man's age, but she obviously has a close relationship with him. Her arms around him display gentleness and her posture portrays concern. This scene is shot in a private house, not a hospital: the woman does not wear a uniform or cap, the walls seem to be decorated and the bath is not an institutional one - there are no hoists, and it is not placed against a wall. The photographer seems to have captured a private moment. Neither of the individuals shows an awareness of the camera, both faces are hidden, there is no display. The soft focus conjures up ideas of romance and the whole scene might imply eroticism - a loving couple, alone in a bathroom, in an intimate, private moment, only focused on one another. This gentle scene draws the audience in, and then the caption directs the viewer towards the correct interpretation: this is not an erotic scene at all - it is a photograph of an adult man being bathed because he is incapable of bathing himself, he is passive, de-sexed, not captured in a moment of pleasure, but in a time of tragedy. This is another parody of "normality". The parody is not humorous, as in the tabloid dealings with disability, or grotesque, as in pornography,<sup>35</sup> but it is distorted.

In a further distortion, the naked couples who feature in the "Tear" campaign have clearly classical allusions; they frequently seem to refer to classical representations of Adam and Eve,

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<sup>34</sup> This approach clearly achieves a high membership: most people with MS are members of MSS (Wolfenden Committee 1978: 39) and for Scope also a high proportion of the membership is comprised of those with cerebral palsy.

<sup>35</sup> For a fuller account of parodic images see Chapter 2: Body Spectra in Popular Women's Magazines, and Chapter 6: Representations of the Disabled Body in Pornography in this thesis.

or to “pieta” images. This would appear to be borne out by the implications of the advertisements: paradise lost. In Figure 2, the male is a mirror image of Mars in Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars*: the flowing locks, the hairless chest, the naked torso, the stretched neck; like Mars, he is vulnerable in contrast to his alert companion but while the painted image is erotic, in the advertisement the eroticism is eradicated. MS in this way becomes a symbolic disease, not an actual one (Hevey 37), representative of our own personal nightmares. Hevey maintains that the creation of a disease as a symbolic condition “is designed to mirror a fictional manifestation of the fear within the viewer” (37). In particular, the images of men affected by MS, figuratively and literally made impotent by it, are the nightmares of heterosexual men (Hevey 37). Charity advertising sells values, as do other modes: “it’s the image that will sell”, says Gene Nocon, “of this girl, in this dress” and while conspicuous stereotypes should be avoided in effective advertising, the image that the viewer has in the back of their mind will be evoked (Nocon 1988: 41). In the advertising of Scope and MSS the values of heterosexual potency, activity, power, control are played on: here he is, naked, impotent, sans everything. The threat is apparent: when the disease strikes, the sufferer is left with nothing, reduced to a child-like state of dependency, all identity will be stripped away. In consequence the disabled male body becomes feminised through disability.

The darkened background of Figure 2 denies all relationships or hope, and the solitude confirms the message that disability is an individual tragedy; it is impossible to tell even if the couple are indoors or outdoors, such is their removal from context. Their isolation is made primary through this framing. The Scope adverts also tend to feature solitary individuals suspended in time and space. The disability is therefore firmly conceptualised as a transcendent tragedy: in Figure 1, made all the more threatening to the viewer by the solitary and unspecified setting. Such advertising has significant effects on the identities of disabled people (Schmitt and Moody 1994). The advert is saying: “imagine being totally dependent, in

the power of another individual, reliant on someone who used to rely on you, passive, unable to complete even the most basic personal care tasks, being looked after for the rest of your life”.

The depiction of personal tragedy has a history in biblical narratives, as does the notion of disability as an individual affliction, linked to culpability, and with symbolic meanings, a state which is more than itself, which promises layers of significance and legion imports.<sup>36</sup> It is this individualisation which underpins representations of disability in children’s literature, and makes characters in horror movies exceptional.<sup>37</sup> The quasi-religious references<sup>38</sup> have undertones of blame: punished by God, expelled from Eden, forsaken and alone. The impairment charity represents itself as a kind of sanctuary, providing redemption and safety for those who have nothing and no-one, as well as the reassurance that they will assume the burden of caring for them. The advertising emphasises the responsibility of the audience to the disabled and then offers to fulfil it on their behalf for a small sum of money.

With this money, we are principally buying a body of theory about health and illness; we are encouraged by society and the state to guard against bodily decay (Featherstone *et al* 170). Health is represented by freedom, movement, expression and pleasure, and ill health, which seems to be synonymous with disability, with the reverse (Featherstone *et al* 170). In the consumption of ads that persistently represent disabled people as leading solitary, disastrous, pointless lives, we are affirming our belief in these values. The popular media constantly stress the cosmetic benefits of fitness, the link between inner and outer health (Featherstone *et al*). The vast array of visual images of the fit body creates a society in which “individuals

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 5: Biblical Representations of Disability.

<sup>37</sup> Different images are possible, such as those shown in the *Liberty, Equality, Disability* exhibition, but may prove to be unthinkable in advertising terms because the images they portray are of angry, indignant, proud, integrated, sexual people who are politically active and collectively identified. Charities have made an effort to deal with negative advertising images, but they are constrained by the social status of disability and the limits of representational acceptability, both of which will affect the success of an advertising campaign.

<sup>38</sup> The mortises in the ads of the tear campaign contain the MSS logo and short phrases under tears, such as: “a hope in hell”, having a religious echo and making large claims to redeem.

must constantly monitor the healthiness of their lifestyles” (Radley 199). We have created our own internal surveillance system. Recent years have seen a trend in health promotion to focus on the individual as responsible for disease prevention and a concentration on chronic rather than acute disease (Radley 192). This may be due to an ageing population as well as the desire to cut the cost of welfare provision on a national level. In the past, the solution to public ill health was discussed in terms of sanitation or improved living conditions, but shifts in perception of cause and effect have resulted in individualism, and by implication “the primary result of holding individuals responsible for their health is that they can be blamed for failure” (Radley 198). Women’s bodies are similarly the focus of self-regulatory strictures. Public concerns about contraception, foetal health, weight and sexually transmitted diseases identify a female focal point. By implication it is her responsibility to safeguard her body for her children or for men, or to prevent it from reproducing. In consequence, blame for high levels of single parent families, sexually transmitted disease, or premature or underweight babies are attributed to women.

I have demonstrated in this chapter that impairment charity advertising does not operate with more consideration for the integrity of representations than other forms of advertising, despite the claim of impairment charities to promote positive images of disabled people. Images of disabled people in charity advertising are formulaic, as are the images of women in advertising. They depict stereotypical images of illness, dependence and isolation. For example, the demographic incidence of MS and cerebral palsy is sacrificed to the creation of images that threaten the viewer with feminisation and its attributes of frailty and relative powerlessness. In addition, I have established that there are similarities between the ways in which female and disabled bodies are represented in advertising and that these similarities are constructed.

The next chapter considers how images of disability in the tabloid press select certain disabilities for their grotesque or humorous potential and construct triumphal narratives to describe the lives of women and disabled people.



## ***Chapter 2: Body Spectra in Popular Women's Magazines***

Magazines such as *Best*, *Eva*,<sup>1</sup> *Chat*, *Woman*, *Take a Break* and *That's Life* and the tabloid press<sup>2</sup> present the body as problematic or present individuals experiencing a problematic relationship to the body. They present stories about disabled people in sections such as "True Stories" (*Chat*) or "Reader's True Reality" (*Take A Break*) which narrate experiences of the problematic body in a continuum that ranges from distortions of the body such as extreme weight loss or gain through to "true" physical disability. Narratives of the problematic body are presented in this space regardless of where in this spectrum they appear. This chapter explores the ways in which particular disabilities are correlated with the problematic body and are aligned to gender in these narratives. Such narratives construct the disabled body as distorted, humorous and freakish.<sup>3</sup> In wider Western culture, the female body too is identified with the freakish (Russo 1995: 2). The discourse of women's magazines emphasizes the problematic relationship of the female subjects in the narrative to their bodies<sup>4</sup> and relates their experiences in triumphalist tones.<sup>5</sup>

I have chosen to analyse this material because it is characterised by a spectrum of

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<sup>1</sup> This magazine is no longer in circulation.

<sup>2</sup> In Britain the chief distinction in the press is between "quality" and "popular" press; in other words (Braithwaite and Barrell 1979), "popular" means non-quality (Gripsrud 1992: 84). However, this is more revealing of the society which categorizes its media thus than it is of the papers so defined, for the popular press is the preferred medium by definition and there is limited usefulness in simplistic condemnation (Gripsrud 84). Popular magazines, like the popular press, seem to be characterized by personalization and sensationalism (Dancyger 1978), "if the material, the new item *per se*, is not shocking or personal, the popular press will tend to present it as such, for instance by focusing on any traces of shocking or personal aspects of the material in question" (Gripsrud 85). This accounts for the falsity of the headlines which exaggerate the extraordinary to incredible proportions.

<sup>3</sup> The term freak is understood as "a monstrosity; an abnormally developed individual or thing" (OED 551) but the term "Freak Show" was used commonly in circuses in the nineteenth century to describe human performers such as dwarfs, Siamese twins, bearded women, feral children, amputees and so on. Russo argues that circus freaks "shared the same distancing, scrutiny, classification and exchange value as other colonial and domestic booty as the discourses of medicine, criminology, tourism, advertising, and entertainment converged" (1995: 80). The term "freak" was appropriated in the 1960s by genres of rock music and street culture in reference to the drug-taking lifestyle (OED 551). For a history of circus freaks see Fiedler 1981 and Bogdan 1988.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the general contents of these articles about disability or about women's lives are "true life" stories, often depicted as readers' own accounts, rather than as fiction or general articles by journalists.

<sup>5</sup> Defined as "self-satisfaction at one's achievements" (OED).

representations of the problematic body. As the material does not differentiate between points on this continuum I have chosen to look at the spectrum as a whole rather than to isolate the narratives of “true” disability. These magazines routinely carry stories about disability, far more often than either the more expensive women’s magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan* or *Marie Claire*, or the daily newspapers, like *The Sun* or *The Times*. These stories are also presented in quite specific ways,<sup>6</sup> usually referring to female characters and containing elements of humour and theatricality which evoke carnivalesque<sup>7</sup> images. In contrast, the daily tabloid newspapers, while carrying the same stories, do not develop them in this way, keeping the text reduced and often omitting colour images.<sup>8</sup>

These narratives feature more female than male characters. Female characters in both popular and classical culture in the West are more easily associated with the grotesque than male characters; for Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, the “senile, pregnant hag” represents the epitome of the grotesque (1984: 25). The Bearded Woman, the Fat Lady, the Medusa, the Tattooed Woman, the Hottentot Venus, the Hysteric, the Vampire, the Crone, the Witch, the Wicked Stepmother exhibit bodily characteristics of being “open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing” (Russo 1995: 8). This is in contrast to the classical, usually male, body which is presented as “transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-

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<sup>6</sup> As Gripsrud writes, “it [media emphasis on private life] is part of a tendency to distract the public from matters of principle by offering voyeuristic pseudo-insights into individual matters” (90). He also points out that “while melodrama in film, television, theatre and literature is presented as *fiction*, and thus normally understood as ‘not empirically true’, as ‘hypothetical examples’ by audiences, the melodramatic representation of the world in the popular press claims to be the Truth” (Gripsrud 91).

<sup>7</sup> Drawing on Bakhtin, carnivalization can be described as “the liberating and subversive influence of popular humour on the literary tradition” a form which allows “alternative voices to dethrone the authority of official culture” (Baldick 1990: 30). Rabelais, for example, “subverts the asceticism of the medieval church by giving free reign to the bodily profanity of folk festivals” (Baldick 1990: 31). However, in these examples, the point of the use of humour and reversal is to expose rather than to celebrate.

<sup>8</sup> Magazines, being feature rather than news orientated, tend to contain longer articles than the daily newspapers, about 2,000 words instead of about 1,200 words (White *et al* 1993: 41). These features are prepared further in advance of publication than the newspaper features, and so there is a greater lead-time than in the last-minute media release. To compensate for this, the features tend to concentrate on length and reflection, rather than on exclusivity (White *et al* 41).

contained, symmetrical, and sleek” (Russo 1995: 8).<sup>9</sup> Grotesque<sup>10</sup> imagery is perceived as primarily visual (Rhodes 1982: 7).

These accounts are predominantly about disability of the visible kind; there are many articles about facial disfigurements, skin complaints and obesity.<sup>11</sup> They are always accompanied by colour photographs but in addition describe the physical aspects of the disease or disability in graphic detail, reinforcing the visual and spectacular nature of disability.<sup>12</sup> In articles which are concerned with invisible conditions such as allergies, visible symptoms are emphasised in the text, as for instance in an article in *That's Life* which describes the experience of certain allergies: “I couldn’t keep food down, I was covered in sores and my skin itched like crazy ... I have forty injections a day and I’m on a drip” (McCarthy 1996: 12-13). This image is grotesque as it focuses on the physical and inspires both laughter and revulsion, while verging on the distasteful (Rhodes 10-13).

It is also grotesque because it depicts the body at war with itself. In the popular mythology of the tabloid magazine, the body, being changeable, can change in a radical way to attack itself instead of defend itself. This is apparent in stories which describe conditions of the

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<sup>9</sup> Feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and Harriet Taylor Mill (1851) through radical feminists (Daly 1978; Millett 1977) to postmodern feminists (Cixous 1981; Irigaray *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One* 1985) have argued with the construction of masculinity as rational, cultural, unified and self-controlled versus the female as emotional, physical, plural, and victim of her physicality as propounded by Rousseau.

<sup>10</sup> The term grotesque was first applied to paintings discovered as murals in Roman apartments in the early sixteenth century depicting bizarre animal and plant compositions. As these rooms were all underground, buried beneath centuries of Roman city building, they were called caves or “grottoes” and their decoration was labelled grotesque (Rhodes 7). These formations were composed of incongruous and unnatural factors, hence the fusing of naturally disparate elements is called grotesque. It is characterized by “bizarre distortions, especially in the exaggerated or abnormal depiction of human features” and in literature involves “freakish caricatures” or disturbing oddness of character (Baldick 1990: 93). It has come to be associated with Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) in comic form and in horror form with Wolfgang Kayser (1986).

<sup>11</sup> One notable exception is mental illness, which gains quite a lot of text space without being physically distinguishable, but I think is connected to visible disability in its comic dramatic implications and possibilities. Most of the articles are, at least partially, informative initially but the information is given in a melodramatic, and often excessively medical, tone.

<sup>12</sup> The familiar pictures of the packed amphitheatres of medical schools when an operation or post mortem is carried out demonstrate the specularity of medicine, reinforced by the site being referred to as an operating “theatre”. Therefore, knowledge, the (specifically female) body and theatricality have been closely linked since the 1500s (Bruno, 239; Kuryluk 1987: 28; Russo 1986: 53). Medicine and the grotesque are linked by a common subject - the body. Femininity, far more than masculinity, is likewise centrally associated with physical appearance (Edholm 1992: 154-6).

auto-immune system, whereby the body seems to spontaneously erupt in self-destructive symptoms such as sores, rashes, ulcers, or vomiting. It is also apparent in stories which are concerned with extreme weight loss or gain.

Features are often concerned with diseases of the immune system. In one example, the author suffers from multiple chemical sensitivity disorder which has led to her nervous and immune systems being irremediably impaired and any exposure to commonly used chemicals may cause her to faint, vomit, or break out in rashes and sores. In another example, a child has a condition so rare that it has been named Joanna's Disease after her. It is an auto-immune disease which, in Joanna's case, manifests itself in an extreme reaction to cold: she starts gibbering, has difficulty breathing, develops ulcers, and "hideous swellings" on her hands and feet, her skin cracks and her temperature soars. Her parents have been warned that the disease is not under control: "if it wanted to take over, it could have Joanna within days" they have been told (Chapman 57). They fight an ongoing battle against chaos, the family home is kept at a constant 24 degrees and if Joanna should have to venture outside she wears a tailor-made all-in-one, head-to-toe thermal suit. Like Gillian McCarthy, who was told "you should be living in a bubble" (Duffy 13), Joanna Harris also is in danger of her body in a sense self-destructing; both conditions could cause the body to erupt spontaneously and kill the sufferer and to some extent the attempt to create stability is an antidote to the chaotic diseases. Both sufferers tread a fine line between the chaos within and the chaos without, and their skin, which is the very organ which should protect their bodies from the external world, and contain the internal body, is the site of a tense struggle. Joanna Harris is shown at the height of an attack and her skin looks inside-out, red raw, which is reminiscent of other grotesqueries.<sup>13</sup> The skin contains the viscera, both because the viscera is inside it and because it cannot get out (Rawson 1982: 223). Therefore disorders of the skin are particularly

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<sup>13</sup> Such as Swift's use of inversion in mock argument: "I saw a Woman *flay'd*, and you will hardly believe, how much it altered her Person for the worse".

appropriate for grotesque imagery because they evoke the danger of boundaries, which are both the point at which two elements are separated *and* the only point at which they are in danger of coming together. The problem of skin disorders, like the problem of weight extremes, is the threat of a rupture in the boundary.

Weight (too much or too little) is predominantly seen as problematic in relation to the female body (Caskey 32),<sup>14</sup> although the female body's reproductive cycle is typified by weight gain and loss (Chernin 1983: 32). The overweight people depicted in women's magazines are usually women and they occupy the same positions in the magazines as the "freak" stories.<sup>15</sup> The article "I look like this to stop men fancying me" announces itself as incongruous; accompanied by a photo of Sylvia Hurt, subject of the article, with her male partner. As she is obviously in a sexual relationship something remains unexplained in this scenario (Ward and Corr 1996). The article describes Sylvia's attempts to lose weight before her realisation that she prefers to be fat as she believes this makes her unattractive to men which, since her rape, makes her feel more secure. At one point, under pressure from her family, she had her jaws wired together. This prevents the person eating anything other than liquids, or blended food, usually with the effect of rapid drastic weight loss but nevertheless an absurd operation and also dangerous as exemplified in this case when Sylvia took an overdose and the wires had to be removed before further treatment, potentially endangering her life further. Such a process is bizarre because it closes an orifice; the main point of a mouth is to eat. Although not the only function of this orifice, consumption is its most vital function and one which we cannot live without; we have to eat and we have no other way of

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<sup>14</sup> This is reflected by the frequency with which women are the subject of features in women's magazines (Cox 1987: 160). Men never attract the same negative attention for being obese or underweight (Cox 1987: 161). Feminist writing on weight issues includes Caskey 175-89; Chernin (1983); MacKenzie (1980); Orbach (1974). For feminist writing on anorexia and associated conditions see Bordo (1992); Bruch (1973); Chernin (1983); Ellman (1993).

<sup>15</sup> One article in *Best* (6 June 2000) describes a young man's anger and humiliation at being (wrongly) diagnosed with anorexia (Charlesworth 2000).

eating than through the mouth.<sup>16</sup> To artificially close up the mouth then is grotesque and unnatural because we are closing a necessary orifice. Because it is a boundary site, the boundary between the inner and outer body, the method by which external matter is assimilated into the body, it is a point of contention; it is a stage where certain dramas can be acted out. To voluntarily block a necessary orifice is even more eccentric when the reason is to prevent food entering the body.<sup>17</sup> It is the body at war with itself. Here the body has uncontrollable, unquenchable appetites which it is unable to leave unfulfilled.<sup>18</sup> In order to justify a radical medical intervention, it must be believed that the mind is unable to prevent the arms, legs, or hands from buying and feeding excessive amounts of food to the body - the body is conceptualised as fragmented, as consisting of disparate and often conflicting elements which must be externally and forcibly unified.<sup>19</sup> The same could be said to be true of another drastic but not uncommon invasive technique, “stomach stapling”, a process whereby the stomach sac is reduced with metal staples (under general anaesthetic) in order to limit its capacity to hold food. The processes are grotesque because the images are in conflict; a mouth should be able to eat. In Western culture there is correspondence between fatness, femininity and chaos (Rhodes 141-55).<sup>20</sup> In modern cultural imagination, women represent an excess of the body. Being constructed as predominantly physical beings, rooted in their physicality, any excess of the body is gendered feminine (Ellman). Obesity is related to appetite, which has overt sexual connotations as well as to growth, reproduction, fertility

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<sup>16</sup> For an example of such a drama under discussion see Caskey's implication of the politics of gender relations in anorexia (1986: 176-89).

<sup>17</sup> It may also represent in this case a reflection of her refusal of sexual penetration.

<sup>18</sup> This is reminiscent of the consuming sexuality that can be attributed to certain female depictions, for example, the whore, the witch. Bordo suggests that it is also expressive of female hunger for independence and public power (1992: 18).

<sup>19</sup> Hayles writes that female excess in the form of obesity or large breasts in pornographic material is used to encourage and justify male violence against, and control of, women (Hayles 164).

<sup>20</sup> Rhodes cites Jonson's *Bartholemew Fair* in support of his theory that obesity and woman are closely connected in sixteenth-century drama (141-55).

and enlargement.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, grotesque images of sweating and feeding, also associated with obesity, seem to refer to physical waste and decay (Rhodes 115).<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the over-weight woman represents something out of control, particularly in the twentieth century when the assumption is that no one chooses to be overweight and therefore fatness is the result of a failed effort to control the physical body (Caskey 176; Ellman 3-4). There is a correlation between this assumption and the notion of an ungovernable female nature; the uncontrolled body reflects an uncontrollable essence. The outer relates to the inner so that the woman is fat because she cannot stop eating. The fat woman is frequently the subject of satire and scorn in popular culture, as evident in the title of the article headed “I was so fat I squashed a horse” (Lenahan 2000). Here excess threatens to breach the boundaries – the woman’s insides are too large for her limits. It is often said in these narratives that her weight “ballooned,” an adjective implying the tension between the outer and inner and the battle of one to contain the other.

There are other examples of narratives representing the overweight female as chaotic. *Take a Break* ran a story in October 1996 entitled “I am a WOMAN”. Although the title assumes some denial of her sexual identity this is misleading; it is quite impossible for the woman to be a man since obesity and the feminine are conjoined (Caskey 175-6). The accompanying photographs confirm this - Norma, the heroine, is pictured with long hair, wearing pink dresses, next to her husband, Terry, and four children; she bakes, shops and diets. She has had five children, an excessive number in the late twentieth century, and one has died, another failure to control her world. The climax of her story is her decision to have her stomach stapled, an operation in containment which fails since the staples burst, resulting

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<sup>21</sup> Feminist performance artists such as Jenny Saville, Annie Sprinkle, Karen Finley and the photographer Jacqueline Hayden have used images of overweight and underweight women in ways which subvert these traditional associations.

<sup>22</sup> Weight has different connotations in different cultures, eras and socio-economic classes (Bassuk 142; Caskey 177; Russo 1995: 23).

in a perforated stomach and septicaemia, the descriptions of which are quite revolting. Any attempt to invade further into the interior is impossible. False boundaries cannot be placed since the tension between the existing boundaries finds its own balance. The story ends with Norma accepting her weight and vowing not to try to change it, but nevertheless substantially slimmer than prior to the operation (26-7).

The sensationalism and the images of surplus, of redundancy, of the body out of control that are constructed in such tabloid representation of overweight people are images associated with the freak show, the (comic) grotesque and with the feminine in other arenas.

The other weight extreme, anorexia, still objectifies the person but lacks the humour of the stories of overweight people. The feature “I’d rather die than put on weight” is the story of Sarah Greene who at 14 years old weighs just over 3 stones. The piece is structured as a diary, describing her thoughts over the five years she has been anorexic but it is her dissociation from, and hatred of, her body that dominates the entries. It appears that her body image is restricted to her skin and bones and that anything between is an alien part of her which must be expelled. She perceives her body as fragmented and alien; cellulite or fatty tissue, although biologically necessary and intrinsic parts of the body, Sarah thinks she can choose to discard without recognising that the body cannot survive in the absence of certain components. She writes, “Mum said it was just a bit of puppy fat, but I didn’t want it on my body”, denying that the tissue is part of her body (Wright 1996: 38). She is also contesting that the skin is a stable boundary to the body, since she is aiming to expel substance inside the skin without (presumably) rupturing or discarding the skin itself.

Other narratives in women’s magazines depict the problematised body as threatened by an external force such as injury or disease. These offer descriptions of disability that stress the unpredictability of the disabled body either through the volatile nature of the disability or through the indefinite prognosis of its development. Doctors are often quoted as saying, “I’m



afraid we'll just have to wait and see" (Lockey 1996: 60), or giving warnings such as "the disease is not controlled, it's just behaving itself for the time being" (Chapman 57). These stories feature unpredictable diseases and are imbued with a sense of impending chaos. It is pervasive, waiting to take over the unmindful body at any moment. Bodies in these narratives are depicted as grotesque, alien and freakish.

For example, a story in *Best*, "My darling wife got Alzheimer's at 43", has elements of the grotesque in the emphasis on the difference between Margaret Carmen before and after developing Alzheimer's disease. The first paragraph sets the tone of strangeness: "Whenever Margaret wants to tell me something, she makes a humming noise. I've learnt to interpret it, just like a mother understands the cries of her baby. But Margaret isn't a little girl, she's my wife" (Doherty 1996: 8). A wife and mother herself, she is nurtured like a baby by her husband and children: "caring for Margaret is now a 24-hour job. She has no sense of danger, so she has to be watched every single moment, particularly when she's eating, in case she chokes" (Doherty 9). Prior to the onset of the disease, she is described as having been "a bright, fiery, amazing woman ... with her fierce intellect and sharp wit" (Doherty 9), in stark contrast to the person she has become, unable to read, write or even dress herself. The two images are irreconcilable and frightening, all the more so for the disease being invisible, destroying the brain cells without affecting the physical appearance of the person.<sup>23</sup>

The physical appearance is the focal point for the story of Nicky Featherstone, who has stunted growth in her arms (Clarke "I Can Do Anything...": 26-7). The visual images here focus on Nicky doing ordinary, everyday things such as driving, eating, telephoning, brushing her teeth and playing the keyboard, but the grotesqueness of the images comes firstly from the disparity between the ordinariness of the tasks and the extraordinariness of the body, and secondly from the strangeness of someone without arms doing things that most people do

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<sup>23</sup> The appearance is usually seen to be indicative of mental, emotional and moral states. See Elaine Showalter on the importance of appearance in establishing mental illness in women (1987).

with their arms and hands.<sup>24</sup> None of these photographs show her legs, so the readers' attention is concentrated on the difference between ordinary arms and these arms; not all tasks require hand usage so this article, far from demonstrating all the things Nicky can do, actually shows how awkwardly she performs the most mundane tasks. Someone with no lower arms playing the keyboard, which is an instrument specifically for the fingers, is a far more incongruous image than someone swimming.<sup>25</sup> Using stumps as if they were hands only emphasises that they are not hands, creating a grotesque image.

The grotesque and freakish image is partly achieved through textual exaggeration. The front page of *Eva* for 11 September 1996, for example, reads "WONDERGIRL: Pasha's legs are made of LYCRA!" Upbeat in tone, this headline is followed up inside the magazine with a further jaunty announcement: "Lycra's given our daughter a LIFE" (16-17). The implied image is one of a half-human, half-lycra girl and the photographs of Pasha seem to confirm this. The main text describes her condition of cerebral palsy, which has rendered her quadriplegic. The gravity of her disability is in stark contrast to the frivolous informality of the fabric lycra. Lycra is marketed as a particularly supple material, it stretches to fit any size and adapts to fit any shape; most tights and leggings are at least partially made of Lycra. This is a cruel contrast to the material of Pasha's body, which is neither agile nor elastic, but which relies on "a complicated system of splints and ties" (17). This description has something of the mechanical about it.

When the body is so extraordinary that it breaches the boundaries of the human, it is represented as alien, object-like, or animal-like;<sup>26</sup> such imagery is prolific throughout history

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<sup>24</sup> This substitution of legs and feet for arms and hands is exaggerated and parodic (Russo 1986: 90). It is used as a device in Tod Browning's film *Freaks* in the Wedding Feast scene to emphasise the difference between Cleopatra and the "freaks".

<sup>25</sup> In another example, *The Sun* published an article about a man with six fingers on each hand which showed him with specially made gloves and using a keyboard (3 June 2000: 32).

<sup>26</sup> Gender is also a factor in anthropomorphism, where for example, cats and ships are seen as female, as is the alien in the film series *Alien*. This dimension imbues the object in question with characteristics associated with femininity but also imbues women with characteristics associated with the object.

and culture, and disabled bodies, always viewed as extraordinary, seem to be particularly vulnerable to these metaphors.<sup>27</sup> *Chat*'s front page for 7 September 1996 uses the headline "Robo Cop MIRACLE" to introduce George Lambert's story of surviving cancer of the tongue. The title refers back to a film with Arnold Schwarzenegger as the android with a human brain, whereas actually George Lambert has no prostheses fitted at all. The creation of a myth of non-human parts, despite being literally untrue, is figuratively true because by transplanting one part of his body to another, George Lambert has stepped beyond the bounds of a humanity that most people experience.<sup>28</sup>

The person in the story can also be dehumanized by being compared to an object. The story of Alice Thomas which was run in *Chat* with the leader "If I cuddle her, she'll break"<sup>29</sup> (Hall 1996: 52) makes her sound like a doll which can shatter into fragments and, once broken, can be discarded. This image of fragmentation is inappropriate to a child, and actually quite horrific; a broken limb is not as serious as a completely broken body. Alice is very small and very pretty: it is easy to see why the writer has thought of a doll in relation to her, but projecting Alice Thomas as an object makes her disability all the more remote and her existence all the more alien.

This imagery represents the difference between the "them" of the stories and the "us" as

<sup>27</sup> Davros (leader of the Daleks in *Dr. Who*), Penguin in *Batman*, werewolves and Dog-boys of the circus are all familiar images but the physical appearance of each can be attributed to a medical condition.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein (1977), Susan Griffin (1981) and to a certain extent Susan Wendell (1996), have developed the view that alienation from the body reflects a desire to escape its vulnerability which is reminiscent of infant need and motivates "cultures and ideologies that objectify, rage against, and attempt to control women" (Wendell 167).

<sup>29</sup> Sensationalism is also achieved through the frequent use of false headlines: "I looked in the mirror and a Purple Monster Looked Back" (Cozens 1997: 16); "My Head Looked Like a Meccano Set" (Howell 2000: 22-3); "One of my Boobs Grew – The Other Didn't" (Wharton 26); "One Sniff of a Nut Could Kill Me" (McGowen 1998). One of the reasons that this type of fiction is created is that disabled bodies are so extraordinary that adding to it does not seem to be so untruthful as the same fictions would be if told about a non-disabled body. Neither is it so difficult to believe them as once a body becomes extraordinary it makes nearly anything credible; as Pasha Thompson, having cerebral palsy, has already entered a place we cannot follow, it is a short leap to accept that her legs are made of a stretchy dress fabric. Joanna Harris has a disease never seen before so the remedy of a horrific drug seems consistent and Alice Thomas, looking like a tiny living doll, might well break like one. If disabled people are remarkable when they can brush their teeth or eat a meal, how much more so when they are cured by dangerous drugs or walk on lycra.

readers.<sup>30</sup> For example, one story about a woman with disabilities deriving from the thalidomide drug is titled “Coping with Being a Disabled Mum” but lists in the first paragraph all the things that the woman finds difficult, including shopping, looking after her daughter and housework (Wright 1996: 60-1). As these are tasks that most women would not find physically difficult, the difference between the disabled mum and able-bodied mum is emphasised. The stigma of this difference is even transferred to her child: “my daughter does realise her mum’s different to other mums, but she doesn’t ask why – she just accepts it” (Wright 1996: 60).

The sense of otherness in these narratives is achieved through photographic images as well as through text. The purpose of photographic images in articles about disabled people in mass culture magazines seems to be neither to portray the beautiful<sup>31</sup> nor solely to convey unpleasant information, but a combination of the latter with a comic festive<sup>32</sup> component. Rhodes contends that the grotesque bridges the gap between images which we normally find incompatible; it gives a name to the abstract. The use of grotesque imagery with carnivalesque ambience demonstrates a concern with the boundaries of the body as well as a preoccupation with the body in physical *extremis*. Rhodes believes that this accounts for the repellent grotesque images which are sometimes used in art and literature:

...the desire to give body to what is abstract produces the images which cluster around that other, macabre and repulsive pole of the grotesque. The monstrous births, the tortured criminal, and the plague- or famine-stricken city are all

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<sup>30</sup> The physiological circus freak is seen to represent “the problems of the boundary between self and other (conjoined twins), between male and female (the hermaphrodite), between the body and the world outside the body (the *monstre par excès*), and between the animal and the human (feral and wildmen)” (Stewart 1993: 109).

<sup>31</sup> The use of grotesque imagery may seem bizarre, since the logic of showing ugly images to attract an audience is not apparent. Photographs are generally expected to portray beauty rather than ugliness; Susan Sontag in *On Photography* writes: “Nobody ever discovered ugliness through photographs. But many, through photographs, have discovered beauty. Except for those situations in which the camera is used to document, or to mark social rites, what moves people to take photographs is finding something beautiful” (1979: 85).

<sup>32</sup> Festive is used here to refer to the reversal of order and emphasis on the marginalized which characterizes community celebrations of the middle ages. “True Life” narratives bring the marginalized to the fore for the purpose of exposure rather than celebration. They make the marginalized vulnerable to the public gaze.

objectifications of moral deformity and spiritual illness (Rhodes 14).<sup>33</sup>

The photographs draw the reader in with promises of a curious spectacle, playing on voyeuristic tendencies and a desire for illicit knowledge (Hermes 1995: 136). Simultaneously these images are a comfort to the viewer: though strange they confirm our own inclusion, our own privileged place in the social and political order, and offer reassurance by affirming the reader's identity as other from that which is represented. The depicted remains an object, an other, subject to ridicule, inquisition, patronage, subject of exploration; a disruptive element which temporarily threatens disorder but which is ultimately excluded or reformed in the image of ourselves.

This is manifest in stories such as Margaret Carmen's. She is described as having been taken over by Alzheimer's disease (Doherty 1996: 9). Since the disease has taken hold, she has experienced "uncontrollable rages" during which she kicks and punches her young daughters and anyone else who gets in the way (Doherty 9). The disease progresses with the gradual death of the brain cells, reducing the functions and activities the brain is capable of performing, but here, the disease is seen as a force which has robbed her body of humanity; her husband speaks of "Margaret, the way she used to be" and of a moment of lucidity as "like a window opening from her world into ours" (Doherty 9). She has become someone less than the reader. What is "left" of Margaret Carmen, which is her body and only residual personality traits, is a fragmented part of her integral self, and it is apparently not enough to make her human. The fear of fragmentation which the writing exhibits echoes the fear of feminine pluralism demonstrated in representations of women.<sup>34</sup>

This fear is sensationalised, objectifying disabled people by making them into a visual

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<sup>33</sup> I look at this issue in greater detail in Chapter 3: The Disabled Body in Literature for Children and Chapter 5: The Disabled Body in The Bible.

<sup>34</sup> This is particularly exhibited in film. *Dead Ringers* is a good example, as is *Boxing Helena*, a film I examine in detail in Chapter 4.

spectacle, rather than the subject of the narratives.<sup>35</sup> This is the case in nearly all the articles published in these magazines: the human interest is with the disabled person's non-disabled partner or carer; the central character's attraction seems to stop at the visual level. This is particularly so in the case of articles about children as they often focus on the parents' situation rather than that of the child, as demonstrated by the titles "Our Daughter was Blinded by a Worm" (*Eva* 3 May 1995: 39), "A Mother's Courage" (Sheridan 1996), and "We think He's Beautiful Enough" (Cassey 2000: 15). Many of these magazines seem to assume that all their readers are non-disabled in the angle they adopt on disability; it is inconceivable that a magazine could consider disabled readers as an audience for an article that appeared in *That's Life* in September 1996 entitled "Would you abort a disabled child?" and subtitled "You want this baby, but you know he or she will never lead a normal life. Terminate or let live? What would you do? Two women explain their decisions" (Bartlett 10-11). The captions confirm this interpretation: "Roz's story - I still think I did the right thing ... I did it for all our sakes" (Bartlett 10) and "Julie's story - I couldn't play God with my baby's life" (Bartlett 11). A feature in *Best* 27 February 1996, "I love my daughter but I wish she'd died at birth" gives the account of an able-bodied woman's struggle to bring up a

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<sup>35</sup> The magazines looked at here obviously seek to create sensationalism through exaggeration and hyperbole. For instance *Best* (19 December 1995) published an article about Christopher Reeve (who suffered a spinal cord injury leaving him paralysed from the neck down), containing information over two pages about the accident and its results; however, the title "Christopher Reeve: What I really want for Christmas" undermines any serious intention in its flippancy. In comparison, *Time* magazine (Rosenblatt August 1996: 28-40) published a thirteen-page article on his life, very largely text rather than photographs, which contained several medical diagrams and labels. The article is in the "Medicine" section, declaring itself scientific, and carries much detailed information. However, it gives way to triumphalist tones in the front page blurb: "an intimate look at Christopher Reeve's heroic battle to rebuild his life and champion the quest to cure spinal-cord injuries. Will he ever walk again?" and in the captions inside: "At night he dreams that he is whole again. He is sailing with [his wife] Dana. He is playing with his children" (32-3). The use of parataxis is of course space-saving but it also adds to the dramatic impact, the brevity stressing the theatricality of the story line.

learning disabled daughter.<sup>36</sup>

These articles centre on the effect of the disability on the carers, the life changes that have been imposed on them. The disabled person becomes little more than the source of trouble or the field on which a drama of decision-making is played out. These pieces, while being fascinated with a grotesque sight or disease, are not in sympathy with it. It is the “normal” person who is the subject of the text, the disability is an element of *their* life: it is an event in *their* biography. It is in this emphasis that the representation of bodily extremes can be seen as an exploration of a general concern with the physical body as a vehicle for the representation of able-bodied anxieties rather than a simple desire to depict the lives of disabled people.<sup>37</sup>

Articles which describe children’s disabilities focus on the pathos of children being excluded or bullied and show the misery that this can cause while at the same time accepting that the disabled child is a natural victim of persecution. Features such as “Am I Ugly, Mummy?” (Todd 1996) endorse the exclusion of these children by categorising them as a group apart from other, non-disabled children, while seeming to represent them positively, reminiscent of the construction of negative images of women in representation (Todd 1996).

If positive presentation is one (stated) intention of the editors, another intention which the

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<sup>36</sup> Feminism has been criticised for advocating “abortion on demand” (Sjoo 1972: 188; Fine and Asche 1988: 297) for women without considering the consequences for disabled people (Morris 1991: 64-83). There is an assumption that the disability of a foetus is on par with rape, incest and threat to life as a valid reason for abortion (Cornell 1995: 69). Morris writes that widespread use of prenatal screening to identify potential disability undermines the value of disabled peoples’ lives (1991: 79) by its implicit rejection of disabled children (Hershey 1994: 30). The de-selection of disabled foetuses is underpinned with the assumption that disabled lives are not worth living (Silvers 1994: 159), that disabled children are an inevitable and unfair burden to their families and to society (Wendell 153). Genetic screening has potentially grave outcomes (Cohan 1986): the channeling of resources into screening out disabled foetuses rather than into improved care packages (Rothman 1996; Hershey 31; Finger 1990; Johnson 1990: 34), increased pressure on women to abort disabled foetuses (Morris 1991: 83; Wendell 155-6), the expansion of eugenics policies (Degener 1990; Sherwin 1992). Screening has its limitations because it cannot predict accidents or disease (Wendell 153) and 90% of disabled people acquire their disability during their lifetime rather than at birth (Burnett and Paul 49). Screening cannot determine the degree of disability a child may experience (Blumberg 1994: 220). Susan Wendell’s final argument against the inevitable abortion of disabled foetuses is that “every life has its burdens, some of them far worse than disability” (Wendell 154).

<sup>37</sup> Hermes suggests that the readers’ enjoyment of melodramas that focus on random tragedy may be a way of displacing our own feeling of injustice (128).

editors lay claim to is the promotion of the irrelevance of physical beauty, or a belief in the predominance of inner spiritual beauty; the texts of the articles are very much concerned with the examination of the low self-esteem of disabled children and the reassertion that their physical difference should not make them the targets of bullying or victimisation. However, the very existence of the article would seem to negate this intention. The photographs that accompany these articles are therefore compelled through the rules of what is and what is not representable in the photographic image to depict the children as “normalised” in that their disability is disguised by clothing and they are shown performing everyday tasks like playing, drawing or brushing their teeth. In these constructed images, the difference between disabled children and non-disabled children is paradoxically both understated and emphasised. The understatement itself contributes to the emphasis; rigid adherence to the customs of child photography is in stark contrast to the distorted subjects of the photographs.

In her piece on femininity and colonization, Judith Williamson writes that the appearance of difference in the form of validation serves an ideological purpose:

the whole point about most of the ideologies manifested in mass cultural “texts” is that they are dominant or hegemonic ideologies, and are therefore likely to be intimately connected with that very class which is furthest from “the masses.” The function of most ideologies is to contain difference or antagonism, and the most effective way to do this ... is to set up difference ... A populist ideology operates by creating a simple dualism between dominant and dominated groups, who then become defined purely by their mutual “difference” rather than by actual differences (1986: 100).

Within such a framework the disabled and non-disabled, constructed as opposites, serve as one of many diversionary fractures: “The whole drive of our society is toward displaying as much difference as possible within it while eliminating where at all possible what is different



from it: the supreme trick of bourgeois ideology is to be able to produce its opposite out of its own hat” (Williamson 1986: 100).

Display and exposure are common elements in these narratives of the problematic body. The search for the “true” story, and the dismemberment of the physical body in the process, can be witnessed in a diversity of texts, from detective fiction to horror films, from strip-tease to masked balls, from pornography to representations of surgery.<sup>38</sup> Akin to this idea of the necessity to dismember the body in order to discover the person is the assumption of the elusiveness of truth, the search for which requires the removal of deceptive obstacles, barriers, impediments, before what is behind the latter can be revealed; truth - a delusive, delusionary, slippery, bashful monster, caught unwillingly in the spotlight of journalistic investigation. Partly, this is the invention of journalists; it is their marketing strategy - “we will uncover the truth” - which justifies their existence since the truth must, by implication, be difficult to find or the press would not be advertising this as their cardinal burdensome task.<sup>39</sup>

Susan Sontag highlights the obligation of the photograph to portray truth:

... photographs make a claim to be true that paintings can never make. The history of photography could be recapitulated as the struggle between two different imperatives: beautification, which comes from the fine arts, and truth-telling, which is measured not only by a notion of value-free truth, a legacy from the sciences, but by a moralised ideal of truth-telling, adapted from nineteenth century literary models and from the (then) new profession of independent journalism. Like the post-romantic novelist and the reporter, the photographer was supposed to unmask hypocrisy and combat ignorance (1979:

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<sup>38</sup> This may be the intense “desire to see and find *out*” (Russo 1995: 118) when “the inside is turned outside and the dark secrets of the organic become disclosed as the bodily cave is opened up” (Kuryluk 1987: 28). The desire to find out is exploited by representations which create a mystery; for example, advertisements for exotic travel often use the image of a black woman to signify “mysterious lands” (Alvarado *et al* 1987: 185).

<sup>39</sup> Constructions of headlines and titles of magazines such as “*That’s Life!*” demonstrate a claim to reality (Alvarado *et al* 1987: 177).

86).<sup>40</sup>

Truth has always had particular relevance in the study of disease and disability since a definition of disability first became necessary when employers became aware that it was possible to fake certain disabilities. Disability and its classification then became the realm of the medical profession who claimed to be able to confirm true disability and to unmask faked handicap.<sup>41</sup>

The element of unmasking is intrinsic to representations of disability. Rather than a desire to beautify, the images in mass culture magazines show a desire to “rip off the mask”, to reveal the hidden,<sup>42</sup> not just the hidden lie, but the hidden horror, as medical photography and medical models seem also to do. These photographs are evidence of the written text - they prove it - so they both embellish the story and show something unusual to the reader/consumer. Many of the stories quoted here reveal the complexities and mysteries of “medical miracles”. They expose medical procedures which are not necessarily common knowledge and describe diseases and treatments which may be largely unheard of.<sup>43</sup> It is unlikely that most readers know that it is possible to transplant a piece of one’s arm into the mouth and have it function as a tongue, before reading it in *Chat*, or that thalidomide could save someone’s life before reading it in *Best*. The mystery surrounding these specific extraordinary bodies is solved, but the appetite is whetted for more; the destruction of the body, or its unwrapping, can be seen as an attempt to destroy the vessel in order to see a

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<sup>40</sup> However, within journalism, photography has always had a problematic role since journalism polarizes the informative and the entertaining, equating these with the quality and popular press respectively, and photojournalism is usually considered to fall within the category of the latter, the popular (Becker 1992: 130). An equation is therefore assumed of “tabloid = sensationalism = photography” (Becker 132); the more pictures, the more popular. Aside from this suspicion of its trivial appeal, the central problem for serious journalism arises because on the one hand photography is presumed to visually portray a factual event accurately, and on the other hand, this by-passes the journalistic practice of interpretation (Becker 130).

<sup>41</sup> Russo notes that through the nineteenth century there emerged an increasing tendency to “medicalise” the conditions of circus freaks so that by the mid-twentieth century they were viewed as sick and suffering from various pathological disorders rather than as exotic (1995: 94-116).

<sup>42</sup> The veil and the mask, as forms of semi-revelation, have a history in the pornographic representation of female bodies. I examine this issue closely in Chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup> Apparently neutral and scientific representations are significant as they profess to be impartial but they still “fix” figures stereotypically (Alvarado 182).

different vision of the world.

The disabled body is particularly vulnerable to such a disassembly because it is not viewed as integer in grotesque imagery, but rather as a vessel lacking organic unity. As Rhodes writes, “both instability of physical form and the confusion of the relative size of things are important features of grotesque art” (108). It is common for the grotesque image to favour “vessels of all sorts, because they can be stuffed with strange matter and thus violate the integrity of things” (109).<sup>44</sup> Female bodies are frequently represented as “vessels” and common images in film and pornography are of them being penetrated and violated.

Anxieties about bodily integrity are partially addressed in tabloid magazines through humour. Many of the stories in these magazines are constructed as comical, or contain an element of comedy. These are usually stories about problems of obesity, amnesia or allergies. One formula is the scapegoat, the comic butt and the features which deal with the above complaints utilise this device.

The comic butt is featured in the story “Helpless in my own home” which describes Clare Grey as the unfortunate victim of a string of unsuitable carers who range from lazy, to drunk, to thieving (Clarke “Helpless...”: 38-9). She becomes increasingly pessimistic until deciding to set up her own agency to match clients and carers. The photographs show mock-anger and mock-disdain which add to the light-heartedness; this is a form of burlesque, which Rhodes describes as a common feature of the grotesque (1996: 20). He says, “the use of a laudatory form for purpose of comic disparagement is burlesque; the absurdity of the images, and their relation to the body, is grotesque” (20), again relating the image and comedy directly to the body.

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<sup>44</sup> Rhodes suggests that “bodily distortion in the microcosm reflects disharmony in the body politic, or at least points to an imminent disharmony” (46), citing the plagues of 1592-3 and 1603-4 as contributing to an apocalyptic atmosphere (47). The instability of the body can represent concerns for the economic and social stability of the political state, but it can also be indicative of a concern for the boundaries of nation, race, gender and class.

Another sense of disorder occurs in features concerning memory loss; this is a disorder of the body social because it inverts what we believe to be natural. Many of these stories that describe forms of memory loss (Davey 1996; Doherty; Malik 1996) stress the partner in the title: wife, fiancée, husband (by implication) although all the stories make it clear in the text that other family members are also forgotten. This relationship, or the forgetting of it, is the source of comedy as well as a point of disruption. According to the rules of western culture, the heterosexual marriage is the highest form of emotional relationship. Our partners are therefore the last people we should forget, being closest to them. This memory loss then stresses the extent of the amnesia, but it is also subversive since it implies that the primacy of this relationship is not natural, but contrived, and that left to nature human consciousness will not find a sexual partner more important than other relations.

These features concerning amnesia also dwell on the alienation of the individuals from their community, family and past in a way which problematises the idea that there is a unified self. In articles concerned with amnesia, the past and future are fragmented, with the present as a limbo in between. Remembering nothing of their past, the sufferers have no history or points of reference: "I was standing in the doorway of the arcade, and suddenly realised I didn't know where my home was" Peter Butler tells *Best* (Malik 8). When waiting to be collected by his wife, from the hospital to which he had admitted himself, he expected to recognise her immediately, but when she arrived it was "just like meeting a stranger ... It was a moment of sheer horror" (Malik 9). Still unable to recall his past life, the writer describes Peter Butler as living a stranger's life in a stranger's family (Malik 8) and the article ends with his words: "I want my life back . . . I'll do anything to grab hold of those lost years" (Malik 9). The article implies that without his memories, the central character feels less than himself, somehow diminished, as if the return of his memory would make him more himself than he is at the present time. The language of the article makes his lost memory a splintered off part of

Peter Butler, something that can be lost and brought back. Where the memories used to be there are now “gaps” implying an absent presence (Malik 9). There is even a suggestion that the memories are somewhere else: an appeal was put out on a television programme in the hope that this would have “provided some clues on his memory loss” (Malik 9), as if it were a lost person or article which could be tracked down and reunited with its constituent parts.

This sense of disorder contributes to the comic tone.

Mary Taylor’s story in *Eva* is grotesquely humorous because it unites two incongruous elements: poison and remedy (1996: 10). The title “A bit of poison did me a power of good” is bizarre; after all, if something is poisonous it can do you no good. Suffering from the muscle disorder spasmodic torticollis, she has a radical treatment involving an injection in the neck with a solution of the food poison botulism which fortunately alleviates her symptoms. The story tests the readers’ credibility and assumptions, inverting the expected outcome of a dose of food poisoning, as well as causing revulsion both because of the disease and the cure which is an injection of poison in the neck, evoking death (to get it in the neck) and radical intrusive therapies. The tone of the passage is festive. It celebrates Mary Taylor’s miraculous cure, her return to a normal life: “I’m driving my car, and I’m out and about again visiting friends . . . Anyone with my condition should push for the bug treatment” she flippantly concludes (Taylor 1996: 10).

In twentieth-century criticism, comedy tends to be regarded as a form of festivity or carnival (Nelson 1990: 171). Nelson writes that “One of the most widespread characteristics of festivity is the temporary inversion of social order” (171). Festive anarchy can be found in the traditional celebrations of many cultures and in many eras (Nelson 171). However, the inversion is short-lived and ultimately “laughter and festive licence act as safety valves: by releasing dangerous social pressures, they help to preserve the established order from destruction” (Nelson 171). This is evident in the two stories of amnesia, “Remember me? I’m

your wife” and “Fiancee? What fiancee?” in which the partners are comic butts but the primacy of the heterosexual union is maintained: Peter Butler stays with his wife and Neil Thorpe enters the same relationship, but with someone else. Resolution is achieved, and the inversion is proven to be temporary.<sup>45</sup>

One factor of the narrative resolution is the construction of personal testimonies about triumph over adversity (Ehrenreich and English 1978; King and Stott 1977). The theme is the overcoming of personal misfortune and the plot is the struggle to do this. As Janice Winship writes,

Many read somewhat hollowly; perhaps it doesn't matter. As “religious parables” or a latter-day version of Pilgrim’s Progress these stories “teach” that faith in oneself (if not in God), hope (that there is a bright light at the end of the tunnel), and individual effort will get “you” there as well as the “heroine” of the story. In seeing these women’s emotional strength and courage to come through or just to go on, whatever the trials sent to test them, “you” as the reader either feel that, well, at least you haven’t got that tragedy to contend with - fed-up as you might well be - or that if you are up against some other wall you might leap it yet. (1987: 70)

Winship asserts that similar attributes are revealed in readers’ letters, a combination of optimism and fatalism, and that the message is really “about individual resourcefulness in tackling problems, about making decisions” (70). Winship also sees this style of presentation as a screen for more serious problems: “Personal revelation is used as validation of the

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<sup>45</sup> Another element of festivity is the theme of the contest between carnival and lent, acted out in works such as John Taylor’s *Jack a Lent* (1600). The traditional story is that Lent challenges Carnival to a battle because she feels that Carnival is threatening her power (Rhodes 103). Carnival is fat, fertile, raucous, celebratory, associated with physical indulgence; Lent is thin, barren, associated with deprivations and fasting; she is mostly defeated and elicits little sympathy. It is in this tradition that stories of obesity can be comic, while features about anorexia cannot; it is possible to view obesity positively, as life giving, but excessive thinness can only be viewed as deathly.

experiences: it speaks the unalterable “truth” of women’s lives. Readers are not invited to analyse and understand why these experiences have occurred or to see them as deriving from a social as well as personal history” (71). Like women, the disabled people then are not encouraged to perceive themselves as a political group with certain rights and recourses of action; they are always alone in an able-bodied community (Mason 1987). With strong emphasis on the rarity of the diseases that they have, their isolation and singularity is underscored. Stories such as that of Besim Kadriu, who lost his nose, eye and half of his face when shot in Serbia (Fallowfield 2000), are typical in the relative rarity of the problem depicted, their place in an able-bodied family and community and the fact of being housebound.

In the magazines studied here, the concentration is very firmly on the personal lives of the subject rather than on their financial, public, professional or political activities. These accounts are individualised, uncontextualised in a framework of social intercourse, economic funding or political action. The difficulties that the subjects of the articles encounter are pathological in character: originating internally rather than externally; such representation, as women have found, makes political unity problematic (Bray and Colebrook 1998; Stoppard 1997). The presence of these stories in women’s magazines<sup>46</sup> categorises both them and their subjects as the realm of the personal, the feminine, popular culture, which in turn informs the possibilities for the integration or acceptance of actual difference.

In our society women seem to stand for the aspects of life that are presumed to occur outside history. They stand for love, sex and for personal relationships so that these parts of life actually seem to become women’s arenas. But they are also, generally speaking, the arena of “mass culture.” Much of mass culture seems to take place, or is consumed, in the “female” spheres of personal relationships, the family or leisure, and the home, and it also

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<sup>46</sup> Like soap operas, the concern of these magazines has conventionally been emotional relationships and personal issues, household, home, and family, domestic and familial (Geraghty 1992: 222; Modleski 1988).

focuses on these as the topics of its representations (Williamson 1978: 101). Issues of class, political and social divisions can be overridden by the fascination with other, physical differences, particularly when these are spectacular. The topics of features in women's magazines can therefore be described as both mass culture and marginalised because although relationships, sex, children and personal triumph stories are the subjects of mass culture, they are also marginalised as women's concerns and as a result categorised as at worst trivial or frivolous, and at best recreational.

One of the forms recreation now takes is that of health which has undergone a redefinition in recent years; it is no longer a passive term for disease-free existence but an active term for a responsible life style (Cashmore 1990: 120-1). With responsibility has come control, so that we feel we have an increasing mastery over the image and shape of our bodies and the power to metamorphosise them into the desired appearance.<sup>47</sup> When individuals undertake elective surgery to change their bodies they are exercising this power although all of these type of cosmetic surgical procedures are controversial. But no matter how many people have face lifts or rhinoplasty, elective amputees and transsexuals still evoke discomfort on a moral level. When people lose or gain weight excessively, they are exercising the same power. The body is no longer perceived as given but as a malleable object which can be sculptured to the desired image and through which emotional dramas as well as social conflicts can be safely played out.<sup>48</sup> This is such a pervasive idea that the reality of the life-threatening aspects of these enforced changes are rarely grasped; none of the characters who have weight problems express any genuine concern for their health while continuing to radically alter their bodies.

The body is a vessel on which a number of social and cultural dramas can be played out; it

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<sup>47</sup> Two articles in *Best* in 2000 have featured "phantom" pregnancy (Richardson 2000) and psychic cure (*Best* 6 June 2000). Each stresses the "mind-body link" and the potential to self-heal through the power of thought.

<sup>48</sup> This topic is explored in greater depth in Chapter 3: The Disabled Body in Literature for Children.



has boundaries and ruptures, excesses and lacks, and the disabled body is particularly ideal for the exploration of our cultural anxieties as it has the potential to represent radical disruptive inversion. However, in order for the disruptive potentials of disability to have any impact on social stratification, it is necessary for the action to take place within a wider and more public context than the tabloid magazine. This arena is not constrained in the sense of having a limited audience but in the paucity of its internal world.<sup>49</sup> To demonstrate that someone with cerebral palsy can walk with the aid of lycra tights is not a platform for a sustained attack on discrimination against the disabled, because it does not deal with the issue of disability in a social context (Cox 1987: 164). It deals with the lives of disabled people and women as personal tragedies and with their bodies as sources of humour. As Falstaff can be a central and radical figure in *Henry IV* and *Henry V* but only a comic butt in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, so the figure of disability in the tabloid press suffers, as femininity does, from this narrow social context. The possibilities of physical analogy are reduced from plural reflections to the essentially private experience, just as women's experiences are reduced in the tabloid press to the private sphere of the home and family.

In the next chapter I shall examine the relationship of gender to physical disability in children's literature. Disabled characters are represented as feminised and often as evil in literature that is written for children and their narrative development parallels their journey from sickness to health.

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<sup>49</sup> For example, black women hardly ever appear in these magazines (Onwarah 1987: 39).

### ***Chapter 3: The Disabled Body in Literature for Children***

This chapter examines the depiction of disability in literature for children.<sup>1</sup> Children's literature has many examples of representations of disabled people. Novels such as *Peter Pan* (1911), *The Secret Garden* (1911), *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Heidi* (1881) all feature prominent disabled characters. In this chapter I shall focus on *Masks* (1993), *The Haunted Mask* (1993), *The Witches* (1983), *Peter Pan*, *The Secret Garden*, *Treasure Island* and *Heidi*. Disabled characters have significance in the narratives of these works, indicating moral inadequacy and a lack of self-control, as female characters have been used to represent the same.<sup>2</sup> Twentieth-century literature for children, works such as *Masks* and the *Goosebumps* series, including *The Haunted Mask* and *You Can't Scare Me!* (1995), continue to depict

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<sup>1</sup> Childhood is a social construct (Jenks 1996: 7; Reynolds 1994: 18). The concept of the child as a category of person arose in the eighteenth century (Coveney 1967: 29), although toys were available from about 1600 (Firestone 1972: 43-4). Children became the subjects of protective legislation between the late nineteenth century and the beginning of World War I (Steedman 1990: 62). The child exists in relation or opposition to the adult, a difference which is not explicable in merely physical terms (Jenks 3-7). The perception of childhood has changed over time (Jenks 5). From 1900 to 2000 the significance of the child shifted from low economic worth to immeasurable affective value (Zelizer 1985), and social progress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has to some extent been measured by the position of the child in law (Steedman 62). The development of the nuclear family during the twentieth century is a comparatively recent event (Hoyles 1979: 16), and an arguably short-lived one as its continued existence as the dominant form of child-rearing is already questionable. For adults, the child holds a symbolic value as "a repository of inheritances and attributes which [are] often lost or blunted in adulthood" (Cunningham 1991: 43). Artists and writers have used the image of the child to reflect innocence, insecurity, fear, vulnerability and isolation (Hunt 1991: 142; Coveney 1957: 31-2). In the nineteenth century, the child came to be seen as a garden, "enclosing, within the safety of its walls, a way of life which was in touch with nature and which preserved the rude virtues of earlier periods", in contrast to the urbanised and alienated adult (Cunningham 43). In contemporary society, we may be "obsessed with the physical, moral and sexual problems of children" (Arie 1962: 395). Despite this, children in the twenty-first century are an underprivileged group (Director of Public Health Medicine 1998; Spencer 1996; Kumar 1993). Although children have always been associated with women, the legal and social benefits that women have acquired in the last thirty years have not been shared by children who remain, in many ways, "both silent and invisible" (Elshtain 1982: 289).

<sup>2</sup> Women have been historically regarded as morally inadequate (Smart 26-49; Walkowitz 1984), as "incomplete in their moral development, at worst as dangerously irrational creatures who, if not controlled, are capable of disrupting culture and progress. . . Women are not to be trusted because they lie and cheat to protect their husbands and children, regardless of the wider social order. . . Women are seen as incapable of the detachment necessary for the highest forms of abstract moral discourse" (Lees 1993: 247). Biblical figures such as Eve, Delilah and Salome are malevolent to men (Hourihan 1997: 177) and as a gender, women are "regarded by men as dirty, alien, even evil" (Wood 1984: 65).

disabled characters as focal points, often as monsters.<sup>3</sup> Psychoanalysis, feminism and empiricism have all influenced the representation of disability in literature for children.<sup>4</sup> This chapter analyses the impact of these developments as well as society's concern with the developing child and how contemporary adult values are expressed in books that are written for our children.<sup>5</sup>

Feminist criticism has problematised children's literature on many counts for its stereotypical characterization of women and black people.<sup>6</sup> Literature for children also feminises characters who are disabled by representing them with feminine characteristics. Barrie writes of Captain Hook that "in the dark nature there was a touch of the feminine, as in all the great pirates, and it sometimes gave him intuitions" (Barrie 1993: 78). Male disabled characters are unmanned by a lack of obvious sexuality. For example, the seven dwarves in

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<sup>3</sup> There are several works which claim to depict disabled characters in positive ways in children's literature; for example, *A Nice Walk in the Jungle* (Bodsworth 1989), *Sweet Frannie* (Sallis 1981) and *I Can Jump Puddles* (Marshall 1974). These works still tend to highlight themes such as isolation and death and to idealise disabled children (Pinsent 1997: 125-32); in *A Tree for Peter*, for example, the narrative is in a biblical tradition and Peter is close to a "suffering saint" (Kingston 1974: 31).

<sup>4</sup> A number of critics have commented on the tendency of children's literature to purposefully transmit social values (trimmer 1990; Hollingdale 1988; Bottigheimer 1987: 21; McClelland 1976: 82; Tucker 1976; Stephens 1992: 3) which are internalised during childhood (Ritchie and Kollar 1964: 24; Parsons 1951: 207). Literature for children is often concerned with the necessity to integrate children into a socially ordered adult world (Jenks 3). There is a profound discrepancy between the behaviour, language and thought of adults and children, and children have only a few years to attain the advanced level of "shame, revulsion, and knowledge that has developed over centuries" (Shilling 160). During the period of childhood, children in western culture must develop a level of cognitive competence that equips them to operate in adulthood (Piaget 1972). Although developmental psychology has been challenged (Archard 1990; Rose 1984), literary criticism of children's literature is dominated by a concern for the "moral and emotional education" of children (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994: 69).

<sup>5</sup> Writers first became conscious of the need to produce specific literature for children in the late seventeenth century (see Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé* (1697) for example). Children's literature is unique as a genre of literature because it is defined in terms of the reader rather than in terms of authorial intention or the structure or subject of the text (Hunt 1990: 1). It is questionable whether or not there can be a literature for children that is not really a literature for adults about children (Rose 1984: 1; Ransome 1937: 34). Using *Peter Pan* as a classic example, Jacqueline Rose puts the "desire for the child" at the heart of children's literature (3). By this, she means the desire of adults to understand and fix the relation of adults to children (Reynolds 23-4). The recent popularity with adults of the J. K. Rowling *Harry Potter* series of children's books would seem to support this argument. Childhood may be something we rework in children's literature in attempting to create our own history (Rose 12; Rees 1980: 30), or perhaps children's books "reflect society as it wishes to be, as it wishes to be seen, and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be" (Hunt 1991: 2).

<sup>6</sup> See *Catching Them Young: Sex, Race and Class in Children's Fiction* (Dixon 1972), *Reading into Racism: Bias in Children's Literature and Learning Materials* (Klein 1985), and *Racist and Sexist Images in Children's Books* (Children's Rights Workshop 1975) for example. Several works are available that do not depict stereotypical characters: *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (Carter 1990), *The Forest Princess* (Herman 1975), *Fairy Story Collective* (Merseyside Group 1972), *Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf* (Storr 1967) and *The Practical Princess and Other Liberating Tales* (Williams 1979) are examples.

“Snow White” are all males who are “stunted in their development”; lacking conflict or sexuality they are “little men mining in dark holes” (Bettelheim 1976: 210).<sup>7</sup> The munchkins and dwarves in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Dahl 1995) and in the film *The Wizard of Oz* are similarly sexless. Captain Hook is also without a wife or reference to female companionship.<sup>8</sup> Disabled characters are therefore presented as sexless and so open to a feminine reading.

Typically both female and disabled characters in children’s literature rely on “deceit, fraud, guile and trickery” rather than on forthright methods to achieve their aims (Paul 1990: 153-4). In fairy tales such as “The Wild Swans”, “Rumpelstiltskin”, “Snow White” and “Cinderella”, female characters overcome adverse circumstances through their ingenuity (Andersen c.1835; Grimm and Grimm 1815).<sup>9</sup> In *The Secret Garden* Mary Lennox and Colin Craven keep the secret of the garden and of their healing powers from the surrounding adults (Burnett 1951). They restore the garden to its former state over a period of months without the knowledge of Mr Craven, who has expressly forbidden them to even visit the garden. The character of Will in *Masks* hides from his carers his imaginary life which is stimulated by the masks brought to him in hospital by his brother (Hatrick 1993). In *Heidi*, Clara and Heidi adopt and hide a litter of kittens from Fräulein Rottenmeier (Spyri 1963: 82-5). *Treasure Island*’s Long John Silver plans and undertakes the mutiny in order to find Flint’s stolen treasure (Stevenson 58-86) and then double-crosses his allies (Stevenson 159). Silver’s allegiance is only to his own wealth and ambition, to further which he is willing to use all his

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<sup>7</sup> The dwarf appears in literature in the form of the elf, pygmy, fairy, goblin, troll, leprechaun, midget, sprite, gremlin, pixie, gnome, munchkin, hobbit and Lilliputian (Fiedler 1981: 39). Some of these have positive and some have negative connotations: for example Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is likened to a goblin and is lecherous, but Nell is elfin and a good character (Dickens 1841). In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, dwarves were kept as pets at Royal courts (Fiedler 1981: 48).

<sup>8</sup> Long John Silver is married to a “negress”, a character both “other” and absent in the narrative (Stevenson 1993: 183).

<sup>9</sup> The fairy tales of authors such as the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen reworked and reformulated European legends and folk tales (Böttigheimer 6; Zipes 1983: 3) and were particularly popular in Germany from the Romantic period onwards because of their descriptions of rural idylls (Ellis 1983: 2-5).

abilities to hoodwink others (Sapoznik 1974: 108). He entirely fools the hero, Jim Hawkins, who says of him, “I would have gone bail for the innocence of Long John Silver” (Stevenson 46). He appears to be “one of the best possible shipmates” (Stevenson 48) who speaks the “most perfect truth” (Stevenson 48). His fellow mutineers accuse him of “playing double – of trying to make a separate peace for himself – of sacrificing the interests of his accomplices and victims; and, in one word, of the identical, exact thing that he was doing” (Stevenson 159).<sup>10</sup> Jim Hawkins eventually realises his duplicity: “his looks were now quite friendly; and I was so revolted at these constant changes, that I could not forbear whispering, ‘So you’ve changed sides again’” (Stevenson 174). Blind Pew pretends to be helpless and vulnerable to Jim Hawkins: “will you give me your hand, my kind young friend, and lead me in?” he pleads before grabbing him and threatening “take me straight, or I’ll break your arm” (Stevenson 22). Dahl’s witches of *The Witches* hide their monstrous appearance with wigs and make-up: “REAL WITCHES dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women. They live in ordinary houses and they work in ORDINARY JOBS. That is why they are so hard to catch” (Dahl 1983: 7). It is this disguise that enhances the witch’s threat: “What makes her doubly dangerous is the fact that she doesn’t look dangerous” (Dahl 1983 10). In one of the Goosebumps Series, *The Haunted Mask*, the deformed and evil mask is hidden in a back room and deceives its intended victim into putting it on their face (Stine 1994). In *Peter Pan* Captain Hook attempts to poison Peter Pan while he sleeps (Barrie 110-1) and ambushes the Piccanninnies at night in a surprise attack which is “a massacre rather than a fight” (Barrie 102-3). He also entrances Wendy during the pirates’ attack on the Lost Boys (Barrie 106). Gulliver of *Gulliver’s Travels* and the fairy tale character Tom Thumb also use deception as a survival tactic to escape from their enemies (Swift 1726; Grimm and Grimm). Therefore in

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<sup>10</sup> This behaviour is contrasted with that of Jim Hawkins who, when asked to escape from Silver by Dr Livesey, replies, “No . . . you know right well you wouldn’t do the thing yourself; neither you, nor squire, nor captain; and no more will I. Silver trusted me; I passed my word, and back I go” (Stevenson 161).

various examples of children's literature, disabled characters use tools such as trickery and deception, which are typically those of female characters, to achieve their goals (Benjamin 1968: 101).

This deceptive behaviour is motivated in part by the survival instincts of the characters. In narratives of children's literature, female and disabled characters have little formal power at their disposal with which to defend themselves. They must therefore use underhand methods to survive.<sup>11</sup> With his missing leg, Long John Silver is unlikely to achieve wealth and status in a physically demanding role such as the sailor's life without using criminal means (Saposnik 108). He lies, cheats and grovels to survive (Maixner 1981: 135). Blind Pew is vulnerable because of his disability and this is proven in his death, caused by his failure to see the horses that trample him (Stevenson 32). Dahl's witches are frightened to reveal themselves and so are constantly on their guard: "‘witches never spit,’ my grandmother said, ‘they daren’t’" (Dahl 1983: 32). They are also too frightened of discovery to take off their wigs, shoes or gloves (Dahl 1983: 30) and are in danger of death should anyone discover them. Colin Craven is unable to defy his father as an able-bodied child would, and so is reduced to lying to him about the garden. Clara cannot move about the house as Heidi can and so she must manipulate her father's servants to attend to her needs. The idea that female and disabled characters are vulnerable is established through these devices that limit their choice of behaviour to attain their goals. Their inability to defend themselves physically and overtly means that they have to use deceptive methods to escape danger.

Disabled and female characters share the role of the terrified victim. Captain Hook is terrified of the crocodile that pursues him and is haunted by the fear of it (Barrie 52); "don't

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<sup>11</sup> This theme is also evident in film. Verbal in *The Usual Suspects* evades Kujan's questions by feigning ill health and in *Boxing Helena*, Helena lures Nick close to her by pretending to deceive him before trying to strangle him.

desert me,” he begs (Barrie 78); Silver entreats Hawkins to “save Long John from swinging” (Stevenson 150). The sound of the crocodile’s “tick tick tick” has Hook shuddering with fear and running to hide (Barrie 54). He is easily humiliated: “they were his dogs snapping at him, but, tragic figure though he had become, he scarcely heeded them. Against such fearful evidence it was not their belief in him that he needed, it was his own. He felt his own ego slipping away from him” (Barrie 78). This leads to the characters being portrayed as objects of pity and sentiment: Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* or cousin Helen in *What Katy Did*, for example (Pinsent 54). Long John Silver is also pitied: “some of the men who had sailed with him before expressed their pity to see him so reduced” (Stevenson 55). Trelawney writes to Dr Livesey that “out of pure pity I engaged him on the spot to be the ship’s cook” (Stevenson 41). Clara is the “rich little crippled girl” (Spyri 2) whose “little face was thin and pale” and “lying on the invalid couch on which she spent her whole day, being wheeled in it from room to room” (Spyri 63) in contrast to Heidi who has “rosy cheeks” (Spyri 62), and in contrast to her later cured self, when her “cheeks have grown quite round and rosy” (Spyri 236).

The piteous victim’s role is in part demonstrated in their ingratiating behaviour. When Silver offers to talk to a young seaman “like a man” (Stevenson 59) Hawkins interprets it as “words of flattery” to dupe the seaman in the way he had flattered Hawkins (Stevenson 59). Silver flatters Smollett when it is clear that he cannot escape: “A word from you’s enough. I know a gentleman, and you may lay to that” (Stevenson 103). “He fairly outstripped himself in willingness and civility; he was all smiles to everyone. If an order were given, John would be on his crutch in an instant, with the cheeriest ‘Ay, ay, sir!’” (Stevenson 71), so much so that “indeed it was remarkable how well he bore these slights, and with what unwearying politeness he kept on trying to ingratiate himself with all” (Stevenson 180).

Villainous disabled characters show other feminised characteristics. Hook is described as a “man [who] was not wholly evil. He loved flowers (I have been told) and sweet music (he

was himself no mean performer on the harpsicord); and let it be frankly admitted, the idyllic nature of the scene stirred him profoundly” (Barrie 109). “He was often thus communing with himself on board ship in the quietude of the night. It was because he was so terribly alone” (Barrie 115). Even in death he is something of a dandy: “And his shoes were right, and his waistcoat was right, and his tie was right, and his socks were right” (Barrie 130).

Such preoccupation with appearance and clothes is stereotypically attributed to women. Long John Silver is not as dandified but “he kept as clean as a new pin; the dishes hanging up burnished, and his parrot in a cage in one corner” (Stevenson 55). For the mutiny “he was tricked out in his best; an immense blue coat, thick with brass buttons, hung as low as to his knees, and a fine laced hat was set on the back of his head” (Stevenson 103). He is “clean and pleasant tempered” (Stevenson 44). Like Hook, Silver also likes music: he leads the crew singing at the start of the voyage (Stevenson 53), and later, “he kept up one song after another” as the mutinous crew row ashore to Treasure Island (Stevenson 71). Silver is “genteel” (Stevenson 97) and “had good schooling in his young days and could speak like a book when so minded” (Stevenson 55).<sup>12</sup> Although the characters may be presented as male then, their disability seems to have an effeminizing effect on their characters.

The themes of the narratives in children’s books also demonstrate a connection to femininity. Children’s authors such as Roald Dahl are especially concerned with bodily functions and parts (Pinsent 31) for example, and this is a feature of representations of women. Dahl has been credited with “a vigorous feel for the raucous, crude, vengefulness of children” (Inglis 1981: 236). The Grand High Witch proclaims that “my orders are that every single child in this country shall be rrrubbed out, sqvashed, sqvirted, sqvittered and frrrittered” [*sic*] (Dahl 1983: 73). The manner of their corporeal destruction by witches is

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<sup>12</sup> He is brave though (Stevenson 55; 175) and also tyrannical (Stevenson 148-9), inspiring fear through threats of violence: “I have seen him grapple four, and knock their heads together – him unarmed” (Stevenson 55) and through his willingness to kill those who oppose him (Stevenson 54; 76; 93).



graphically described:

Down with children! Do them in!

Boil their bones and fry their skin!

Bish them, Sqvish them, bash them, mash them!

Brrreak them, shake them, slash them, smash them! (Dahl 1983: 85).

The witches' link to and preoccupation with the basely physical is attributable to their femininity and their physical grotesqueness.

Another subject, that of the home, is a female domain and recurs in children's fiction. Literature for children tends to focus on the home and on the limits of the hero's or heroine's experience (Paul 151). Home can be both good and bad: "when home is a privileged place, exempt from the most serious problems of life and civilisation – when home is a place where we ought, on the whole, to stay – we are probably dealing with a story for children" but "when home is the chief place from which we must escape, either to grow up or . . . to remain innocent, then we are involved with a story for adolescents or adults" (Clausen 1982: 143). In children's literature the concept of the home as a privileged place is bound up with "one's place in society, one's position in the class structure" (Watkins 1992: 190). For Colin Craven the secret garden is reclaimed and restored in parallel with his character development as his father's heir to the vast family estate. This pattern of "the reconstitution of home on a new plane" is also a recurring theme in fairy tales (Zipes 1983: 176).<sup>13</sup> In *The Witches*, the grandmother's house is the home which the hero is forced to leave and to which he returns, triumphant, at the conclusion (34-5 and 191). The Darling children leave home for Neverland (Barrie 35) where they encounter the danger of the pirates and Captain Hook, and return to their family when their adventures are over (Barrie 139). In *The Haunted Mask*, Carly Beth's

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<sup>13</sup> The home, and by implication the family, far from being a safe haven for children can be an extremely dangerous place for children (Gelles and Cornell 1985). The majority of child abusers are parents, step-parents or siblings (Haugaard and Reppucci 1988; Russell 1987; Summit and Kryso 1978), and peer abuse is common in childhood (Ambert 1995).

experience of monstrosity begins when she leaves home and her return to normality is signalled by her return (Stine 1994: 42; 120). The state of disability in these narratives is often associated with alienation from the home and all that it represents in terms of class and social order. Alienation from the home is a condition of exclusion for the character concerned and other excluded categories such as villainy are also implicated in this alienation from the home.

In literature for children, villains are signalled by their physical appearance, which can be femaleness or abnormality (Pinsent 52). The disabled characters Pew, Black Dog and Long John Silver in *Treasure Island* are the villains of the novel.<sup>14</sup> Black Dog, with his two missing fingers described as “talons” on his “mutilated hand” (Stevenson 15) is “fierce” (Stevenson 8) and prone to fits of violent anger (Stevenson 9). The character of Long John Silver is introduced from the beginning as a “diabolical” (Stevenson 9) rogue: “you’re a prodigious villain and imposter – a monstrous imposter” (Stevenson 178). Jim Hawkins has nightmares in which he sees Silver: “now the leg would be cut off at the knee, now at the hip; now he was a monstrous kind of creature who had never had but the one leg, and that in the middle of his body” (Stevenson 9). Blind Pew is introduced as a “horrible, soft-spoken, eyeless creature” (Stevenson 22) and a “blind miscreant” (Stevenson 31) who “was plainly blind, for he tapped before him with a stick, and wore a great green shade over his eyes and nose; and he was hunched, as if with age or weakness, and wore a huge old tattered sea-cloak with a hood, that made him appear positively deformed” (Stevenson 21). Even his voice depicts his terrifying character to Jim Hawkins: “I never heard a voice so cruel, and cold, and ugly as that blind man’s” (Stevenson 22). His character is revealed when he strikes out

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<sup>14</sup> The character of Long John Silver was based on Robert Louis Stevenson’s friend W. E. Henley (Swearingen 1980: 69). Henley developed a tubercular disease in adolescence that later meant he had to have a foot amputated (Hennessy 1974: 84). Stevenson wrote to Henley in May 1883 telling him “it was the sight of your maimed strength and masterfulness that begat John Silver in *Treasure Island*” (quoted in Swearingen 69-70). Stevenson himself experienced periods of ill health throughout his life, which may also have influenced his choice of a “maimed” character (Hennessy 82).

violently at his friends with his stick (Stevenson 31). The physical disabilities of such characters are a metaphor for a “darkness of the soul” (Pinsent 53) where “physical malformation often stands for psychological misdevelopment” (Bettelheim 69). Long John Silver is an evil character, rejecting the Bible and betraying Jim Hawkins. In *Peter Pan*, Captain Hook has an “evil swarthy face” (Barrie 75). As “Blackbeard’s bo’sun” he is “the worst of them all” (Barrie 41) and has “an iron hook instead of a right hand” (Barrie 42). His is “a black voice” (Barrie 51). His companions are also physically different and equally repulsive: “A more villainous-looking lot never hung in a row on Execution dock” (Barrie 47). These include Bill Jukes, “every inch of him tattooed”, a “gigantic black” who has “had many names since he dropped the one with which dusky mothers still terrify their children on the banks of the Guidjo-mo” (Barrie 46), and Noodler, “whose hands were fixed on backwards” (Barrie). Hook’s disability and hateful character are bound up together as Peter cuts off his hand (Barrie 42). The thought of Peter “made his iron claw twitch, and at night it disturbed him like an insect. While Peter lived, the tortured man felt that he was a lion in a cage into which a sparrow had come” (Barrie 104). In *The Haunted Mask*, the evil masks first strike the heroine, Carly Beth, as “distorted, deformed faces” that are “ugly” and “grotesque” (Stine 1994: 33), a “gross, deformed face” (Stine 1994: 51) and “the scariest, realest, ugliest mask she had ever seen” (Stine 1994: 51). Once she is wearing the mask, instead of her usual nature, Carly Beth feels angry, refusing to apologise to the mother of the boys she has frightened (Stine 1994: 60): “her anger raged through her chest. . . I’m going to tear this woman apart! Carly Beth decided” (Stine 1994: 62). She experiences violent thoughts: “I’ll chew her to bits! I’ll tear her skin off her bones! Furious thoughts raged through Carly Beth’s mind” (Stine 1994: 63). Wearing the mask turns Carly Beth’s voice “deep, raspy, evil” (Stine 1994: 44). The mask infects her with evil and then becomes part of her “the mask had become her face” (Stine 1994: 93). Carly Beth knows that she has become one of them

because she wears the ugly face. “Now I’m a monster too” she says (Stine 1994: 106). In acquiring their looks, she acquires their character because “they seemed so real, so horribly real. The faces had such detail. The skin appeared to be made of flesh, not rubber or plastic” (Stine 1994: 34). The emphasis on deformity resulting in violent and aggressive behaviour in these texts confirms an association of appearance and character. That association is based on a direct link between disability and character, rather than being portrayed as a function of the social rejection disabled people may experience, for example.

Witches are particularly common villainous feminine disabled characters in children’s literature (Folena 1989). Although witches are not necessarily represented as disabled characters, they often share characteristics with disabled people, such as limps and hunched backs. Roald Dahl has positioned his fictional witches somewhere between the disabled and the grotesque and has conceived them as a misogynistic image of “everywoman”. Margaret Hourihan maintains that witches are “symbols of events in the hero’s psyche” rather than representative of living individuals (156).<sup>15</sup> Dahl has been attacked for the violence and sadism of his work, and has been accused of inciting hatred towards women through his depiction of witches (Hunt 1994: 21; Laudsberg 1988: 90), partly because real women were burnt as witches during the witchhunting era.<sup>16</sup>

Witches are recognised in literature by their grotesque appearance: they have “thin, curvy claws, like a cat” (Dahl 1983: 24), are “bald” (Dahl 1983: 25), with “nasty sores” on their heads (Dahl 1983: 28). Their feet “have square ends with no toes on them at all” (Dahl 1983: 30), “queer noses and peculiar eyes” (Dahl 1983: 30). Witches “look like women. They talk

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of witches originated in antiquity as a threat to the social order (Cohn 1975: ix). Witches were usually women, although they could be men or children (Cohn 99), and symbolised the bad mother or housewife (Purkiss 1996: 97; Williams 1941: 134-5). It was believed that witches could bring illness, accidents, insanity, death, sterility, miscarriage and impotence which could affect people, livestock and agriculture (Cohn 100). The crime of which witches were accused was usually Christian heresy (Cohn 16-59; Russell 1980: 55).

<sup>16</sup> Medieval witchhunts targeted solitary women with deformities and midwives or those schooled in medicine (Cohn 249; Purkiss 101). During the trials, those found guilty of witchcraft were tortured and burned (Cohn 226; Russell 1980: 70), in compliance with the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) which detailed the search for, identification, and punishment of, witches.

like women. And they are able to act like women. But in actual fact they are totally different animals. They are demons in human shape” (Dahl 1983: 30). Historically the witch was said to have a physical sign such as the witch’s mark which was used as proof of guilt.<sup>17</sup> In Dahl’s fiction, witches’ minds are constantly “plotting and scheming and churning and burning and whizzing and phizzing with murderous bloodthirsty thoughts” (1983: 7). In fairy tales, witches are “hideous and deformed” (Andersen 1993: 72).

Witches in history were commonly believed to have the power to castrate men (Roper 1993). In *The Witches* many images of ingestion are used to describe the witches’ desires in relation to children. Witches get “the same pleasure from squelching a child as you get from eating a plateful of strawberries and thick cream” (Dahl 1983: 8); “the witch stalks the wretched child like a hunter stalking a little bird in the forest” (Dahl 1983: 8). The witches are told by The Grand High Witch to buy sweetshops in order to lure children to them (Dahl 1983: 95-6). When a witch gets “squelched” by the Grand High Witch at the convention, her remains “smell of burning meat” (Dahl 1983: 75) and when the little boy Bruno is turned into a mouse, the witches shout, “Cut off his head and chop off his tail and fry him in hot butter” (Dahl 1983: 1). The spell to turn children into mice is cast in the form of a “recipe for concocting Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker” (Dahl 1983: 92). Although there is no direct reference to witches eating children, there are so many references to food and eating that the concept of ingestion, and therefore of castration, is repeatedly implied.<sup>18</sup> In *The Haunted Mask*, during Carly Beth’s experience with the deformed mask, “she felt a tingle of excitement she’d never felt before. And a strange feeling she couldn’t describe. A Hunger . . .” (Stine 1994: 72). She mostly uses the mask to frighten boys: her brother is her

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<sup>17</sup> The witch’s mark may have been a third nipple near the vagina or anus, or on the shoulder or side, or an area insensible to pain (Williams 1941: 157). It was the means through which Christian heresy was written on the body (Roper 1994: 172). This symbolised the antithesis of the lactating mother (Purkiss 134).

<sup>18</sup> There are many references to castration that do not centre on disabled characters in literature for children. Cinderella’s ugly sisters cut off their toes to fit the Prince’s slipper and so signal their willingness to castrate themselves to prove their femininity (Bettelheim 268).

“first victim” (Stine 1994: 41) followed by Chuck and Steve (Stine 1994: 58-9) and two strange boys (Stine 1994: 73), followed by Chuck and Steve again (Stine 1994: 78-9) from whom she demands sweets (Stine 1994: 80).<sup>19</sup>

The witch in “Hansel and Gretel” also wants to eat children (Grimm and Grimm 90), so demonstrating the “destructive aspects of orality” (Bettelheim 162) and cannibalistic pleasure (Bettelheim 1976: 161).<sup>20</sup> If we accept that orality represents a desire to castrate, some disabled characters represent the desire to castrate males. This desire originates in the body of the female or disabled character.

In much literature that is written for children the inner landscape of the characters is reflected in their outer appearance and the origin of their disability is shown to be located in their psychology or character rather than in anything physiological or congenital. The disability signals a character defect of some kind (Kingston 31). For these figures, negative characteristics are accompanied by physical signs<sup>21</sup> of paleness, discolouration, sickness, bone distortions or extremes of bodily weight (see Chapter 2 for an analysis of weight extremes in popular women’s magazines). This has been a feature of children’s literature from folklore to present day fairy tales. The reader of *The Secret Garden* is persuaded early in the novel that ugliness comes from within and that the constitution of the personality determines the constitution of the body. Throughout her childhood, Mary Lennox is “an ugly, cross little thing” (Burnett 1951: 110), “a plain piece of goods” (Burnett 16), but with the potential to become prettier: “perhaps she will improve as she grows older” the officer’s wife comments, “if she were not so sallow and had a nicer expression, her features are rather good” (Burnett

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<sup>19</sup> Hourihan suggests that stories of threatened ingestion in children’s literature instruct readers that they need to overcome consuming women in order to survive childhood (182).

<sup>20</sup> The theme of the fear of being devoured also appears in mythology in the story of Kronos eating his children, and in Little Red Riding Hood (Bettelheim 169).

<sup>21</sup> One of Andersen’s tales is entirely devoted to the demonstration of this principle. “The Frost Queen” is the story of two sisters, “one was pretty and hardworking; the other was ugly and lazy” (67). The pretty sister is made rich by her hard work and rewarded for her good nature, while the ugly sister is punished for her faults and is a reformed character by the end of the tale: “gradually they grew more and more alike, so that the ugly girl became just as pretty as her sister” (Andersen: 67).

16). Her physical ugliness originates in her neglected childhood and is inextricably linked to her sense of maternal rejection.<sup>22</sup> Mrs Crawford says of her: “she is such a plain child . . . And her mother was such a pretty creature. She had a pretty manner, too, and Mary has the most unattractive ways I ever saw in a child. . . Perhaps if her mother had carried her pretty face and pretty manners oftener into the nursery, Mary might have learned some pretty ways too” (Burnett 15), thus attributing her physical appearance to her psychological state. Colin Craven’s disability is similarly attributed to his state of mind and environment: “he began all wrong. Mother said that there was enough trouble raging in the house to set any child wrong. They was afraid his back was weak an’ they’ve always been takin’ care of it – keepin’ him lyin’ down and not lettin’ him walk” (Burnett 121). The origins of his disability therefore lie first in his family background and then in his emotional condition of hysteria and hypochondria (Green 1962: 43). In *Heidi*, the origins of Clara’s invalidity are not explained but from her cure they can be inferred. The Alm Uncle says “so, we’ve made the effort, have we, and won the day!” (Spyri 231) implying that lack of effort might in part explain her paralysis.

In both *The Secret Garden* and *Heidi*, neglectful parents are shown to be an agent in the child’s condition.<sup>23</sup> Mary Lennox and Colin Craven have been indulged but not loved (Jan 1973: 105). Mary is a “disagreeable looking child”, and sickly and fretful as a result of the

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<sup>22</sup> The child is not a constant category but varies within differing theoretical models (James 1993; James and Prout 1990). The two predominant cultural views of the child can be described as the Dionysian and the Apollonian (Hillman 1975). A Dionysian view of childhood assumes the presence of innate (usually, but not always, evil) qualities in the child, expressed in the Christian concept of original sin and in the Freudian theory of infantile sexuality. Such a view stresses the necessity for discipline and control of children and is demonstrated in films such as *The Omen*. An Apollonian view of childhood sees infants as entirely innocent. This view informs the Montessori education system and the pro-life movement. The Apollonian view prefers facilitation and freedom of expression to socialisation and the first example in literature is Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762), which describes the maturation of an innocent child. The tension between the two views results in the cultural representation of children as simultaneously “naively beautiful and brutishly threatening” (Reynolds 1). Nineteenth-century campaigns to legally address the problems of child prostitution conceptualised the child as “totally sexualised and totally innocent” (Rose 99). The contemporary debate centring on the appropriate treatment of the child killers of James Bulger plays out this tension of opposing views of childhood (see “Profile” in *The Sunday Times* 29 October 2000, for example).

<sup>23</sup> Victorian humanitarians blamed parental transgressions such as alcoholism, single parenthood and intermarriage for incidents of congenital learning disabilities (Ryan).

parental transgression of not being wanted (Burnett 7). In contrast, Susan Sowerby has healthy and well-behaved children because she is “healthy minded” (Burnett 105). Although he changed the story later, in Barrie’s first draft of *Peter Pan*, Peter flew away because his mother forgot to weigh him at birth (Birkin 1979: 62).

In literary criticism fairies are readily associated with mothers, as in fairy godmothers and bad fairies (Seifert 1996: 191).<sup>24</sup> The figure of the wicked stepmother in fairy tales such as “Snow White”, “Cinderella”, and “Hansel and Gretel” explores childhood fantasies of bad mothers and jealous rivalry for paternal affection (Hourihan; Neuman 1955; Pickford 1942). In these tales, the mother figure “assumes the burden of blame while the father, virtually absent, shoulders no responsibility for the fates of his children” (Bottigheimer 81). The witches are also bad mothers as they disguise themselves as ordinary women and mothers: as the cover for their convention, they choose to pretend to be the Royal Society for the Protection of Children (sic) (Dahl 1983: 55). The Grand High Witch is likened to a “queen bee” (Dahl 1983: 198) whose sole function is to produce offspring. Grandmother is the opposing figure who is both protective and nurturing. The witch in “Hansel and Gretel” appears to be mother-like at first by offering food to the children but she soon becomes the bad mother by attempting to consume them (Bettelheim 163). In fairy tales, children are malformed if conceived in anger or impatience (Bettelheim 69). In *The Witches*, the hero’s parents are killed in a car crash early in the book, ultimately resulting in his vulnerability to witches (Dahl 1983: 13). In *Peter Pan* it is Mr and Mrs Darling’s evening outing that allows the children to escape with Peter and Peter’s mother failure to leave the window open for her wandering son, resulting in his necessity to live in Neverland. Captain Hook has an

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<sup>24</sup> This theme is also common in adult literature. For example, in *The Island of Dr Moreau* (Wells 1896), the beast people are neglected by parental surrogates, and in *Frankenstein* (Shelley 1818) Victor proves a negligent parent to the monster (Baldick 1995: 154).



unexplained relation to his mother; when speaking of her “there was a break in his voice, as if for a moment he recalled innocent days when – but he brushed away his weakness with his hook” (Barrie 76). In *The Haunted Mask*, Carly Beth discovers that the mask is not a mask at all but a real face, created in a laboratory by the shop owner: “They weren’t ugly in the beginning . . . They were beautiful. And they were alive. But something went wrong. When they were taken out of the lab, they changed” (Stine 1994: 103). It is being “The Unloved” creations of a bad father that has led to their ugliness, evil character and monstrosity (Stine 1994: 104). Although one factor in fictional disability can be seen to be bad parenting, it does not follow that the disabled characters should necessarily be treated sympathetically.

A typical response to disability in children’s novels is anger or impatience. In *Treasure Island*, Blind Pew demands pity but deserves none (Pinsent 53); he is trampled to death by horses, with no “regret” (Stevenson 31-3). Long John Silver experiences humiliation when he is finally subdued by Captain Smollett and his crew, of whom “none treated him better than a dog” (Stevenson 180). He is justifiably punished for his mutiny “‘Why Silver,’ said the captain, ‘if you had pleased to be an honest man, you might have been sitting in your galley. It’s your own doing. You’re either my ship’s cook, and then you were treated handsome – or Cap’n Silver, a common mutineer and pirate, and then you can go hang!’” (Stevenson 103). Peter the goatherd in *Heidi* has cast “angry looks” at Clara from the beginning (Spyri 244) and is overtly menacing to her: “Peter doubled his fists and made threatening gestures towards the invalid on her couch” (Spyri 215). He demonstrates hatred of the wheelchair because there is “something proud and disdainful about it” (Spyri 221) and because he is jealous of the attention gained by Clara: “the invalid child was always already in her chair and Heidi fully occupied with her” (Spyri 221). The chair symbolises Clara’s disability when he decides to throw it over a cliff: “he glared at it as at an enemy that had done him harm” and then he “sprang forward like a wild creature, caught hold of it, and gave it a violent and angry push in

the direction of the slope” (Spyri 221). Clara’s invalidity invokes violence and punishment, and Peter is satisfied with his actions: “The pieces flew in every direction – feet, arms, and torn fragments of the padded seat and bolster – and Peter experienced a feeling of such unbound delight at the sight that he leapt in the air, laughing aloud and stamping for joy” (Spyri 21-2). The direct result of Peter’s action is that Clara, unable to rely on her chair, is forced to attempt to walk, which she quickly achieves (Spyri 228) and so Peter’s behaviour, while evil in its intention, is explicitly redeemed within the text: “for you see the harm you intended has turned out for the best for those you wished to hurt. As Clara had no chair to go in and yet wanted so much to see the flowers, she made the effort to walk” (Spyri 245). Mary Lennox is impatient with Colin’s ill health; she “[does] not feel very sympathetic. She felt rather as if he almost boasted about it” (Burnett 126). Even his nurse, who might be expected to sympathise with her patient, is exasperated with him: “it’s the best thing that could happen to the sickly, pampered thing to have someone stand up to him that’s as spoiled as himself . . . Hysterics and temper are half what ails him” (Burnett 147). Colin is therefore seen to be in need of chastisement to effect a cure for his disability which arises from his spiritual weakness.<sup>25</sup> Captain Hook deserves to be punished for his attacks on Peter, the Lost Boys, the Piccanninnies and the Darling children, and his downfall is relished: “the unhappy Hook was as impotent as he was damp, and he fell forward like a cut flower” (Barrie 117). “Very frightful was it to see the change that came over him. It was as if he had been clipped at every joint. He fell in a little heap” (Barrie 120). His humiliation is complete with the sound of the approaching crocodile: “even the iron claw hung inactive; as if knowing that it was no intrinsic part of what the attacking force wanted...he crawled on his hands and knees along the deck as far from the sound as he could go” (Barrie 121). He begs the pirates to hide him,

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<sup>25</sup> Disability as punishment for transgression is common in children’s tales, for example “How the Camel Got His Hump” (Kipling 1975 (1902): 9-16). In certain biblical traditions, visible physical affliction is constructed as punishment for vice (see Chapter 5) and in other works of literature such as *Frankenstein* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde 1891) vice takes a corporeal form.

but they all avert their eyes and wait for it to reach him (Barrie). Chastisement of disabled characters “confirms the need to check these weaknesses, to mortify the flesh and purify the spirit” (Richards 1977: 9) to redeem them.

The redemption of the disabled characters in *The Secret Garden*, *Masks* and *Heidi* is achieved through their cure, told through triumphalist narratives of overcoming (Paul 153). Clara suffers her invalidity with forbearance: “She bore this last bad attack so patiently” (Spyri 155). “The poor child, who had to give up so many pleasures” (Spyri 156). “The vision rose before him of a face of suffering that he had known long years before” and it therefore “seemed natural to him to attend on the sick Clara” (Spyri 205). Colin is physically cured when he becomes mentally and emotionally strong. His character development compliments his physical restoration to health (Pinsent 53). The overcoming is usually facilitated by an able-bodied character (Kingston 1974: 28).<sup>26</sup> Mary Lennox, Heidi, the Alm Uncle and Peter are all crucial to the narratives of overcoming as they lavish positive emotions on the disabled characters (Bettelheim 69). Clara is cured by the psychological strength she learns from Heidi and her way of life. The curative potential of the “life giving” mountain is emphasised by Heidi, Peter and the Grandfather to Clara and her father.<sup>27</sup> The Sesemann’s doctor acknowledges that “it is good to be up there, good for body and soul” (Spyri 125).<sup>28</sup> Her recovery is facilitated by Heidi and the Alm Uncle who encourage her to try to stand: “the little daughter must do something to please me: she must try her best again this evening to stand on her feet” (Spyri 219) Alm Uncle persuades her. Her recovery is

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<sup>26</sup> Women also need to be rescued by male heroes in literature and film. Imperialism takes the same view. A recent documentary accused the developed world of viewing Africa as “a country of victims and beggars whose people can only be saved by Western intervention” (*The Hunger Business* Channel 4. 11 and 12 November 2000).

<sup>27</sup> There are, in addition, issues in *Heidi* of the rural versus urban dichotomy (Dixon 13), a theme which is also explored in *The Secret Garden*. This is reflected in other Victorian literature: the work of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Keats, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, such as the Rossettis, for example.

<sup>28</sup> Many stories for children are “narratives of journey, rites of passage, or entry and returns” (Watson 1992: 11). For adults, childhood is always in the past (Rose 87) and therefore children have great “metaphorical value” as a journey from the past to the present (Reynolds 21).

heroic: “Clara still held on firmly to her supports, but with every step she felt safer on her feet” (Spyri 228) and is attributable to the Alm Uncle’s “care and nursing” (Spyri 237).

In *The Witches*, *Peter Pan*, *The Haunted Mask* and in most fairy tales the existence of the problematic disabled character is resolved through their destruction and death.<sup>29</sup> Long John Silver is one of the very few characters in children’s literature who escapes relatively intact, but his story is not the usual one. For the witches, their redemption can only be achieved through their destruction: “waiters were attacking the mice with chairs and wine-bottles and anything else that came to hand” (Dahl 1983: 186). Hook is eaten by the crocodile. The resolution of *The Haunted Mask* is the destruction and disappearance of the masks (Stine 1994: 118) and the death of the mask worn by Carly Beth: “the orange eyes that had glowed like fire had faded. The pointed animal fangs had become rubbery and limp” (Stine 1994: 119).

Disability followed by recovery signals emotional healing in literature for children (Kingston 31-3), where illness forces a reassessment of the self for the character and results in physical recovery. In *A Tree for Peter* (Seredy 1949), illness is the catalyst that leads him to self-discovery and in *The Door in the Wall*, the main character, Robin gains a new identity through ill health (De Angeli 1949). The mask “can only be removed through an act of love” (Stine 1994: 106). This equates deformity with hatred and lack of deformity with love. The symbol of love is the head that her mother has fashioned (Stine 1994: 116). This is the act of a good parent and therefore is a good head, unlike the evil heads of the shop owner.

The absence of disability, like masculinity, signifies normality, health and happiness and stands in contrast to the state of disability. In *The Happy Prince*, for example, the Prince recovers his eyes through doing social good and overcoming capitalism (Wilde 1888). The

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<sup>29</sup> The resolution of death can be seen as renewal (Jan 54). In *The Witches* the hero is turned into a mouse by the witches, a state from which he never recovers within the narrative. The transformation allows him a freedom and power to destroy the witches of the world and is therefore a form of renewal for him (Dahl 1983: 198-207).

joy of Clara's cure is seen through Heidi's eyes: "suddenly she remembered that Clara was cured; that was the crowning delight of all that made life so delightful in the midst of all the surrounding beauty. Clara sat silent, overcome with the enchantment of all that her eye rested upon, and with the anticipation of the happiness that was now before her" (Spyri 229). In *The Secret Garden*, it is Mrs Crawford who observes a mentally cured Mary and physically cured Colin at play: "and they both began to laugh so much that in the end they were making as much noise as if they had been two ordinary healthy natural ten-year-old creatures – instead of a hard, little, unloving girl and a sickly boy who believed he was going to die" (Burnett 128). The story of the disabled male character stands in contrast to the able-bodied hero. His story is that of a young white male who ventures into a wilderness in pursuit of a goal where dangerous or magical things occur. He has a series of hurdles and opponents to overcome which he does through being "strong, brave, resourceful, rational and determined to succeed" and at the end he returns home and is rewarded (Hourihan 9-10). Therefore it "would have been impossible for Burnett to have portrayed Colin as a fundamentally good and attractive character had he really been deformed" (Pinsent 53-4). Standing in contrast to witches, the figures of beautiful goddesses have resonances of the Virgin Mary and often appear at times of crisis to assist the hero or heroine (Hourihan 172). Goodness is therefore signalled by beauty and able-bodiedness.<sup>30</sup>

The absence of disability also signals the existence of mental control. Nineteenth-century education made a connection between mental and physical health (Hargreaves 1994: 66-8). The Victorians practised this in what has become known as the cult of athleticism and advocated the values of control, courage, determination, morality, happiness and potency.

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<sup>30</sup> In *The Witches*, the heroine's grandmother lacks a thumb. The narrator is fascinated by this: "I kept looking at the hand with the missing thumb. I couldn't help it. I was fascinated by it and I kept wondering what awful thing had happened that time when she met a witch" (35). In this instance, the missing thumb represents a kind of mark of grace that frequently appears in biblical narrative and is not a sign of her evil, but of evil done to her. In itself, it still represents an evil deed.

These values were opposed to the characteristics of passivity, cowardice, misery, self-pity, immorality and lack of self-control. Organised sport was largely a Victorian invention, developed in boys' schools to structure students' leisure time not only in a healthy and disciplined way but in a manner which advocated the values of team work, leadership and competition. Although girls' schools such as Roedean, St Leonard's School and Wycombe Abbey School emulated the boys' public schools by introducing sport to the curriculum, the Victorians generally believed that girls were not suited to sports or physical activities, particularly those that encouraged competition (Hargreaves 1994: 43-65; Cohen 1987). In this logic, health, diet, drugs and sport are a source of power over the body (Sharpe 1994; Cashmore 121) and are pitched against a lack of bodily control evidenced in disability and femininity (Douglas 1994; Hargreaves 1994: 141).

In *Peter Pan*, Hook is therefore feminised through his lack of swordsmanship and inability to defeat Peter in a sword fight: "Peter fluttered round him as if the very wind it made blew him out of the danger zone". He is also feeble because he is afraid of blood: "at the sight of his own blood, whose peculiar colour, you remember, was offensive to him, the sword fell from Hook's hand, and he was at Peter's mercy" (Barrie 129). The witches are certainly not athletic: you "might possibly see her limping very slightly", Dahl says of the witch (Dahl 1983: 31). Witches are incapacitated by their imitation of femininity: "All ladies like to wear small rather pointed shoes, but a witch, whose feet are very wide and square at the ends, has the most awful job squeezing her feet into those neat little pointed shoes" (Dahl 1983: 30). Long John Silver is also obviously unfit. He "had hobbled down there" to the sea when he met with John Trelawney (Stevenson 40) and "had terrible hard work getting up the knoll. What with the steepness of the incline, the thick tree-stumps, and the soft sand, he and his crutch were as helpless as a ship in stays" (Stevenson 103). Silver invents ways of overcoming his disability: "he had a line or two rigged up to help him across the widest

spaces – Long John’s earrings, they were called; and he would hand himself from one place to another, now using the crutch, now trailing it alongside by the lanyard, as quickly as another man could walk” (Stevenson 55). Despite this he is helpless in most situations: in rage at Captain Smolletts’s attitude, “his eyes started in his head with wrath” but he is stuck on the ground and demands to be helped up but “not a man among us moved. Growling the foulest imprecations, he crawled along the sand till he got hold of the porch and could hoist himself again upon his crutch” - his threats are impotent as “with a dreadful oath he stumbled off, ploughed down the sand, was helped across the stockade, after four or five failures, by the man with the flag of truce, and disappeared in an instant afterwards among the trees” (Stevenson 106). He then “hobbled, grunting, on his crutch; his nostrils stood out and quivered; he cursed like a madman when the flies settled on his hot and shiny countenance” (Stevenson 172). He is therefore disadvantaged in comparison with able-bodied men, as Jim Hawkins acknowledges when they are at risk of attack: “he a cripple, and I, a boy – against five strong and active seamen!” (Stevenson 164). Pew is also impotent in his unfitness; when attacked, he “struck at them right and left in his blindness, and his stick sounded heavily on more than one”. His death is pathetic; he “turned with a scream” and “made another dash, now utterly bewildered, right under the nearest of the coming horses” (Stevenson 32).<sup>31</sup>

In *Heidi*, Clara is incapable of doing anything for herself and this motivates her to walk: “she suddenly felt a great desire to be her own mistress and to be able to help others, instead of herself being always dependent as she was now” (Spyri 225). With this “an unaccustomed feeling of joy took possession of her, as if everything she had ever known or felt became all at once more beautiful, and she seemed to see all things in a new light” (Spyri 225). Her dependence on others is quite burdensome: Fräulein Rottenmeier thinks up the idea of a

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<sup>31</sup> The death of Blind Pew is contrasted with the death of able-bodied characters, who die heroically, or at least not pathetically, in the novel (Stevenson 54; 62; 76; 93; 94; 112; 138).

companion for Clara as “it would relieve her from having always to entertain the sick girl herself” (Spyri 74). Clara cries with disappointment when the trip to the mountain has to be cancelled because of her ill health (Spyri 157). Her insistence on the journey creates huge logistical problems:

in front were two men carrying a sedan chair, in which sat a girl wrapped up in shawls; then followed . . . a reclining chair, which was being pushed up by another man, it evidently been thought safer to send the invalid to whom it belonged up the steep path in a sedan chair. The procession wound up with a porter, with such a bundle of cloaks, shawls, and furs on his back that it rose well above his head (Spyri 204).

Clara gives no thanks to the workmen for their efforts. Once on the mountain, she wants to go out with the goats, despite this being demanding on an old man (Spyri 219). As Clara “could not stand, how were they to support her and get her along?”, Heidi and the Alm Uncle wonder (Spyri 227). She nevertheless resists attempts to make her walk: when the Alm Uncle tries she “clung to him as soon as her feet touched the ground, exclaiming that it hurt her so” (Spyri 219). He, unlike the Doctor, does not allow her to do this but “let her try a little longer, however, each day” despite her resistance (Spyri 219). Her character therefore demonstrates a lack of self-discipline which is associated with disability.

In *Masks*, the onset of Will’s syndrome is signalled by his inability to carry a large suitcase after returning from a holiday where he had collected “a first baseman’s mit, an American football, sand dollars from the beach in South Carolina, an empty shell from a box turtle, porcupine quill, Indian arrowheads we’d found in the Adirondack Mountains” (Hatrick 5). All of these objects refer to an athletic, outdoor intrepid life and this invites a comparison between the previous, healthy Will and the now paralysed Will. His recovery is signalled by his return to sport and his plans to go swimming and organise a football team (Hatrick 118).



These athletic values stress that the normality of masculine able-bodiedness is to be preferred over the feminised state of disability.

Closely allied to the cult of athleticism was the concept of empire. Mary Lennox was born into an Indian colony and the novel examines dualisms of civilisation and wilderness, rationality and irrationality through the characters of Mary and Colin and the existence of the wild garden which must be tamed (Hourihan 22-32). For the ex-patriot community in Victorian India, home was bound up with national identity and the sense of nostalgia for the English landscape (Watkins 190-2). This is an “idyllic pastoralism” (Watkins 195) which stood in conflict to the imagined unordered Indian agrarian society (Babe 1996: 70-1).<sup>32</sup> The principle of the savage helped to justify Victorian imperialism and slavery (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam 1994: 18). Privilege and power abroad were equated with the same at home in fiction (Said 90). In *The Secret Garden* control over the garden is equated with control over colonies: Colin has to take control over the estate at home in order that he can be a fit, masculine English officer abroad in India. Nineteenth-century propaganda stressed the necessity of empire to “England’s strategic, moral, and economic well-being, at the same time characterising the dark or inferior races as unregenerate, in need of suppression, severe rule, indefinite subjugation” (Said 181). Natives were seen as indolent and morally depraved which justified their rule (Said 202) and at home the working classes, children and women were all compared with savages (Shurmer-Smith and Hannam 18). The physical difference of such groups justified their subjugation (Butchart 1998) as they represented potential disorder.

The potential disorder was one that disrupted gender, class or race hierarchies and the

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<sup>32</sup> Victorian and early twentieth-century English literature refers to imperialism frequently: *Kim* (Kipling 1901), *Passage to India* (Forster 1924), *Vanity Fair* (Thackeray 1847-8), *Bleak House* (Dickens 1852-3), *Mansfield Park* (Austen 1814), *Middlemarch* (Elliot 1871-2), *The Portrait of a Lady* (James 1881), *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy 1894-5). In these novels there is a tendency to depict British occupation with a sense of “permanence and inevitability” (Said 1993: 79), and imply that non-European people accepted colonialisation indifferently (Said 78).

desire to restore order was present in the influences of the cult of athleticism.<sup>33</sup> A contributing factor to the disabilities of Clara and Colin is the lack of “order” which is echoed in the control of the Craven and Sesemann households being in the hands of servants. The “natural” patriarchal order is therefore disturbed. The novels are resolved when the households are brought under the proper control of the father.

The restoration of the patriarchal order signals a resolution of recovered masculinity (Paul 159). To restore the patriarchal order, Mary has to sacrifice her potential so that Colin can realise his: “for Colin, growing up in the garden means that he has been able to overcome the physical and emotional deprivation of his early childhood – without earning it. For Mary, growing up, outgrowing her early childhood deprivation means learning to be a follower, not a leader” (Paul 159). *The Secret Garden* can be seen as an “identity quest” (Paul 158) for Mary and Colin. However, the problem with the archetypal quest as structure of the book is that “it is about turning boys into men, not girls into women or children into people” (Paul 161). In *The Haunted Mask*, Carly Beth also disrupts the patriarchal order initially. The book begins with Carly Beth being frightened by the boys (Stine 1994: 2; 6-8; 14; 21). Chuck and Steve “loved to startle her, to make her jump and shriek” (Stine 1994: 5). This is reversed when she dons the haunted mask and uses it to terrify various boys in return (Stine 1994: 44; 58-9; 73; 81). The book ends with her brother once again frightening her: this signals that it is now “all normal” (Stine 1994: 121). In this book the power to frighten is a male prerogative and Carly Beth usurps this power. Her unrightful potency is signalled by a deformed face and its destruction ends her power. The mask, symbolising an ungrateful, “inhuman” (Stine 1994: 109), “gruesome” and “hideous” (Stine 1994: 111) offspring is also guilty of defying its parent and therefore disrupting parental authority. Transgression is symbolised in the nineteenth century by physical grotesquery (Baldick 1987: 14) with

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<sup>33</sup> The whodunnit genre also typically reflects a desire for order (Cooke 1990; Humm 1990).

monsters made up of “ill-assorted parts” (Baldick 1995: 12). Even in Shakespeare’s plays “monstrosity already implied rebellion, or an unexpected turning against one’s parent or benefactor” (Baldick 1995: 12).<sup>34</sup> The natural order of command is transgressed in *Treasure Island* when Silver leads a mutiny on the *Hispaniola* (Stevenson 63-8). Silver then accuses Smollett of abandoning them: ““These poor lads have chosen me cap’n after your desertion, sir”” (Stevenson 102). Order is restored with the recapture of the ship, the re-establishment of Captain Smollett in post and the subjugation of Silver (Stevenson 177) when he “in spite of daily rebuffs, seemed to regard himself once more as quite a privileged and friendly dependant” (Stevenson 180). While it is clear that gender or class order must be restored in children’s literature, the transgressors are not punished equally.

Female characters who transgress are punished more often and more severely than male characters who transgress in children’s literature (Bottigheimer 81-122). The moral code of fairy tales is “a witch burning notion of eradicating (generally female) evil [which] coexists with an indulgent tolerance of (generally male) malefaction” (Bottigheimer 94). The punishment of bad fairies makes clear the cost of “feminine vice” (Seifert 203) in literature for children. Dahl’s witches transgress because they are not “nice ladies” as they appear, but dangerous child killers in disguise: “A REAL WITCH hates children with a red-hot sizzling hatred that is more sizzling and red-hot than any hatred you could possibly imagine”(Dahl 1983: 1).

The disproportionate punishment of certain transgressors has a long history. During the period 1480-1650, the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Reform Movement, and the rising industrial mercantile classes combined to “exterminate social deviants who were associated with the devil” such as “witches”, “werewolves”, Jews, Gypsies and other social

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, *King Lear* I ii 94-6, I v 39 and V iii 160; *Timon of Athens* III ii 72-3 and IV ii 45-6; *The Tempest*.

non-conformers who were brutally punished in order to encourage restraint and renunciation (Zipes 1983: 22). Children in this period began to be seen as innocent and therefore potentially corruptible and so pressures were exerted through education and literature in the subsequent centuries to encourage them to conform to the dominant social values and customs (Zipes 1983: 22-9). These values and customs are shored up by good fairies in literature for children who use magic to restore moral order and particularly to achieve heterosexual union (Seifert 197). But witches and sirens represent transgression because they are “governed by emotions and physical hungers” (Hourihan 174) and therefore threaten the masculine value of self-control (Hourihan). This tendency in literature for children very firmly places the blame for disability on the lack of self-management of the disabled individual.

Frances Hodgson Burnett makes her views on self-management explicit in the final chapter of *The Secret Garden*:

One of the new things people began to find out in the last century was that thoughts – just mere thoughts – are as powerful as electric batteries – as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad as poison. To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body. If you let it stay there after it has got in you may never get over it as long as you live (238).

These values emphasise that disability is not physical but spiritual in origin and further that it is something which is within the control of the individual who, by developing inner strength and determination, can effect a return to an able-bodied state.

Children’s literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has often used the device of a disabled character to depict evil and moral inadequacy. Representations have varied from the unspecified “cripple” of Victorian literature to the monsters of twentieth-century literature. Throughout the period, depictions of disabled characters in children’s literature

promote the idea that health of the mind and body is signalled by a lack of physical disability. More often than not, the disabled characters depicted are male but their condition is feminised through their association with malignancy and lack of self-control. Disability is feminised in children's literature as both disabled and female characters are associated with moral inadequacy. The figure of the witch, a recurrent theme in children's literature, is both deformed and female, so providing an imaginative link between femininity and disability.<sup>35</sup> Disability is depicted in literature for children as a loss of mental and physical self-control.

In the next chapter I shall examine the feminisation of disability in film and the relationship of gender to physical disability in films where the disabled character is the main character. For disabled characters in the cinema, their gender and disability has significance for the plot and narrative construction. I shall therefore develop several points that I have made here in an analysis of the representation of disability and its relation to gender in literature for children: the purpose and function of disability, the meanings conferred upon physical disability, and the feminisation of the disabled body.

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<sup>35</sup> Women's literature and children's literature also have a commonality in their assignment as minor genres. They are "devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational committees" (Paul 149).

## *Chapter 4: The Disabled Body in Film*

Physical disability frequently appears as the defining aspect of the central character in mainstream films such as *My Left Foot* (1989), *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *Children of a Lesser God* (1986), *Shine* (1996), *Mask* (1985), *Hilary and Jackie* (1998), *The Usual Suspects* (1995) and *Boxing Helena* (1993).<sup>1</sup> In these films featuring a disabled character, the disability and gender of the character is significant for the narrative and plot construction (Darke “Everywhere: Disability on Film” 1997).<sup>2</sup> The disability has function and purpose within the film, conferring meaning and exposing disability as a construction, as gender is a construction in film (de Lauretis 1987: 3). In cinema, as in other forms of representation, disabilities are genderised: for example, most disabled characters in film are male, while in the general population, most disabled people are women (OPSC). Two films of the 1990s in particular, *The Usual Suspects*, directed by Bryan Singer film, and *Boxing Helena*, directed by Jennifer Chambers Lynch, have central

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<sup>1</sup> Historically, the cinema has varied in its portrayal of disabled characters in supporting roles. In films made prior to World War II, disabled characters were often portrayed as freakish. Films such as *West of Zanzibar* (1928), and *Freaks* (1932) have characters like “Dead Legs” and “The Armless Wonder”, for example. Later, a series of post-war rehabilitative films were made such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *The Pride of the Marines* (1945) and *Reach for the Sky* (1956). Many films feature a disabled character as an “obsessive avenger” (Darke “Everywhere: Disability on Film” 1997: 11), characters such as Long John Silver, Captain Hook, Freddie Kruger. Disability is often simplified through its resolution in death, medical remedy or miracle cure as in *Torch Song* (1963), *Monkey Shines* (1988), *The Penalty* (1926), *Afraid of the Dark* (1991), for example. In films such as *Goldfinger* (1964), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), *Moonraker* (1979), *Asylum* (1972), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *Dr Terror’s House of Horrors* (1964), disabled characters represent evil and abnormality as a foil to “good,” “normal,” able-bodied characters.

<sup>2</sup> Certain disabilities are associated with stereotypical character traits in film (Sutherland 1997: 18-20). Hunchbacks are usually twisted characters in films such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923 and 1939). Blind characters range from wise and inspirational in films such as *Cactus* (1986) and *City Lights* (1931), to tragic and vulnerable in films like *Wait Until Dark* (1967), *Blink* (1994), *Jennifer 8* (1992) and *Eyes of a Stranger* (1980) (Darke *Framed* 1997: 36-42; Hancock and Hearn 1987). Characters with learning disabilities in films such as *Dumb and Dumber* (1995), *A Dangerous Woman* (1993), *Of Mice and Men* (1993) and *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) are portrayed as “simple, innocent, untainted and childlike” (Kimpton-Nye 1997: 34). In films such as *Children of a Lesser God* (1986), *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1968) and *The Miracle Worker* (1962), deaf characters are presented as lonely, depressed and isolated (Schuchman 1997: 43-8). It is less common for disabilities to be congenital than acquired in film and characters with congenital disabilities in film such as *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1968), *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Mask* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* are frequently depicted as tragic and isolated (Sutherland 1997: 20). Characters with limbs or who are amputees also have certain stereotypical qualities.

characters who are physically disabled and whose gender and disability is crucial to the narrative. One of these characters is female and one is male. I have chosen to analyse examples of both genders as these two characters both function as castrated figures in the narratives of *Boxing Helena* and *The Usual Suspects*. These two films have unusual narrative structures in that both narratives revolve around the difference between the plot and the described events in the film.<sup>3</sup> In these films, “events do not exist independently of their representation” (Bordwell 1995: 109). To support the preferred reading of the film the authoritative role of the extradiegetic narrator (the extradiegetic narrator is the narrator that appears to be omniscient and outside the story of the film) is frequently exploited.<sup>4</sup> This voice is usually male while female voices are usually contained within the diegesis of the film

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<sup>3</sup> The cinematic term “syuzet” is often used interchangeably with plot (Stam 1989: 71), being the artistic organization of chronological events which involves defamiliarization through disarrangements of sequence, creation of gaps and halting of the flow of information (Stam 71). Detective films utilize a complex and detailed syuzet in order to circumvent the denouement; *The Big Sleep* (1978), for instance, is almost impossible to follow narratively, even on the second or third viewing, because of the intricacies of the syuzet. The Russian formalist distinction between the opposition of fabula and syuzet (Stam 71), seeing the fabula as the story and syuzet as the plot (Stam 75), is pertinent here. Fabula is generally taken as the structure of the film action, conceptually firmly rooted in specific time and space (Stam 71), whereas the syuzet typically is the more disruptive element, constructing the stylistics of the film. The fabula is primary, it precedes the syuzet; “the primary role of the syuzet is to present the fabula” (Stam 73). The syuzet is the imposition of elaboration and complication onto the narrative as it unfolds in time, space and logic (Bordwell 51). In *The Usual Suspects* and *Boxing Helena*, unlike most films, the syuzet is the principal mover of the plot: it precedes the fabula, and creates it.

<sup>4</sup> This voice is usually male while female voices tend to be contained within the diegesis of the film (Silverman *The Acoustic Mirror* 1988: 45). The narrator of a film may be termed the personal or character narrator and is judged on performance and felicity but the extradiegetic narrator is regarded as the more truthful. In *The Usual Suspects*, Verbal is the omniscient narrator in another voice, a voice which normally possesses an authentic authority. This is subverted by his narrative being found to be untrue (Bordwell 111). The narrator, through excessive double presence, masks the facts of his faulty narrative - his presence compensates for the lack of fabula. Towards the end of the film, the extradiegetic narrator is dispensed with but it is still his authenticity we feel through Verbal’s apparent fear of Kujan. His personal narration does not just report the real world but creates it; the only facts of this fictional world which remain at the end are the first and last scene. The narrator is less evident in *Boxing Helena*; it is not the voice of any particular character, but it does to some degree sympathize with Nick early in the film as the rejected son and lover. Helena appears as callous and spiteful early in the film, although her torture later is viewed sympathetically. *Boxing Helena* lacks an extradiegetic narrator; the plot within the film is created by Nick’s sub-conscious and so in this film also, it is only the early and final scenes that have existence beyond Nick’s fantasies.

(Silverman *The Acoustic Mirror* 1988: 45).<sup>5</sup> These two films form the basis of my analysis here.

In these two films, disability is gendered feminine through its divergence from the white male body which patriarchy idealises and conceptualises as the norm.<sup>6</sup> Femininity is associated with the pathological as women and disease “are both socially devalued or undesirable, marginalized elements which constantly threaten to infiltrate and contaminate that which is more central, health or masculinity” (Doane 152). Verbal and Helena, the central characters of *The Usual Suspects* and *Boxing Helena*, are thus associated with the feminine through their pathology. Taking on the attributes of femininity, terror and vulnerability is typical of disabled characters; Carol Clover has argued that the victim of horror is “eternally and prototypically the damsel” (42).<sup>7</sup> In *The Usual Suspects*, the disabled character Verbal’s acting can be seen as feminised;<sup>8</sup> he cries, grovels, cowers, demonstrates abject fear in defence of his story and is therefore believed by the police officer Kujan, not just because his crippled body is designated abject but because it is gendered feminine and

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<sup>5</sup> This mode therefore explicitly reveals cinema’s limitation in only being able to tell and not to show; demonstration is an apparition only. Film operates on the device that narration appears transparent; the visual discourse guarantees truth (Bordwell 18). Typically, curiosity and suspense are created by the limitation of knowledge and controlled imparting of information via the narrator to the audience (Bordwell: 65). This may be true of any narrative text; a central tenet of most narrative theory is that “no story exists apart from a shaping human intelligence, and that every story bears the mark of this shaping intelligence” (Newman 168).

<sup>6</sup> The white male body as norm claims that “I am the unified, self-controlled centre of the universe. The rest of the world, which I define as Other, has meaning only in relation to me, as man/father, possessor of the phallus” (Jones 1981: 248).

<sup>7</sup> She cites Alfred Hitchcock’s words on the set of *The Birds* (1963), “I always believe in following the advice of the playwright Sardou. He said ‘Torture the women!’ The trouble today is that we don’t torture women enough.” (Spoto 1983: 483).

<sup>8</sup> Dale Spender has also argued that the feminine must inevitably occupy a negative semantic and syntactic space, being “the marked form: it is the proof of otherwise” (20) and that linguistically, femininity “is nothing but body” (102).



these positions are feminine ones.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the film, all characters except Keaton and Syuzet are implied as homosexual, that is their masculinity is not asserted through their sexual dominance of women. Although Verbal's omniscient narrator sounds assertive and is deep voiced, his language to Kujan is gentler, less assertive, and decidedly camp; he is also literally limp-wristed. He is not sexually competitive with Keaton but cries about the death of Edie, not as a lover but as a friend. Verbal is seemingly subservient to Kujan, although slightly provocative in the manner of female victims of the genre.<sup>10</sup> Verbal can also be penetrated by Kujan - Kujan can see into his mind and extract things from it without his consent because he is gendered feminine, because Verbal is therefore penetrable, because he is stupid, a cripple, weaker than the rest. Only at the conclusion is this act of disability revealed and Verbal is unveiled as Keyser Syuzet, affirmatively heterosexual and so misogynistic that he shot his own wife and children to protect his business and his honour.

Both films contain strong homoerotic elements: Kujan tells Verbal he can make him do whatever he wants, that he can take what he wants from Verbal and there is a sense of Verbal pretending to open up for Kujan and for Keaton (in allowing Keaton to beat him). Nick is unable to have a "normal" sexual relationship with a woman but seeks approval from his male friends, Laurence and Edward, in the film. Neither film develops these elements. Instead

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<sup>9</sup> Kristeva strives to explain revulsion in her essay *Powers of Horror* through her belief that the symbolic is not in itself strong enough to force the constitution of the subject but that drives, which she calls chora, push the mother away to enable separation (1982: 12). This demands the abjection of the mother but above all, the abject is "the ambiguous, the in-between, what defies boundaries" (Lechte 160) and that which disrupts order, such as the corpse, the "traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour" (Kristeva 1982: 4). Filth and defilement therefore are associated with the mother as abject rather than desired object (Lechte 162-3). The child can "become a subject capable of dealing with objects only by virtue of having constituted a domain of the abject" (Boothby 1991: 65). In the constitution of the subject "what threatens to emerge from the real is ultimately a part of oneself, one's own refuge, one's own corpse" (Boothby 65). A representational concern with the interior of the body is linked to a concern to maintain the boundaries between inner and outer which is a crucial element of the subject's separation from the mother (Lechte 163).

<sup>10</sup> Cinematically, the female body is victimized and punished. In horror, although the perpetrator may variously be animal, vegetable or mineral, the victim is typically a woman. As Carol Clover says, "cinema hardly invented the pattern" (42); literature had already established and acknowledged the feminine as the victim prototype. Edgar Allen Poe wrote in "The Philosophy of Composition" in 1846 that the "death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world". Hélène Cixous has stated rather less romantically: "It is always necessary for a woman to die for the play to begin" (1984: 546).

they focus on masculinity, and the relation of men to each other in terms of parental authority. When Verbal tells the story of Keyser, we see Kujan, seated for once, listening with rapt attention, soothed like a child at bedtime, even saying the words one might find in a bedtime story, “tell on your pa and Keyser Syuzet will get you”. It is a described world that Kujan does not understand, for all his posturing and pretense of knowledge of criminals. He believes without question the theatrical myths of the underground: the all-knowing lawyer, the “fence”, the respect for the “guys”. This seems to be what he desires above all else, this criminal, highly masculinized world explained to him, one with no women in it except raped or dead ones. Nick appears in a similar parental role, nurturing Helena like a child, humouring her with food, clothes and mirrors<sup>11</sup> but it is most often Helena who wields the parental power over Nick: “a little boy named Nick invited me” she tells him at his party and later she warns not to search her purse with “don’t be a curious George, Nick”. These aspects may disguise the homoerotic elements of the narratives but they never entirely eclipse them, thus allowing the characters to occupy feminised positions.

Contemporary film criticism and cultural theory has problematized the equation of sex with gender and the assumption that in representational images femininity is always denoted by a female body and masculinity by a male body (see pages 9-10 in the Introduction to this thesis).<sup>12</sup> While Mulvey (1991) argues that only a female body is the favoured metaphor, others have contested this, arguing that gender and sex are not collapsible categories and, that under certain circumstances, femininity can be written on the male body and vice versa

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<sup>11</sup> Her delight in seeing her own reflection depicts her self-sufficiency as narcissistic (Freud 1953: 56-7).

<sup>12</sup> In her study of the slasher films of the eighties, Carol Clover re-examines the female victim as victim-hero and questions the interpretation of film critics such as Ann Kaplan who fix women as the indisputable object of the gaze and interpret all pleasure derived from the text as identification with the sadistic, subjectified killer. Kaplan writes, “within the film text itself, men gaze at women, who become objects of the gaze; the spectator, in turn, is made to identify with this male gaze, and to objectify the woman on the screen; and the camera’s original ‘gaze’ comes into play in the very act of filming” (1983: 29). Clover argues that the audience, including the male elements, identify with the female victim heroes, satisfying a homoerotic desire, re-enacting the incestuous aspects of the Oedipus complex (Clover 42-64). Importantly, she disputes the commonly held belief that men identify with male characters and women with female characters: what the character does and what it seems is more important than its gender. Thus “appearance and behaviour do not necessarily indicate sex” (Clover 58).

(Roiphe).<sup>13</sup> The male body can therefore be feminised in certain circumstances such as when the depicted man is disabled.

The character of Helena in *Boxing Helena* is evidently female. She also is a stereotypical female character; like Verbal, she also betrays and abandons. Nick's obsession with her begins after she has a brief affair with him and then rejects him. She is constructed as promiscuous and domineering. To Ray, another lover, she says: "you bore me", and she taunts Nick about his premature ejaculation: "You're pathetic. What'd it take you: a whole three seconds? . . . You're a goddamned joke". Nick's mother is also rejecting: the film opens with a party scene in Nick's childhood where his mother openly rejects him to pursue her lover. This sets the scene for Helena's behaviour throughout the film in her dealings with her lovers and with Nick in particular. The party scene is replayed with Nick as the host, expectant of sexual success with Helena in his new position as an adult male. However, she rejects him as his mother did, for another male. Within the constructs of the film, it is this feminine behaviour which provides the motive for Nick's abduction and mutilation of Helena, and therefore leads to her amputations.<sup>14</sup>

Verbal's role play of a feminised character is signalled through the contrast in narrative voices between his crippled and non-crippled personae. He is introduced visually with his

<sup>13</sup> When gender becomes separate from sex and the boundaries are blurred, the same body does for both masculine and feminine, and that body is always female (Clover 59). The "final girl" is both feminized and masculinized at various points in horror films eventually saving herself and so becoming the hero-victim (Clover 59). The shifting gender boundaries necessitate the identification of the audience with the masochistic role of the feminine victim in the early parts of films such as *Texas Chain Saw Massacre II* (1974) as well as with the triumphant masculinized role (Clover 61-4). Silverman disputes any identification based on sadism, arguing: "I will hazard the generalization that it is always the victim - the figure who occupies the passive position - who is really the focus of attention, and whose subjugation the subject (whether male or female) experiences as a pleasurable repetition of his/her own story. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the fascination of the sadistic point of view is merely that it provides the best vantage point from which to watch the masochistic story unfold" (1980: 5). Teresa de Lauretis in *Alice Doesn't* has cited two Hitchcock films *Rebecca* (1940) and *Vertigo* (1958), to develop a theory of the female spectator which posits that she identifies with both the passive object (female) and the active subject (usually male) simultaneously (1984). Male bodies do not escape gender transgression, they are often the victims in horror, but Clover argues that they die because they make mistakes, whereas females die just because of their sex (33-5).

<sup>14</sup> Amputees feature in a number of films such as *West of Zanzibar*, *Treasure Island* (1971 and 1990) and *Peter Pan* (1953). Their characters are often bitter (Sutherland 18). In film, wounds and slashes such as those inflicted in amputations represent vulnerabilities (Clover 62-113).

disability and to the other characters, after his long time silence, as “Verbal, Verbal Klint” to which he adds, “Roger really; people tell me I talk too much”. His various names, Verbal, Roger, cripple, gimp, are given to him by others (a mark of femininity) and imply a plurality of character (another feminine trait). Verbal chooses his role of cripple. Through it he enters a category which attributes baseness, cowardice, passivity, and stupidity to the subject without him having to prove these characteristics. His most visible disability is his limp, which in *The Usual Suspects*, as in other films carries a mythology of deficiency and pathos (Sutherland 18).<sup>15</sup>

Kujan does not doubt his ability to dominate Verbal because Verbal is already designated through his feminised body as inferior to him: “I’m smarter than you and I’m going to find out what I want to know and I’m going to get it from you whether you like it or not” he asserts, threatening a penetration and possession he knows is his by right. At the end of the film, he has failed to do this because Verbal is not what he seems, and is not after all penetrable or possessable by Kujan. Verbal’s adoption of the category cripple is only a device to distract Kujan from the facts of the case: that Verbal is the sole unlikely survivor and that he is protected “from above”. His testimony is the only account of the events that exists. There is no evidence to substantiate it or in any way prove or disprove it and so his acting the cripple equips him with a ready-made set of personality associations which deceive Kujan for just long enough for Verbal to make his escape. It is not just Kujan who is distracted by Verbal’s excessive physicality, the resort to the body as truth operates on the viewer too, so that when the narrative strains at moments of inconsistency, embodied character takes over.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Another example of the same character type is Ratso in *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), a shambling and pathetic character who wastes away during the course of the film. Such characters denote castration (Botting and Wilson 1998: 188).

<sup>16</sup> Excessive embodiment is often represented in cultural depictions by twins: *Dead Ringers* (1988), *Dark Mirror* (1939), *A Stolen Life* (1946) (Fiedler 1981: 203).

Helena is introduced in *Boxing Helena* as an embodied character through her characterization as sexually promiscuous and domineering.<sup>17</sup> Her sexuality is the first and most significant aspect of her character. She is shown in scenes of seduction, copulation and sexual rejection rather than at work, for example. Her social interaction is entirely with men she is, or has been, sleeping with rather than with other women or family. She appears to have no close friends or family at all, either in or out of Nick's fantasy. She sees herself as an object of beauty: "how can I ever look at myself and think of myself as worthwhile?" she says after she discovers the amputations. Later she associates her identity with her physicality when she says to Nick: "give me back some of what you've taken away: kiss me".

The body wins out in the narrative of these two films. There is an assumption in the films that a true body and a false body exist. Verbal's disabled and feminised body is a false body, constructed by Verbal for his narrative purposes. His theatricality is reasserted for what it is - a curtain. His "true" able-bodied body is revealed at the conclusion of *The Usual Suspects* and gender, as well as able-bodiedness, is revealed as a fixed indisputable state. Although Verbal can act feminized, he is really male and the truth of his body is in his (able-bodied) exit: he denies the possibility of feminized man. Helena's limbless body is similarly a false body, constructed by Nick's desires. Her body is "truly" whole: the revelation of her abduction and mutilation as Nick's dream affirms the truth of the able-bodied body.

Various theorists have conceptualized the body not as demonstrable of truth but as highly contextualized: Beverly Brown and Parveen Adams argue that the "body exists in a number of ways for medical and legal practice" (1979: 43), and Sue Scott and David Morgan have maintained that "social competence as expressed in bodily demeanour is always that which is appropriate to the particular demands of the context" (14). In *The Usual Suspects* the context

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<sup>17</sup> I use the term "embodied" in a particular sense in this thesis, meaning "focused on the body as pre-eminent".

is the competition for narrative and in *Boxing Helena* the context is the drama of the castration complex.<sup>18</sup>

When Verbal's narrative is threatened by logical analysis which it may not stand up to, he resorts to the inner body to ward off Kujan. When Kujan first begins to question him, he asks for coffee to stall for time to invent a story. Kujan first refuses his request (depriving witnesses of fluid, food and sleep is a common device of fictional police) but Verbal insists, "I'm really thirsty. I used to dehydrate as a kid. One time it got so bad my piss came out like snot. I'm not kidding, it was all thick and gooey..." Kujan interrupts him to get the coffee. The threat of the body spillage is enough to enervate Kujan into evasive action immediately; he does not question the fact of Verbal's statement nor his (lack of) control over his body. All through the film Kujan seeks to subordinate Verbal to his narrative, to inflict his idea of the sequence and impetus of events to him, questioning Verbal's narrative time and time again. "Convince me," he repeats scene after scene except where Verbal's body is concerned, when he assumes that it speaks the truth of itself. It is as it seems. When he speaks of his body, he speaks the truth. Towards the end of the film when Kujan suspects Verbal's account of the final moments of Keaton's life, he starts to wonder why Verbal, who seems so devoted to

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<sup>18</sup> In Freudian theory, psychosexual development is negotiated through three general stages: the oral, the anal and the phallic (Freud 1905: 116-33). Gender and sexuality are the product of sexual maturation (Tong 1992: 139). Prior to the phallic stage, the infant is polymorphously perverse by the retrospective standards of the adult (Freud 1986: 274), since it is not genitally orientated but instead feels its orifices and appendages to be sexual terrain (Tong 140). Hence anyone who as an adult seeks orgasmic satisfaction in the pregenital realm or who maintains their autoerotic organization is classified as perverse (Freud 1986: 274; 1953: 116). In "Infantile Sexuality" Freud described the oral stage of development as pleasure which is associated with the ingestion of food through sucking at the mother's breast and which exists into later stages as thumbsucking (Freud 1905: 116). This is followed at the age of two or three by the anal phase during which the infant derives pleasure from the control of the expulsion of faeces (Freud 1905: 117). At the age of three to four the child negotiates the Oedipus and castration complexes and it is in these stages that the development of boys and girls differs (Tong 140-3). The boy's natural attachment to the mother who nurtures him becomes a desire to possess her, that is to have intercourse with her, which requires the death of his father as his rival. This desire is short-lived, however, since having seen his mother naked he assumes she has been castrated by his father and then fearing his own castration the boy abandons his mother love and develops the superego. He thus assimilates the father's values, the patriarchal social conscience and internalizes the father's authority through identification. The girl, on the other hand, realizing that she does not have a penis blames her mother for her lack and turns to her father as love object. To deal with the loss of her mother, she identifies with her and therefore tries to take her place with her father, at first desiring the possession of the penis and later desiring a male child in its place. For boys then, the castration complex brings the Oedipus complex to an end while for girls the castration complex leads to the Oedipus complex where they remain indefinitely (Tong 142-3).

Keaton, did not try to save him. Verbal once again side-steps his analysis with the excuse of his body: “I knew it was Keyser Syuzet. It was Keyser Syuzet, Agent Kujan, I mean the devil himself; how do you shoot the devil in the back? What if you miss?” At this point he raises his crippled hand toward Kujan for emphasis and Kujan withdraws, disturbed but convinced. An inconsistency in his story shortly after this incident is also answered in this way; when it starts to become apparent that Verbal, against all odds, has survived the explosion without a scratch, he phrases this to Kujan in terms of Keaton “saving” him, then questions this to preempt Kujan’s thinking, then accounts for it in terms of his body: “Why me? Why not Fenster or McManus or Hockney, why me? I’m stupid, I’m a cripple, why me?” Kujan seizes this explanation and recounts it to him: “Because you’re a cripple Verbal, because you’re stupid. Because you’re weaker than them.” It seems that whatever truth needs to be proposed has only to be framed in terms of the body to invoke instant verity.

Verbal’s narrative to Agent Kujan appears to have more truth than his other accounts to other characters because of its presence as the spoken word, and certainly Kujan believes that what he is hearing is truer than the version Verbal told the District Attorney. This is revealed as unfounded at the close of the film when Verbal’s oral statement is shown to have no truth at all, nor even any cohesion since it was assembled from fragments. The name Verbal also undermines the truth of the spoken word - it is popularly believed that people who talk a lot reveal themselves in the same way that body language is supposed to reveal the mind. In his course on general linguistics, Saussure (1916) imagined language not as an adjunct to reality but as formative of it; rather than expositional he perceived language as constructional and Verbal uses these conceptions precisely to deceive - the language that emanates from his body is controlled to communicate false messages to Kujan, an effective device because Kujan believes he can almost hypnotise Verbal into telling him what he wants to know. Kujan explains to Verbal how to tell a murderer in a group of people, an exercise in amateur

psychology which does not help him to recognize that Verbal is a mass murderer. His ability to “read” people is ultimately useless against either the dead or the living; he knows no more about Verbal, Keaton, or the others by the end of the film than he did at the beginning.<sup>19</sup>

The fantasy of a singular narrative truth is therefore exposed in a multiplicity of possibilities at the conclusion of these two films. This relates to the issue of fragmentation which arises in both films.<sup>20</sup> Verbal denies the “natural order” of assumed singularities by assembling fragmented parts to form a singularity but this proves to be an unstable compound as it is “unnatural” and fragments again at the end of the film, only just holding together long enough for Verbal to make his escape. Like the fabricated parts of Frankenstein’s monster, Verbal’s story is ultimately horrific not for itself but for the knowledge that truth is non-existent. Jerrold Hogle says of Victor Frankenstein’s truth, “the primal Other is now discovered as nothing but a symbolic order, a plethora of fragments referring to themselves, where the source remains forever lost and yet where the origin beckons within the multiplicity of signs as the dark and distant object of desire” (1995: 218). Lacan refers to this as “the true

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<sup>19</sup> For Derrida, Western language has presumed that writing is preceded by speech, which has a voice or presence in every text (Newman 185), and is less subject to interpretation than the written text (Derrida 1976). This can be seen in the *Bible*, with St John’s assertion “When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God and what God was, the Word was” (John I: 1-2). Although written down, God’s word is spoken. The spoken word guarantees presence; it appears to be closer to the originating thought than a written word (Selden 1985: 85). The logos is assumed in Lacanian theory to originate meaningfully from an ontological stability (Stam, *et al* 1992: 24), which Derrida disputes on the basis that language creates meaning, which is endlessly deferred; there is no centre or presence to be grasped (Derrida 1978). His neologism, *différance*, describes the division of the sign, the gap between the object of perception and the perception of the object (Lechte 55), an analysis which, like Hawking’s analysis of physics, merges space and time (1988). I would add to this that the spoken word possesses a physicality which the written word does not; it seems closer to the body than the written sign and this endorses its presence and truth. Kujan believes he can get the “truth” from Verbal if he sees him in person. He believes that Verbal cannot lie to him, or that if he does, his body will betray him. This proves to be false. Verbal can precisely control his body like any other tool, and make it work for him.

<sup>20</sup> In *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shapiro has pointed out that the idea of multiplicity represents “a confusing redundancy, an uncomfortable excess of embodiment, that disturbs the freedom of male fantasy” (150). The excess of narrative possibilities symbolizes a revolt against singularity (Irigaray 1985b: 32); the splitting of amputation threatens both cohesion and the phallocentrism upon which patriarchy is predicated as in order to justify oppression, a triangular hierarchy must be established and maintained with a single group at the tip. Kristeva believes that the maternal body is the source of all semiotic references to the unstructured unbounded body, with its harbouring of the foetus within, the splitting during birth, its sense of time and space that differs from that of the Symbolic (1981: 13-35), but it can also be conceived in terms of a fear of the establishment of the subject as a separate identity and the separation from the love object which that implies (Lacan 1977: 1-7). A threat of splitting is therefore a threat to patriarchy and indeed all forms of symbolic oppression.



monstrum horrendum”, an unmasking of “what is designed by nature to signify the annulment of what it signifies” (Lacan 1972: 63, 71).<sup>21</sup> The multiplicity that is seen in Verbal’s fragmented narrative is monstrous in *The Usual Suspects* partly because it is presented as duplicitous, confusing and masked. The narrative is equally deceptive in *Boxing Helena*. The story of Helena’s abduction and mutilation is revealed at the end of the film to be Nick’s fantasy. There are some clues to this in Nick’s English accent, the absence of friends or family searching for Helena, the omission of scenes of bathing, medical treatment, pain or personal care. The end of the film reveals the events of the narrative to be rooted in Nick’s desire (Francke 1993: 9).

Freud described desire in terms of both a search for origins (1905: 113), and a repressed incestuous desire for the mother (1905: 148-52). In “The Riddle of the Sphinx” (in *On Sexuality*), he posited that the desire to unravel mysteries was founded in the desire to know where babies came from (1905: 113). Both Nick and Kujan are unravelling a “mystery” in the course of *The Usual Suspects* and *Boxing Helena*: Nick unravels Helena’s true feelings for him and why she will have relationships with other men but not with him; Kujan establishes the identity of Keyser. The bodies of Verbal and Helena are the sites of these two mysteries. For Freud, women’s bodies become the objects of mystery by being the source of the physical self, an understanding of which is sought throughout culture; Kermode

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<sup>21</sup> Verbal and Helena are, like many disabled characters, monstrous in their characters and in their deformities (Coates 1991: 85). Monsters have a history of inducing fear on a spiritual as well as physical level; St Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* described monsters as revealing the will of God (Baldick 1995: 48), and Foucault has identified the route of the word as the same as that of demonstration - to be shown, lending the origin of the word an authority of presentation (1967: 68-70). In this sense, the monster can constitute truth as well as be constituted by others; Barbara Freeman posits that Kant’s construction of the sublime is “dependent upon a series of negations”, defined by what it is not, rather than what it is, and that this reveals the power of monstrosity to invade and control the subject (1995: 192). Kant defines the sublime as not monstrous representations of nature (1968: 91), or superstition (1968: 103), or passion (1968: 113), or fanaticism (1968: 116), which according to Freeman positions the sublime on the border of the monstrous, which threatens to engulf it (193). There is also a positive aspect to the representation of the monstrous as excessive if it is “that outcome or product of curiosity or epistemophilia pushed to an extreme that results - as in the story of Oedipus - in confusion, blindness and exile... it is an excess of signification” (Brooks “What Is a Monster?” 1995: 100), and may be utilized in feminist politics if it indeed “eludes gender definition” (Brooks “What Is a Monster?” 1995: 101).

argues that *Paradise Lost* is a myth about origins, a poem about horror and death (1975: 502-3). However, the fascination of women's bodies may also be attributed to the oral phase of development in that they have the original breast. In an attempt to keep the mystery of reproduction to themselves, the male medical profession fosters a belief that the female body is the territory of the medical profession (Ussher 1989: 21),<sup>22</sup> and with increased intervention into female bodies with reproductive technology women may be becoming ever more alienated from their physical selves (Corea 1985: 2).<sup>23</sup> These factors affirm the female or feminised body as the site of mystery and therefore vulnerable to exploration in cultural representations.

In *Boxing Helena* and *The Usual Suspects*, as in other cultural representations, there is no truth of the body oblivious to context: it is a competition for narrative that is played out on Verbal's body and the drama of the castration complex that is played out on Helena's body. The body is territorialized and manipulated according to need; Kujan does not question the felicity of Verbal's disability because it is not his territory and health is the jurisdiction of medicine (Scott and Morgan 7). Part of Nick's claim over Helena's body is his profession as

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<sup>22</sup> The body's interior landscape which appears linear in shape, beginning with the mouth and ending in the anus, is a darkness which is always hungry and always unknown. The mystery of inner physicality led to illegal dissections, employed Burke and Hare, and resulted in a number of texts of dubious accuracy until Gray's *Anatomy*, although it was largely after Galileo that the interest in observing the physical world became widespread (until then it was widely believed that the world was created by God to be beyond human understanding). If then, as Mulvey says, the inner body may be said to be a spacial metaphor "for division between surface allure and concealed decay" (Mulvey 1991), and if "the discourse of man is the metaphor of woman" as Gayatri Spivak asserts (1983: 169), as a figure in a film, the female character can expect to enact the difference between presence and other: truth behind fiction, artifice beneath cosmetics, speech behind rhetoric, to which her mythologized dualistic body lends itself (Mulvey 1991). Mary Douglas saw in the human body the prototype of society but interpreted the disruptive potential of the female body as merely the re-establishment and reinforcement of order and social structure through temporary inversion or breach of boundaries (Douglas 1966; Russo 1986: 215).

<sup>23</sup> Ann Dickson has argued that the female genitals are either "eclipsed" or "exposed" by language (1985: 44-5), a dichotomy which enhances both the fear and desire evoked by the original enquiry. Contemporary vaginal iconography such as the work of Georgia O'Keefe, has attempted to combat this symbolism (Ussher 1989: 21).

a surgeon.<sup>24</sup>

The search for the single, truthful solution depicted in the cinematic narrative is, in Derridean terms, the philosophical desire for meaning, which is impossible as there is no fixed meaning, only signification (Tong 222). Derrida criticizes Lacan for the phallogentrism of his work on the Symbolic Order which he believes affords primacy to the phallus, connoting the unitary drive to a single achievable goal (Tong 222). This is reflected in the textual desire for singularity which is apparent in the need for a single narrative in *The Usual Suspects* and in Nick's desire for Helena's fidelity to him in *Boxing Helena*.

The search for singularity in the two films is played out upon the bodies of Helena and Verbal. As Mulvey writes: "the paradox of phallogentrism is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world. An idea of woman stands as lynch pin to the system; it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies" (1985: 6).<sup>25</sup> Mulvey sees the role of the feminine, which she equates with the female body, as fundamentally restricted in filmic representation: "the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is two-fold, she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of a penis and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic."<sup>26</sup> Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end, it does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack." (1985: 6-7). This is evident in *Boxing Helena* and *The Usual Suspects* as

<sup>24</sup> Nick's profession as a doctor is significant as "medicine introduces a detour in the male's relation to the female body through an eroticisation of the very process of knowing the female subject" (Doane 1986: 154). However, this is unlike films such as *A Stolen Life*, *A Woman's Face* (1941) and *Johnny Belinda* (1948) in which the woman is an element in the medical discourse and the doctor fulfils the role of "reader or interpreter" (Doane 1986: 157). Nick may desire this role, but Helena does not consent to it.

<sup>25</sup> Theorists such as Modleski believe that the project of film is to castrate women, to rob them of their image of wholeness which the male dreads (1988: 2), they evoke a masculinity that is in awe of the feminine and seek to destroy it through fear.

<sup>26</sup> The unconscious can, by definition, never be known and by extension, renders the subject radically incapable of knowing itself (Grosz 1990: 13). Freud likened his work on the unconscious to a "Copernican revolution" where the unconscious, like the earth, is no longer erroneously held as the centre of the universe (1917: 139-40). In challenging Descartes' equation of consciousness with subjectivity, epitomized in "cogito, ergo sum", Freud anticipated the reconceptualisation of the criteria of knowledge (Grosz 1990: 2). So began a search for the unfindable, destined to fail, the object always remaining just out of reach.

the films end at the point at which the (created) castrated figure disappears: Verbal's limp disappears and Helena awakes in hospital with her limbs intact.

In both cases, a woman's death impels the action. It is Helena's horrific road accident, leaving her unconscious, that gives Nick the opportunity to capture and mutilate her. If Verbal's story is to be believed, it was Keyser's murder of his wife that set the main narrative of Keyser's life in motion as this event rationalized the mass murder of his fellow criminals. Within the time scale of the film, it is Verbal's narration of this event that reveals who Keyser is and explains much of the preceding events of the film and therefore impels the action. At the end of *The Usual Suspects*, it is the death of Edie, Keaton's lover, that is the last piece of action to occur; Kujan tells Verbal that Edie has been found dead and this appears to bring about Verbal's agreement that Keaton must have been Keyser Syuzet. After this Kujan allows him to leave and the final revelation of identity occurs. Once the woman has been killed, the action begins, "Only when she has disappeared can the curtain go up; she is relegated to the grave, the asylum, oblivion and silence" (Cixous 1984: 564).<sup>27</sup>

The dismemberment of women in film is another form of death. Following on from Freudian theory, Laura Mulvey has equated the horror of fragmentation with the fear of castration which lurks in the male unconscious (1989: 6-13).<sup>28</sup> In film, dismemberment is

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<sup>27</sup> For Kristeva this female body is the maternal body, which in birth scales "the height of bloodshed and life," exemplifying a "scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual" (1982: 155). The rejection of the maternal becomes the abject, "the jettisoned object," which "is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses ... on the edge of non existence and hallucination" (1982: 2). Abjected objects therefore "show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva 1982: 3) and this includes corpses and immorality for Kristeva but in imagery may be represented by disfigurement and monstrosity.

<sup>28</sup> Feminist theorists as diverse as Betty Friedan, Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millet have criticised Freudian theory for its methodology (Friedan 1974), biological determinism (Millet 1977), or assumption of penis envy in women (Firestone 1972). However, a number of feminists have not viewed Freud's theories as an ideological graveyard and instead have accepted them as possibly enlightening for the feminist political project (see Dinnerstein 1977 and Chodorow 1978, for example). Juliet Mitchell has claimed that psychoanalysis could provide an "analysis of ideology" which may be "tied closely to a logic of sexual struggle" (1974: xxiii). She has argued that Freud described rather than proscribed systems of sexual development and that such knowledge could equip feminism with an understanding of non-material forms of oppression (1974).

reminiscent of castration (Dick 1993: 187).<sup>29</sup> The history of the obsession with the spectacle of the body is typified by an analytic drive to dismember, which is inscribed in film (Bruno 241). Helena's dismemberment can therefore be seen as an enactment in Nick's imagination of the drama of the castration complex. This is confirmed in the plot and dialogue. Nick's place in the natural order is established at the party that opens the film when a guest says: "Father's pretty busy in there, eh? You know he's been awfully good to you and your mother and given you this nice house and we all know that you'll follow in his footsteps at the hospital". The film cuts immediately to about twenty years later which sees Nick fulfilling the guest's prophecy: he is a successful surgeon whose work affords him wealth, status and power. He is dominant and assertive with his colleagues, and munificent to his patients and their relatives. Helena challenges this identity though, since she refuses to be dominated or seduced by men. When Ray tries to persuade her to return to bed early in the film, he points to his (presumably erect) penis and says "come back to Daddy" to which she replies emphatically "never", so demonstrating her rejection of phallic power. She is unimpressed by Nick's large house (which is actually inherited from his mother and not the product of his own work) and by his profession. Her rejection of him is reminiscent of his mother's rejection of him but also demonstrates his father's dominance over Nick at a crucial time in his psycho-sexual development ("not now Nicholas, I'm busy").<sup>30</sup> Helena therefore invokes the fear of castration experienced by him as a young child. Identifying Helena as a victim of castration, which stimulates his fear of the same, he attempts to allay the fear by castrating her (again). The removal of Helena's limbs renders her powerless and wounded, and exposes his

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<sup>29</sup> Disintegration of the body is a theme which is explored in the work of artists such as Cindy Sherman and Frieda Kahlo where only the detritus of the body remains once the cosmetic is removed (Mulvey 1991; Edholm 1992: 165-9).

<sup>30</sup> Nick's father is represented as the antithesis of the "nurturant father" whose absence is threatening to the male child (Layton 383). In the original Oedipus, reversed in Freudian theory, the father perceives the son to have the power and be a hostile rival and so kills all those he nurtures (Sophocles 1947). This fear of the father figure can be seen in *The Usual Suspects* in the figures of Keyser and in *Boxing Helena* in Nick's father. Both characters are presented as Godlike, omniscient, omnipotent, yet violent.

fear of castration. Helena accuses him: “you think you can’t be a man without me” because it is her wound that affirms his possession of the penis. She also identifies that his fear of castration is transferred to women: “you really are that frightened of everything: women, me, yourself”. The character of Ann provides a foil for Helena because she does not invoke the fear of castration. She is in love with Nick, she obviously admires and respects him. After they have had sex, she reassures him about his premature ejaculation. When Helena taunts Nick, he is obviously thinking of Ann’s example when he responds “you don’t understand. If you were a real woman you’d lie to me about our sex. Real women lie all the time”. It is in Ann’s image that Nick would make Helena and he hopes to do so through his disempowerment and dismemberment of her body. The scenery and props such as the old-fashioned house and cane armchair indicate that the atmosphere is archetypal rather than medical and technological, as the amputations would require. The box which contains Helena is fashioned like a throne, implying her elevation in his eyes and his fear of what she represents. She is usually placed on a table so that she is physically above Nick.

Nick’s desire to render Helena powerless and castrated is fulfilled in his imagination when she comes to desire him, but the resolution of the film as a dream sequence undermines this ending and reveals his failure to realise his desire. In Lacanian terms, desire is established through lack since it is in “wanting” something that the subject comes to feel desire for it. It is also, in principle, insatiable, since it originates in the splitting of the subject and its entry into the Symbolic (Lacan 1977: 269). Nick’s desire to transfer the fear of castration onto Helena’s body is fulfilled only in his imagination. Typically also, Kujan’s intense desire in *The Usual Suspects* for the narrative, like that of the audience, can never be satisfied. At the conclusion, all are left with nothing: we know nothing of the events the film is concerned with except the confusion of the first few moments of the film, signifying nothing.

This reveals the power of the female narrative and the vulnerability of the male oedipal story. In Adams and Silverman's work, the "dominant fiction" of phallic wholeness and the supremacy of the Oedipal is questioned, and they both figure the pre-Oedipal as subversive (1988: 7-29; "Masochism and Male Subjectivity" 1988: 31-66). However, Lynne Layton criticises their work as remaining tied to Freudian categories, excluding other scenarios and posing problems for the politics of feminism in hegemonic masculinity (1994: 375). In her analysis of the film *Blue Velvet* (1986), directed by David Lynch, Layton argues that the secret which propels the narrative is, in a psychoanalytic reading, the subject's desire to be the sole object of maternal desire; it is the secret of "female agency and male dependence" (381). To avoid the revelation of this secret, "women's desire is rendered irrelevant, dependency is projected onto her, and what is left is a world that tries to function solely around the various looks between men" (Layton 381). This leaves "the men violent and impotent, desperately searching for *something* from each other" (Layton 381), a story line which echoes that of both *Boxing Helena* and *The Usual Suspects*. Kujan and Verbal both search and compete, blindly for the narrative which is never achieved; women and their desire are obliterated through rape and murder. Keyser's wife is raped, in a solely masculine world the only possible way to conceive infidelity, and it is exposed as a betrayal in her execution which echoes that of Lavinia in Shakespeare's Senecan melodrama *Titus Andronicus* (1590).<sup>31</sup>

Both films show masculinity to be impotent, sterile, fearful, ashamed. Nick's domination and possession of Helena is revealed as a dream account of his desire for her that will never be fulfilled. His relationship with her will never be consummated. She remains a threatening figure to him at the conclusion of the film because she is not castrated by him but as a woman remains a castrated figure that threatens his masculinity with the possibility of castration. In

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<sup>31</sup> Lavinia's execution is enacted with the words "Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee; // And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die!" (V: III ll 46-7), which reveal the personal act of betrayal she has performed; it is not difficult to identify shame with the shame of dependence, and sorrow with infidelity and thus abandonment.

*The Usual Suspects*, Kujan's desire for singularity is also shown to be a failed project. When the male characters in these films search for a masculine world that excludes the feminine they find death and absence. Male trouble is therefore the knowledge of dependency and abandonment, both of which must be violently denied in cultural representations and both of which are routinely projected onto the female body (Segal 1994: 385). The failure of the Oedipal promise that "while the adult male's desire is for his wife, her desire is for the penis" (Layton 387) is examined through the character of Helena who rejects Nick. Typically, it is female bodies which show male pain (Layton 388) through being killed, maimed, or distorted (Layton 389). Pain can be played out on feminized male bodies, such as the monstrous and crippled. Through this imagery, the pain appears controlled and chosen: in embracing death and absence the shame is denied.

Disability is constructed as gendered feminine in films such as *The Usual Suspects*, where a disabled man may be feminised through his disability. In films in which women characters are disabled their gender is significant, as in films such as *Boxing Helena*. Here, the disability is often a vehicle for the exploration of masculinity, particularly the fear of castration and dependence on women. In the next chapter I shall examine images of disability as they appear in the Bible. Disability is gender specific in the Bible as it is in cinema, associating reproductive abnormalities with women and sensory abnormalities with men, for example. Disability is represented in the Bible as an undesirable but potentially transitional state. Like film, biblical narrative constructs disability for semiotic purposes. Whereas in film disability may be a construct of the syuzet which is resolved by the fabula, in biblical narrative disability is resolved through religious redemption.



## *Chapter 5: The Disabled Body in the Bible*

The disabled body is a recurrent image in biblical texts. It is critical to a number of narratives such as the stories of Lazarus (John XI: 1-44) and Miriam (Numbers XII: 9-16). Disability is always presented in particular ways: it appears frequently either in the form of skin conditions such as Hansen's disease, psoriasis, vitiligo, ringworm and leucoderma, all of which are referred to as leprosy (Johnson 1960: 52), in the form of epilepsy, which is referred to as possession by devils (Baker 1974: 36-54), or in the form of sensory disability.<sup>1</sup> It is frequently interchangeable with ill health or sickness, which means that it is associated with both a temporary state and the possibility of change. Such restricted representations suggest that disability is a significant construct within the texts, rather than a matter of realistic historical documentation. This chapter analyses the specific functions which disability serves in the Bible, their genderization and the multiple and sometimes contradictory nature of these functions as well as the effects on later Christian doctrine.

Leprosy is one disabling disease which is frequently referred to in the Bible. Biblical ordinances that describe leprosy as unclean (Leviticus XIII: 46) have provided the origin of medieval attitudes to lepers (Palmer 1982: 81), who were considered to be carrying a highly infectious disease (Richards 1977: 123-4).<sup>2</sup> After the Third Lateran Council of 1179, lepers

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<sup>1</sup> The body appears as extraordinary in several other ways: many characters live exceptionally long lives such as Adam 930 years (Genesis V: 5); Seth 912 years (Genesis V: 8); Methuselah 969 years (Genesis V: 27); Noah 950 years (Genesis IX: 29). Giants also figure as Nephilim in Genesis, descendants of fallen angels (VI: 4) and Goliath, a Philistine (I Samuel XVII: 4). Finally, Samson's extraordinary strength is located in his hair (Judges XVI: 13).

<sup>2</sup> This can now be seen to be unfounded since about 90% of people are naturally immune to Hansen's disease and the remaining 10% only contract it after repeated exposures; it is curable within six months using antibiotics, and rendered non-infectious after just days of treatment (see *Black's Medical Dictionary 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. London, 1979. 525.a). However, in biblical times it was not curable.

were ordered to have separate burial spaces and churches,<sup>3</sup> implemented by a rite of separation, called the Leper Mass, performed by a priest (Palmer 81). This concluded with an empty grave being filled with earth and the leper being given a bell to follow the biblical instruction to warn others with a cry of “unclean, unclean” (Leviticus XIII: 41). In parts of twelfth-century England and France lepers were considered dead and were prohibited from making wills or preventing their spouses from remarrying as widows (Palmer 81). Rabbis continued to believe that leprosy was a direct result of sin (Johnson 1960: 52); according to the Cabalistic tradition Adam had a perfect body before the Fall (Brown 1964: 310), and any physical contact with lepers was expressly forbidden in Hebrew law (Leviticus XV: 4-12). In the middle ages, leprosy was popularly identified with sexual vice in the form of sodomy and lust (Park 1993: 242);<sup>4</sup> a Royal ordinance of 1346 banned lepers from the city of London as they spread infection through “carnal intercourse” (Brody, quoted in Palmer 82), and they were believed to have greater sexual appetites than others (Brody, quoted in Palmer 82).<sup>5</sup>

This conception of leprosy created a category for the treatment of people whose diseases were viewed as sexually transmitted (Park 242). Nor is this an antiquated idea: the US Public Health Service prohibited sex between patients of leprosariums until the 1960s for fear that this would “spread the disease through reproduction” (Silvers 1998: 56). Park ascribes this attitude to the tendency of Christianity to “sexualize human evil” or in the words of Peter Brown, to align it “with specifically sexual desires, with avowed sexual stratagems, and . . . with the lingering power of sexual fantasy” (1990: 481). This, coupled with a “mystique of sexual continence symbolised most intensely in the body of the virgin girl” (Park 243) gives rise to images of the victims of supposed rogue sexuality such as that of Kimberly Bergalis

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<sup>3</sup> If this seems unkind, in Russia today over 4000 lepers are forcibly segregated in enclosed villages under a 1923 law regulating infectious diseases (Franchetti 1998).

<sup>4</sup> In the middle ages, lycanthropic urges were believed to be expressive of sexuality (Douglas 1992: 17).

<sup>5</sup> Until the seventeenth century, bestiality was thought to account for the existence of werewolves, and several congenital disabilities (Douglas 1992: 124).

(Park 242),<sup>6</sup> who became the first person to have contracted AIDS<sup>7</sup> through a health care worker (Park 232). Park argues that “the Christian inclination to privilege sexuality as the archetypal expression of the corrupted human will conferred a special status on what were seen as venereal diseases and made them particularly suitable agents of divine punishment and moral blame” (243). Such punishment is constructed to invariably fall on female characters in Christian and Jewish texts, leading to the reverse logic that the sin is therefore of feminine origin, and specifically that it is female sexuality which is both dangerous and sinful (Ochshorn 1981: 181).

However, in both the New and Old Testaments, disability is not restricted to female characters; in fact disabled characters are overwhelmingly male. For example, of the sixteen healing narratives in Matthew, twelve relate to men. In Mark, seven out of eleven are about men; in Luke, seventeen of twenty-one refer to men, and in John, all four narratives are about the healing of men. Far from this being an attempt to equalize the representational balance between women and men, I would argue that male disabled characters predominate because the texts are constructed to avoid overlapping defilements. Women are already in an unclean state by virtue of their biological sex and to endow them with further profane characteristics would create a redundancy of signification. A further consideration, which I shall return to later, is that disability is presented as remedial, whereas womanhood is not, so making the male character a more appropriate choice, as the issue of self-determination is not clouded or contradicted by biological destiny as in the female body.

When women are presented with disabilities, they differ in nature from those the male characters present with; women generally have vague disorders such as fever (Matthew VIII:

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<sup>6</sup> There appeared in the press many references to Bergalis’ virginity, in contrast to the images of the promiscuous gay doctor (Park 238).

<sup>7</sup> Park thinks that the religious element is crucial to an understanding of homophobia and AIDS imagery in America, where 41% of people call themselves born-again Christians and 32% say they believe every word of the Bible to be literally true (Gallup 1992: 239).

14-7; Mark I: 29-31; Luke IV: 38-41), or simply suffer death (Mark V: 35-43; Luke VIII: 49-56). The only specified illness which a woman suffers from in the New Testament is haemorrhages (Matthew IX: 20-2; Mark V: 25-34; Luke VIII: 43-8), an ailment obviously connected to her gender. Male characters tend to suffer from very specific ailments: blindness (Matthew IX: 27-31; Mark VIII: 22-6, X: 46-52; Luke XVIII: 35-43; John IX: 1-41); dropsy (Luke XIV: 1-6); muteness (Matthew IX: 32-3); epilepsy (Matthew XVII: 14-8; Mark IX: 14-29; Luke IX: 37-43); a withered arm (Matthew XII: 9-14; Mark III: 1-6; Luke VI: 6-11). The result is that more spiritual significance is attached to the narratives of male disability, and hence to men's testimony to biblical events, so dismissing and assailing female authority.

Feminists such as Mary Daly (1968), Judith Weidman (1984), and Elaine Pagels (1988), among others (Brooks "Against the Verses" 1995; Brown 1993; Goldberg 1979), have examined the way in which biblical texts exclude or vilify women. Such analyses focus on Christian theology which in the form of Eve posits a particular and sinful female protagonist in the lost paradise story (Ruether 1974: 81), and on the construction of the narratives within the Bible designed to write women out, or to strip them of their femininity so as to render them invisible as women.<sup>8</sup> The ways in which women differ from men are the subject of strict regulation and legislation, of control, containment and amendment in the biblical books. In similar fashion, disabled bodies in the Bible court ordinance and prescription, often being the subject of law or governance and seeming to solicit measures of control and revision. Both the female body and the disabled body, in their deviation from a standard male body, provide a wealth of metaphorical possibility.

In Old and New Testaments it is clear that deviation from the standard of the male body is a crime against God (Ochshorn 210). It is the male person and body which is considered holy

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<sup>8</sup> There has been a considerable movement to reclaim Christianity for women; in the 1980s, a committee led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton examined every major passage in the Bible which referred to women (Russell 1985: 23). There is at present a substantial body of literature which addresses issues in Christianity from a feminist standpoint (Carmody 1979; Clark 1983; Clark and Richardson 1977; King 1995; Drury 1977).

and closest to God: Christ lives in the shape of a man (Matthew I: 22-3), man is created in God's image (Genesis I: 27). St Paul tells the Corinthians, "A man has no need to cover his head, because man is the image of God, and the mirror of his glory, whereas woman reflects the glory of man" (I Corinthians XI: 7). St Augustine later specifies that "woman herself alone is not the image of God" (quoted in O'Faolain and Martines 7), but God is constructed as both masculine (Clark and Richardson 27) and perfect (Fiedler 1981, 229), and mankind is instructed to emulate him (Pagels 1988: 79) in body and soul. The cures of the New Testament and the ritual purifications of the Old Testament can be seen as a drive to eradicate difference from the ideal of the male body (Ochshorn 210).

The ideal of the male body is violated through uncleanness. The state of uncleanness extends in the Old Testament to include those with physical disabilities. Discoloration of the skin (Leviticus XIV: 56-57), hair loss (Leviticus XIII: 42), scurvy (Leviticus XIV: 55), ulcers (Leviticus XIII: 10), sores (Leviticus XIII: 3; 30), burns (Leviticus XIII: 24) and any inflammation of the skin is ritually unclean (Leviticus XIII: 2). This means that like women, the disabled are not associated with the image of God. People with skin conditions are instructed to "cry 'Unclean, unclean'" in order to warn others of their state (Leviticus XIII: 46). Any condition which leads to discharges renders the bearer unclean as all emissions are thus codified (Leviticus XV: 2). Those who have any form of amputation are explicitly excluded from the people of God (Deuteronomy XXIII: 1). The blind (Leviticus XXI: 18), the lame (Leviticus XXI: 18), those with stunted growth (Leviticus XXI: 19) or excessive growth (Leviticus XXI: 19), those with deformities of the body or face (Leviticus XXI: 20) and those with cataracts are all excluded from making offerings to God as their presence at the altar would profane the sanctity of the locale (Leviticus XXI: 23). Both the disabled and women are therefore of the same lowly status in biblical text.

The New Testament is concerned with the relief of disability: of the 250 literary units in

the synoptic gospels, one fifth are stories of healing or exorcism (Kee 1986: 1), and John focuses largely on miracles (Kee 1986: 88). The Old Testament is concerned with the imperfect body in its role in the rituals of purification which are necessary to combat the polluting effects of disability (Leviticus XIII, XIV, and XV), and with setting out appropriate behaviour around polluting elements such as birth, sex, disability and food (Leviticus XII, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX and XXVII). Biblical prohibitions which exclude certain foods and certain people have often been explained in terms of a connection between hygiene and ritual; many believe that religious rituals are rooted in good hygiene (Porter 1976: 106) but this is not necessarily so. Hygiene may be a fortuitous side effect of such rituals (Douglas 1966: 41).

Rituals rely on constructed oppositional states of purity and pollution (Leach and Aycock 123; Aycock 1983: 122), or in Durkheim's words, the states of the sacred and the profane (1983: 37). As Jewish dietary rules, for example, make no obvious connection between prohibited foods and danger (Douglas 1966: 42-4), these rituals exist as a symbolic system (Leach and Aycock 47). This symbolic system is in part a matter of polarisation. It characterises biblical rhetoric which relies on the discrete categories of Heaven/Hell, culture/nature, male/female, master/servant and clean/unclean (Lee 1990: 35) and therefore what is sacred is balanced against, and requires, what is taboo (Wallace 1966: 60-2). These may be arbitrary categories (Durkheim 1976: 38), but they are discrete and visibly marked (Durkheim 1976: 41). Any threat to that strict order is, in such a symbolic system, dangerous and polluting: "in short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (Douglas 1966: 48); it is a reaction to anomaly and therefore "uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained" (Douglas 1966: 53).

Amongst those not included are women since Leviticus categorises the female

reproductive system as impure, so that a woman is unclean if menstruating or postpartum (XIV: 19-30 and XII). The female body, rather than the blood, connotes impurity as the period of uncleanness following the birth of a daughter is longer than the period following the birth of a son (Leviticus XII: 2-5). The definition of female bodily functions as ritually unclean justifies the lower status of women in Levitical law (Clark and Richardson 27). In the New Testament Jesus never directly addresses the issue of women's biological uncleanness which requires sacrificial purification (Ochshorn 221; Clark and Richardson 27). Conversely, he expressly absolves men of the need to be circumcised in order to be full members of the Christian community (Romans II: 25-9, and 1 Corinthians VII: 18-20), demonstrating that Old Testament laws relating to the unclean can be revoked by Christ.<sup>9</sup>

It may be that both the female and the disabled body threaten a notion of the singular which is intrinsic to a sense of God. The "mythic unity" of the Bible (Prickett 1998: 265) is demonstrated in the elaborate theology necessary to explain the Trinity: the concept of Father, Son and Holy Ghost as one, and the two commandments which enjoin "You shall have no other God to set against me" (Exodus XX, 3) and "You shall not make a carved image for yourself" (Exodus XX, 4). The promise of "revelation" in St John's writings implies an exposition of a single meaning, a definitive prophecy for the future and the Day of Judgement but this is not delivered as the text is so obscure as to virtually defy interpretation (Oman 1923: 26; Caird 1966: 1).<sup>10</sup> The parables of Jesus are also exercises in concealment (Kermode 1979: 2), structured to achieve a dramatic effect (Dinsmore 1931: 280-1), but also to exclude those who reject God (Mark IV: 11-12). The unity of God in itself is theologically problematic.<sup>11</sup> John's assertion that the miracles of healing are evidence of divine will and

<sup>9</sup> In Genesis XVII: 10-14 and Exodus IV: 24-6 God specifies that all his followers must be circumcised.

<sup>10</sup> The authorship of the revelation of St John is not certain (Oman 24-7).

<sup>11</sup> The desire to create singularity is possibly more human than divine; Alexis de Tocqueville relates the need to unify to the democratic urge: "The idea of the unity of mankind leads [us] back to the idea of the unity of the Creator" (quoted in Aron 1968: 222). Weber maintains that only Judaism and Islam are truly monotheistic as the principle is corrupted in Christianity by the notion of salvation (1956: 407).

the disclosure of God's nature further point to a singularity which cannot quite be sustained (Kee 1983, 88).

The significance of this singularity can be seen in Chapters XI to XV of Leviticus which focus on the rituals required to cleanse women and disabled people. Kristeva suggests that these passages presume a connection between disease and femininity through the proximity of the states of leprosy and maternity, both of which she believes threaten the singular. She argues that skin diseases are reminiscent of the female "insides", that they remind us of the maternal body which we reject (1982: 67). While we try to retain the illusion that we are separate, contained individuals, skin diseases remind us that we were once contained by another (Kristeva 1982: 67). Walker (like de Beauvoir) suggests that the rejection of the maternal is ultimately the rejection of death (Kristeva 1982: 82). Mary, or Mara was the name of the "mother death" in most Eastern countries at the time that the New Testament was being recorded, and so rejections of the maternal coexist with the Christian rejection of death through Christ's resurrection and eternal life (Kristeva 1982: 82). In linking uncleanness to the female body, Kristeva suggests that biblical impurity "is permeated with the tradition of defilement; in that sense, it *points to* but does not *signify* an autonomous force that can be threatening for divine agency" (1982: 90-1). Defilement is that which threatens oneness (Kristeva 1982: 104). Women, and those who do not conform in other ways to the standard male body, are the principal sources of defilement in the Old Testament; contact with dead bodies, (skin) disease, or sexual discharges transfer the stigma (Grimm 1996: 18). The prohibitions on blood are seen by Kristeva as "the cathexis of maternal function - mother, women, reproduction" (1982: 91); it is because of its maternal resonances that blood is forbidden (1982: 96). For Kristeva, the forbidden is the abject: that which is surplus, remainder, discarded, waste, but still feared, remembered and powerful (1982: 108-11). The skin is particularly dangerous as a site of potential pollution because of its past proximity to



the womb: it was all that was between the mother and child (Kristeva 1982: 101-2). Kristeva writes that the final act of separation from the mother, instigated by the father, is circumcision (1982: 99); to be holy is then to be separated from the maternal.

This rejection of the maternal is underwritten by the Judeo-Christian theology of wholeness. Mary Douglas writes: “Granted that its root means separateness, the next idea that emerges is of the Holy as wholeness and completeness” (64). Much of the book of Leviticus is taken up with stating the physical perfection that is required of things which are to be presented in the temple and of the individuals who seek to approach it: “the animals offered in sacrifice must be without blemish, women must be purified after childbirth, lepers should be separated and ritually cleansed before being allowed to approach it once they are cured” (Douglas 1966: 64-5). The idea of holiness is given “an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container” (Douglas 1966: 65). This wholeness extends to tasks which should not remain unfinished before a battle such as building a house (Deuteronomy XX 5-7), and emphasises completeness, of number and fullness, for example in the parable of the Dinner Party and the Wedding Feast (Luke XIV 16-24, Matthew XXII). The numbers seven and twelve have particular biblical significance (Wright 1988: 77), representing perfection and wholeness (Quispel 1979: 26): the Levite’s concubine (Judges XIX: 29) is cut into twelve pieces to send to the twelve tribes of Israel (Bal 1990: 33). Holiness seems to be equated with completeness, which is irreconcilable with either the female (Irigaray *This Sex Which is Not One* 1985: 142), or the disabled body. Both of these bodies seem to be constructed to lack the fixed boundaries of the male, women through their potential to be penetrated and to be unclean, and disabled people through their potential to contaminate. All disability which is represented in the Bible is of the contaminating kind, and it is in the light of this concern that disability is presented as an aberration.

Sexual intercourse is treated in a similar manner in the Bible since it is presented as a polluting experience. Genesis establishes Eve as disobedient and wilful (III: 1-24), and the New Testament places blame for the Fall squarely on her shoulders (I Timothy II: 12-15). Her punishment includes a desire for her husband (Genesis III: 16), and his mastery over her (Genesis III: 16). In the book of Leviticus, the temporary state of ritual impurity is caused by all sexual discharges, including those of childbirth (Leviticus, XV).<sup>12</sup> It is the danger of transition across boundaries which necessitates ritualistic performance (Gastor 1969: 79), transition between bodies, between health and ill health, between life and death (Grimm 18). The crossing of boundaries between any groups is explicitly forbidden by God. In Leviticus XIX: 19 for example, God commands: "You shall not plant your field with two kinds of seed. You shall not put on a garment woven with two kinds of yarn". Boundary breaches like these require the same atonement as the crossing of sexual or judicial boundaries (Leviticus XIX: 20 and 11-8). For the most part, "guilt offerings" are sufficient atonement (Leviticus XIX: 21). Leprosy, sexual intercourse and touching of corpses can be resolved in the same manner. The cleansings which are set out in Leviticus XIII and XIV are not cures, but purification, involving, "not the process of healing leprosy, but the recognition that it has occurred" (Kee 1986: 11). The healing, like the disease and the classifications, are metaphorical (Kee 1986: 12). Even the sacrificial victim in the purification rite is itself divided into clean and unclean parts, the first of which are eaten and the second burnt (Leach and Aycock 123; see Leviticus VII: 1-10 and III: 12-17). Such divisions are not explicable in hygienic terms, nor does such treatment of the constituents have any discernible effect on the body of the priest or sacrificer, although they mediate between the oppositional states of clean/unclean (Leach and Aycock 123).

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<sup>12</sup> Tertullian, in *De Cultu Feminarum* 1: 12 states that all women represent Eve: the "devil's gateway" (quoted in Pagels 63).

Deuteronomy XXVIII: 15-44 lists the consequences of disobedience to these laws of division and for this “it is clear that the positive and negative precepts are held to be efficacious and not merely expressive: observing them draws down prosperity, infringing them brings danger” (Douglas 1966: 64). The effects of non-compliance include barrenness (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 18), famine (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 17), drought (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 22), dysentery (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 20), pestilence (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 21), disease (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 22), exile (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 25), cancers (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 27; 22), madness (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 28), oppression (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 33), and blindness (Deuteronomy XXVIII: 28). This signifies both the negative status of disability and illness, through the perception of them as punishment, as well as the religious precepts against divergence from the whole and singular, which is associated with the male and the able-bodied.

Since women constitute a divergence from the whole and the singular, they are within the masculine economy of the Bible, initially the property of their fathers (for example Judges XI: 30-32), then their husbands (Exodus XX: 17), and often their in-laws if they survive their partners (Deuteronomy XXV: 5-10). Vows they give may be repudiated by fathers or husbands (Numbers XXX: 3-15). Women do not have the same rights of divorce (Deuteronomy XXIV: 1-5), and slander about a woman’s chastity is compensated for by payment to her father (Deuteronomy XXII: 13-20). If a woman is raped, the offence is against either her father or husband and if the former, the appropriate action is for the rapist to buy her as his wife (Deuteronomy XXII: 28-30). In the Old Testament especially, women are viewed as chattels to be used as sacrifices, or alternatively as political or economic pawns (Clark and Richardson 28; Daly 1968: 53-79). The New Testament gospels are generally considered to be more positive about women (Daly 1968: 79), but works attributed to St Paul further demonstrate the adoption by Christianity of Hebrew gender assumptions (Ochshorn

222). Women are subject to their husbands (Ephesians V: 22-4), and must be restricted in their dress, professions, actions and speech (Timothy II: 9-15). Although Luke stresses that women are among the oppressed whom Jesus seeks to liberate (IV: 16-30), the gospel of Matthew retains a traditional view of their status (Witherington 1988: 166-173). Women are constructed in the Bible as the possessions of men, necessitating this possession by their inherent danger.

Such a strictly systematised and categorised world “is ordered and structured by its boundaries” and is therefore radically changed when those boundaries are traversed (Drury 412). Bodily margins are thus invested with both power and danger (Douglas 1966: 144). Danger of such margins is expressed in Leviticus XV by categorising both bodily emissions and the body from which they are emitted as unclean (1-12). Bodily emissions may be feared because they have breached these boundaries (Leviticus XV: 148), and the revulsion of physical leakages felt may be the displaced fear of such transgressions (Kristeva 1982: 102). Historically and theologically, Douglas accounts for this revulsion in the threat to the existence of the Israelites: they felt a threatened integrity, their racial unity was at risk and therefore their culture reflected a fear of the danger of leaks, secretions or emissions: “The anxiety about bodily margins expresses danger to group survival” (1966: 148). The fear of bodily leakages is the fear of cultural disintegration.

The anxiety of bodily emissions may be expressed through a desire to guard the boundaries of the body. One way in which this manifests itself in contemporary society was the 1990 case of Kimberly Bergalis. From September 1990, when she instigated a million-dollar malpractice suit against her dentist, Dr David Acer, until her death in December 1991, she campaigned for the mandatory testing of health care workers and was fervently supported by the media (Park 233). In reference to the Bergalis case, Park argues that, in the absence of any statistical evidence of a significant threat posed by health workers to their patients, the

issue of testing reflects a desire to “police the borders between the infected and the uninfected” (234-5).

In other cultures, the fear of boundary pollution may focus on sexuality, where certain kinds of marriage might be forbidden as in India (Douglas 1966: 150). In Hebrew culture, laws concerning sexual relations are numerous and detailed:<sup>13</sup> men may not have sexual intercourse with menstruating women (Leviticus XV: 19-24), with a blood relation (Leviticus XVIII: 6-13), with wives of blood relatives (Leviticus XVIII: 14-17), with a wife’s blood relative (Leviticus XVIII: 18), with other men (Leviticus XVIII: 22), with an animal (Leviticus XVIII: 23), with a slave (Leviticus XIX: 20), or with any other man’s wife (Leviticus XX: 10). There are additional prohibitions for priests (Leviticus XXI: 7 and 13-15). These boundary restrictions emphasise the anxiety that the intersections between categories give rise to. This is also evident in the rigorous instruction that orders the treatment of food (Exodus XII: 43-51 and XIII: 1-10, for example), perhaps additionally significant because of its connection to the entries and exits of the body (Douglas 1966: 151).

The principle of the sacred reinforces the anxiety of bodily margins as it requires separation between discrete classes of matter (Douglas 1966: 67). The Hebrew root of the word holy “k-d-sh” is based on the idea of separation (Douglas 1966: 18). Douglas posits that biblically unclean animals which are described in Leviticus XI are those which do not fit easily into imposed categories (Douglas 1966: 69), which are rigidly separated. Corpses are particularly unclean in Hebrew law (Leviticus XXI: 1-4), possibly because death is the “major marginal situation is the individual confrontation with death” (Shilling 178). It is also the ultimate separation, which the Judeo-Christian tradition seeks to negate either through denial (Walker 1985: 82), or through wishful transformation (Freud 1913: 247). This occurs in particular in the representation of saints who are often depicted as undergoing physical

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<sup>13</sup> Bal suggests that sex with women is defiling because it gives women knowledge and a memory of the past which makes their subjectivity undeniable (1990: 24-5).

extremity as they move into a saintly state. Many of the Christian saints are more remembered for their mode of death rather than their way of life: St Sebastian, St Joan, St Agatha, St Lucy, St Lawrence<sup>14</sup> and several others rejected their own physical existence: “this body draws from some a kind of admiration I hate. Let it perish”, St Agnes told her executioner (Bentley 1992: 20). A cursory browse of *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* demonstrates the centrality of physical extremes to the canonical discourse.<sup>15</sup> While such “marginal situations push us to the borders of our existence” (Shilling 178), they also impress upon us the irrefutable knowledge “that the human world is open-ended and unstable, and that the meanings we attribute to our bodies and our world are based on nothing more solid than human activity” (Shilling 178). Shilling seems to agree with Berger that the problem of death for humans “exists more generally as a result of the total conditions of human embodiment. The unfinishedness of human embodiment means that the death of the self is presented to the mind as a particular problem” (179).<sup>16</sup>

One cultural response to the problems of death and embodiment is the focus on body projects (Shilling 191; Bauman, *Mortality ...* 1992: 141). Body projects are regimes such as diets, drugs, health strategies, cosmetic surgery and sports which represent a source of power over the physical body (Cashmore 120). This seems to have replaced religious resolutions of the issue of bodily limits (Bauman, *Mortality ...* 18). Of these, diets, health strategies and cosmetics are largely specific to women, with drugs and sports being applicable to both sexes. It would seem that women are predominantly the object of these projects, as they are of medical approaches. These projects maintain the illusion that death and ill health are

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<sup>14</sup> Sebastian was shot by arrows and then clubbed to death; Joan was burned; Agatha’s breasts were cut off and then she was torn with hooks; Lucy tore out her own eyes; Lawrence was cooked on a griddle.

<sup>15</sup> Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* (1610) demonstrates the intersection of death, wounds, physical pain and resurrection: the amazement of the Apostles reflects the theological complexity of the subject.

<sup>16</sup> The metaphor of death as separation from the world is also utilised by religious orders (Durkheim 1976: 45) during ordination or profession. In some orders, nuns and monks are covered with their burial shroud to symbolise their death to the material world (Armstrong 1981: 178-219).

ultimately controllable (Bauman, *Mortality* ... 141), an illusion which has effects on the perception of the disabled body, since its close association with ill health leads both states to be identified with voluntary passivity. Death, disability and ill health are all viewed as aberrant. Bauman comments that “death from natural causes is diminishing” (“Survival ...” 1992: 19), referring us to the tendency to equip each death with an individual explanation rather than accepting the universal occurrence of death. In social developments which particularise death and render it an individual phenomenon, Shilling sees a pattern of privatisation which has culminated in the present seclusion of the dying (188-9):

“at the same time as death is hidden from the public gaze, there is a growing demand for representations of death: from war documentaries and news, to violent movies and television series based around hospital casualty departments. It is as if the growing removal of actual death from the public sphere has stimulated a demand for an anaesthetised ‘knowledge’ of death. Perhaps the thousands of deaths we see on television each year stand as an empty testament to our continued existence” (Shilling 190).<sup>17</sup>

Death has become so personalised and individualised that each death is understood to be the result of a particular cause, such as lung cancer, heart attack, a stroke, liver failure and so on. No death is considered to be complete without a post-mortem which has “successfully identified its (theoretically *preventable*) cause” (Shilling, 192).

Although we hear of *categories* of death, as Bauman puts it, “we do not hear of people dying of mortality” (“Survival ...” 5). It is this attitude which motivates people to “stop smoking, eating fatty foods and to begin taking more exercise, while diverting their attention from the fact that all of these things are ultimately futile. Death gets us all in the end” (Shilling, 192). Because each death has an individual cause, we are distracted from the overall

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<sup>17</sup> This might also account for the contemporary chic of corpse-like models in the fashion industry (Chaudhuri 1997: 14; Leader 1996).

fact into the detail, and it is this detail which attempts to hide the gap that we cannot bridge.

Cultural narratives which individualise death and disability are echoes of miracle narratives which fulfil the same function (Genticore 1997: 191); individuals respond to illness in these socially patterned ways, so lessening the cultural phobia experienced in the face of the knowledge of comprehensive death and disease (Genticore 1997: 191). Disability is where the body projects that Bauman talks of begin to be inapplicable; there are physical and economic limits to the body's capacity for reconstruction. The irony is that the body projects inevitably fail all of us, regardless of physicality, but nevertheless the disabled are unable to share the superstition of continued good health.

Biblically, it is assumed that disability has an identifiable cause. Nebuchadnezzar's madness is punishment for his vanity (Daniel IV: 28-33), Miriam is punished with leprosy for speaking against Moses (Numbers XII: 9-12), the Philistines are punished with the plague for capturing the Ark of God (1 Samuel V: 1-7), the Pharaoh and his household are struck with diseases for raping Sarah (Genesis XII: 17), and the disciples assume that sickness is the penalty for sin (John IX: 2). This means that death and disease are seen as punishment by God for sin, and particularly for sexual sin.

The triangle of the human will, sexuality and evil, is a potent one and is often invoked in theology and literature (Black 1991: 30). The founding texts of the Judeo-Christian tradition focus on transgressions of the law (Black 29). Figures such as Satan, Faust, and Ahasuerus can be described as "mythical prototypes" (Black 30) whose acts appear superhuman and who seem undoubtedly attractive, if flawed.<sup>18</sup> In the iconography of AIDS as a sexually transmitted disease, it is representationally connected to syphilis and leprosy. Allan Brandt describes the cultural construction of AIDS and syphilis as revelatory of "underlying anxieties about contagion, contamination, and sexuality" (1987: 191-2). AIDS is terrifying as it is

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<sup>18</sup> Durkheim does not categorise Satan as profane but as a lesser god, still considered sacred and so not completely rejected (1976: 50).



transmitted by “what has long been considered a major source of personal gratification - sexual activity” (Shilling 195).

The link between sexuality and death is a fraught one which “confronts the living, sensuous body with the prospect of its own demise” (Shilling 195); exposing the intimate connection between “the flesh as source of ‘ultimate’ joy and the source of decay and death” (Shilling 195). Medieval clerical and literary sources reveal the similarity of their representation and that of AIDS (Gilman 1988): at that time it was seen as a “contagious, slowly mortal, and intensely disfiguring disease devised by God as a punishment for lust” (Gilman 1988: 239). In *AIDS and its Metaphors* Susan Sontag has argued that the plague is the principal metaphor by which AIDS has been conceptualised (1992: 132).<sup>19</sup> The term “plague” is biblical, coming from the Latin “plangere”, meaning to beat or scourge (Sontag 1992: 132-51),<sup>20</sup> making it an appropriate expression of fears pertaining to sexual diseases. The God of the Old Testament instructs his people about the correlation between punishment and plague: “if only you will obey the Lord your God, if you will do what is right in his eyes, if you will listen to his commands and keep all his statutes, then I will never bring upon you any of the sufferings which I brought on the Egyptians; for I the Lord am your healer” (Exodus XV: 26).

Healing is a significant symbol of God’s redemption (Kee 1983: 63). God implores the exiled tribes of Israel “come back to me, wayward sons;/ I will heal your apostasy ... I will cause the skin to grow and heal your wounds” (Jeremiah III: 22 and XXX: 17). This response to human needs and petitions in the Old Testament (Kee 1986: 93) predates Jesus’ role as God among his people which the miracles of healing serve to emphasise (Kee 1986: 2). In many

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<sup>19</sup> For example: “‘Homosexual Plague’ Strikes New Victims.” *Newsweek* 23 August 1982: 10; “The Gay Plague.” *New York* 31 May 1982: 52; Gilman 1988; Kinsella 1989.

<sup>20</sup> Park criticises Sontag for her “ahistoricity”, for her assumption that this metaphor is a throw back, an anachronism (1993 241), asserting that the attitude of illness as divine retribution is “neither natural, inevitable, nor universal” (242). In the Islamic world, for example, leprosy has not had the stigma that it has in the Christian world (Palmer 84-5).

places it is stated that God will be known by signs and miracles (II Kings XX: 8-11, Isaiah VIII: 18, Nehemiah IX: 10, Hebrews II: 3-4). In the New Testament, Jesus is proved to be the son of God through such evidence (Acts II: 22, VII: 36-38, Luke XVII: 18). The apostle's power to heal is derived from God (Acts II: 36, 43, V:12, VI: 8, XIV: 3, XV: 12) and the purpose of such events is primarily to demonstrate his power (Leaney 239). One might therefore argue that God's power is therefore demonstrated in his ability to suppress disability and womanhood, as well as in his ability to relieve such states, or redeem them.

Having established the meaning of uncleanness, namely to be diseased or menstruating, post partum or breaking God's laws of separation (Leviticus XVIII: 1-23), God states his reasons: "You shall not make yourselves unclean in any of these ways; for in these ways the heathen, whom I am driving out before you, made themselves unclean. This is how the land became unclean, and I punished it for its iniquity so that it spewed out its inhabitants" (Leviticus XVIII: 24-6). In other words, uncleanness is derived from a prior differentiation between Jews/Christians and heathens. The God of the Old Testament both bestows and relieves disease, establishing "a direct cause and effect relationship between human disability and divine action" (Kee 1986: 9). In his own description of his relationship to his people, God represents himself in this light: "I put to death and I keep alive/ I wound and I heal" (Deuteronomy XXXII: 39). God's power, and that of his prophets, is demonstrated by actions of healing (Wright 1988: 73).<sup>21</sup> Elijah revives a widow's son in I Kings XVII: 17-24, a child in II Kings IV: 31-7 and Naaman of leprosy in II Kings V: 1-14, so proving himself a "man of God" (V: 8).

The power to heal confirms Jesus' authority in the New Testament (Leaney 157), by cleansing lepers and instructing them to show themselves to the religious authorities (Mark I: 40-45), by curing cripples publicly (Mark II: 1-12 and Luke XIII: 10-17) and leaving the

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<sup>21</sup> See also Mark V: 35-43; Luke VI: 17-9 and VII: 11-7.

legacy of such acts for his apostles to emulate (Kee 1986: 88).<sup>22</sup> Demons who exist in stories of madness or epilepsy<sup>23</sup> in particular are significant because they are believed to recognise Christ (Johnson 1960: 50). Mark I: 34 states that “He would not let the devils speak, because they knew who he was”,<sup>24</sup> and according to Luke IV: 41 the devils came out of Simon’s friends as Jesus cured them shouting, “You are the Son of God”.

Certainly, in the Bible, the wicked can expect no cure (1 Enoch 95: 4), for forgiveness and healing are closely entwined, implying, even when not explicitly stating, the link between sin and disease (Leaney 1966: 125). God promises Solomon that if the people of Israel pray for forgiveness, they will be forgiven and healed of plagues (II Chronicles VII: 11-15). Jesus forgives the sins of the paralysed man before he heals him (Mark II: 1-12) and warns the cured cripple to “leave your sinful ways, or you may suffer something worse” (John V: 5-15). James tells the tribes of Israel that prayer will simultaneously heal the sick and forgive their sins: “therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, and then you will be healed” (V: 13-16). The necessity for sacrifice as expiation for both sinful acts and uncleanness further enforces this bond of relief from sickness or disability in return for repentance (Johnson 1960: 52). Abimelech and his household are cured of barrenness after making appropriate sacrifices (Genesis XX: 1-18). God promises Isaiah that a tortured servant will be healed, having made sacrifices for sin (LIII: 10). Jesus directs the cured leper to go to the priest and make “the offering laid down by Moses for your cleansing: that will certify the cure” (Mark I: 44 and Luke V: 14). Nancy Jay suggests that the positivity of ritual sacrifice conforms to gender associations of passivity and activity: “unlike childbirth, sacrificial killing is deliberate, purposeful, ‘rational’ action, under perfect control” (294). Although birth and killing are both acts of power, “sacrificial ideology commonly construes

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<sup>22</sup> See Acts X: 38.

<sup>23</sup> Rabbis often ascribed illness to demons.

<sup>24</sup> See also Matthew VIII: 28-34, XVII: 14-8; Mark V: 1-20, IX: 14-29; Luke VIII: 26-39, IX: 37-43.

childbirth as the quintessence of vulnerability, passivity, and powerless suffering” (Jay 294).

It follows then that sacrifice is the action which redeems the unclean states of womanhood and disability.

The faith of the person seeking healing is an essential element of the cure (Kee 1983: 237).<sup>25</sup> After several miracles Jesus states that “your faith has cured you”, so representing the affliction as a symbol of a lack of faith rather than an inherent condition.<sup>26</sup> The faith of the people and the power of God are the pledges in the changing contract between God and his people. This power of God to heal speaks to Israel as a symbol of renewal and of a new covenant with God (Kee 1986: 14-16), both individually (Isaiah LIII: 6, Jeremiah XVII: 14, Ezekiel XLVII: 8-12, Psalms 103: 1-5, 107: 17-22), and nationally (Isaiah XIX: 19-22, XXX: 26, XXXV: 5-6; Jeremiah XXXI: 31-40). The power invested in Jesus is the symbol that the time has come for God’s people (Johnson 1960: 52); Jesus questions many of the laws of the Old Testament by touching the unclean (Leviticus XIII: 45-6), working or healing on the Sabbath (Matthew XII: 1-14; Mark XV: 1-35, III: 1-6, VII: 31-37; Luke XIII: 10-17, XIV: 1-6), and by not obeying rules about food (Matthew XV: 1-20), or about washing (Mark VII: 1-13).

The issues of punishment, healing and faith in relation to disability suggest that individuals are held responsible for their condition, both in terms of its origin and continuance. This notion implies that if a person remains disabled, the responsibility lies within him- or herself, since there are actions they can take to ensure a cure. It is implicit in this assumption that disability is curable. The state of womanhood differs radically from the state of disability because it is a fixed and given condition. There are no indications that womanhood is either alterable or voluntarily undertaken. Women can obtain a temporary relief from this state of

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<sup>25</sup> The idea of the faith cure has not lost its potency: it is estimated that charismatic Christians who believe in supernatural events in everyday lives now make up 30% of Christendom, as opposed to 1% in 1990 (Cotton 1996: 10). Places of pilgrimage such as Walsingham, Knock and Lourdes still attract large numbers of people.

<sup>26</sup> See also Matthew IX: 18-26; Mark V: 25-34, VI: 53-6, VII: 24-30; Luke VIII: 43-8, XVIII: 35-43.

defilement through ritual, but this does not equate with voluntarism and may explain why the New Testament goes some way to redeem women, but not disabled characters.

The power to heal through touch is significant since it invests potency in the margin, transition, or boundary between one human being and another. Van Gennep sees society as a house with rooms in which the passages are marked with peril (1960). “Danger lies in transitional states; simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others” (Van Gennep 1960: 116). Any state of the body which is judged to be marginal (to the dominant culture) or transitional can appear dangerous; ironically, the Louisiana State Leper Board at the turn of the century housed lepers in the former slave quarters of a sugar plantation (Silvers 1998: 56),<sup>27</sup> so allying the excluded states of disability and racial identity. In a ritualised society, the danger that exists is largely non-specific but is located in the unclean individual (Wallace 62): “a polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone” (Van Gennep 136). However, precaution against such danger must come from others, as the dangerous individual is perceived to have no control over their power to pollute (Van Gennep 117); prisons, psychiatric hospitals, leprosariums and modern day hospices for those with AIDS represent a recognition of the need to externally control such dangers through segregation, voluntary or otherwise.<sup>28</sup>

The level of regulation that surrounds those who are perceived to be contaminating demonstrates that there is a certain power inherent in the unclean state: “where the social

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<sup>27</sup> It was usual to segregate lepers by race: “first they segregated you by disease, then they’d segregate you by colour” said a former patient of a Louisiana Leprosarium (Silvers 54).

<sup>28</sup> In Louisiana in the 1940s and even later, lepers were brought to leprosariums in handcuffs, having been forcibly removed from their homes; the campus fences were topped with barbed wire, and anyone caught trying to escape was confined to the jail which was on site (Silvers 56).

system explicitly recognises positions of authority, those holding such positions are endowed with explicit spiritual power, controlled, conscious, external and approved - powers to bless or curse” (Van Gennep 120). However, “where the social system requires people to hold dangerously ambiguous roles, these persons are credited with uncontrolled, unconscious, dangerous, disapproved powers - such as witchcraft and evil eye” (Van Gennep 120). The fact that the segregation of lepers in Europe, America and Russia continued for decades after a cure had been discovered in 1946, and despite the formal admission that the isolation of lepers had “no appreciable influence in restricting the spread of leprosy” (Silvers 58), seems to suggest that such isolation was necessary for symbolic, rather than public health, reasons.<sup>29</sup> An important aspect of the Levitical laws was the social isolation of diseased people: in being excluded from sacrifices, they were also excluded from communal eating, a central event in community life (Weber 26).

An important metaphorical implication of the existence of marginal states such as disability and the femininity is the possibility of the transference of uncleanness, and hence sin, which Augustine, among others, emphasised (Clark and Herbert: 35).<sup>30</sup> Jesus escaped the inevitability of human sin by being born of a virgin (Clark and Herbert: 35). Such points of physical intimacy, like touch, childbirth and sex, in holding the possibility of transference, lend themselves to metaphor particularly well; the Hebrews used female sexual deviancy as a metaphor for disobedience (Ezekiel 16: 1-43) and for religious faithlessness, “for like a wanton this land is unfaithful to the Lord” (Hosea I: 2-3). Elsewhere, St Paul uses the body of the prostitute to denote idolatry, and equates lust with apostasy (Romans I: 24-7).

This biblical analogy of the sexual act and cognition (Black 90) begins in Genesis when

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<sup>29</sup> The panic which exists around HIV and AIDS bears little relation to the statistical probability of contagion (Pendlebury 1991: 21).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Confessions X: 29: “you raise up all who are filled with your spirit;/ but I am not yet so filled,/ I am a burden to myself./ The worldly joys that I ought to lament struggle within me.” (quoted in *Praying With St Augustine*. Trans. Paula Clifford. London: Triangle, 1987. 51.

the tree of knowledge bestows recognition of sexual shame on Adam and Eve (Genesis III: 7), but elsewhere in contemporary culture the sexual act is aligned to murder in that it is an action which is doomed to be only symbolically represented (Black 120): officially, “the act of taking another person’s life, either as a crime or a punishment, can be represented only as an artistic fiction or simulation” (Kott 1974: 90). In this guise, murder is no longer a social reality; it has been neutralised and tamed as a supposedly “harmless form of popular entertainment” (Black 21). For example, when Lebanese terrorists sent a video of the supposed execution of an American Colonel in 1991 to US officials, it was carefully censored from the media so that the public was effectively sheltered from real violence while being exposed to simulated or artistic violence (Black 20-1). The outcome of these representations is to focus on disease as the result of evil interaction, of pollution from a contaminated source. Hence monasticism is a religious response to the contaminating influence of the profane world of material and earthly pleasures (Durkheim 1976: 39-40).

The possibility of transference through bodily contact also has positive connotations, as it offers the possibility of something other than destruction in physical contact; thaumaturgical<sup>31</sup> Christian sects emphasise the possible impact of supernatural dimensions of religion on everyday life (Wilson, quoted in Robertson 1969: 368). These sects derive their authority from the many healing narratives of the New Testament which demonstrate that for God the power to cleanse is greater than the power to pollute (Kee 1986: 78). Jesus risked defilement by touching those who were ritually unclean by Old Testament laws: a woman haemorrhaging (Mark V: 25-34), lepers (Mark I: 40-5), corpses (Mark V: 35-43); those who were unclean by their profession (Luke XIX: 1-10, Mark II: 13-17); those unclean by their race (Mark VII: 24-30 and V: 1-20); those who were unclean by their religion, being Gentiles (Mark V: 1-20 and VI: 53-6). Their healings would seem to symbolise that all of the above are included in the

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<sup>31</sup> These are faiths which believe in the supernatural, particularly miraculous cures.

divine plan of salvation (Wright 1988: 77), and to explain why some Rabbinical teachings (those related to certain categories of the unclean, for instance) are rejected in the new covenant (Witherington 65). Harper suggests that “behaviour that usually results in pollution is sometimes intentional in order to show deference and respect; by doing that which under other circumstances would be defiling, an individual expresses his inferior position” (181). So for example among the Havik people of Mysore State, “the theme of the wife’s subordination towards the husband finds ritual expression in her eating from his leaf after he has finished” (181). This is echoed in Christian theology by Christ’s washing of his disciples’ feet (John XIII: 1-20). However, it is also a method of indexing power through the potency to disempower oneself temporarily.

Much of the text relating to disability in the New Testament is concerned with the healing power of touch. The saints were known to heal in this way: St Cuthbert was cured of a knee tumour by the touch of an angel (Bede 1965: 72) and his cincture cured an Abbess and nun by application (Bede 1965: 102); even when ill himself, he cured a monk of diarrhoea, of which Bede said: “this is a clear sign that bodily weakness is powerless to impair the spiritual force of this man” (Bede 1965: 119). The Christian “laying on of hands” is a positive force,<sup>32</sup> as is the power of relics, which confer health and fortune (Wallace 60). The Hebrews used this device less often, but Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh by laying his hands on their heads in Genesis ILVIII: 14. Even in death, supposedly the most corrupt of states, the Christian saints possess the power to cure rather than to defile: a demonic boy whom priests had failed to exorcise was touched with water which had washed St Cuthbert’s corpse and was cured (Bede 122).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The seventh century St Wilfred was also known to cure by touch (Eddius 1965: 131-206)

<sup>33</sup> It is claimed that after the death of St Catherine of Alexandria, oil oozed from her bones and was used as medicine (Bentley 227).



Such ambivalent power<sup>34</sup> to pollute or cure by touch reinforces the notion that the boundaries between social orders need to be policed because of threats of disease, infection, and contagion (Douglas 1966: 13). On another level, these powers can serve as “analogies for expressing a general view of the social order” (Douglas 1966: 14), for example, the idea of sexual or bodily danger is an expression of the anxiety felt about social strata and hierarchies (Douglas 1966: 14).<sup>35</sup> On the former level, the guilt or innocence of the receiver/victim is of paramount importance in moral discourse. “I did nothing wrong, yet I am being made to suffer like this” said Kim Bergalis on September 24 1991 in her testimony before the House Subcommittee on Health and Environment (Park 233), offering a contrast between innocence and guilt represented by the gay doctor and unsuspecting patient (Park 237). She repeated: “I didn’t deserve this” in *People* (December 23 1991). There may be a hidden, or displaced, agenda: interviews with Kim Bergalis demonstrate a lack of sympathy with other sufferers and reveal that the moral thrust of her campaign was homophobic (Park 237, 248); the homophobic image of the invasive and penetrating power of homosexuality was mobilised to justify the castigation of a group of people in the press. The desire to ostracise a particular group, which is not regulated in law, may thus be reinforced and then enacted through symbols of pollution and contamination (Douglas 1966: 13).

The issue of abortion is a case in point where pollution beliefs may compensate for moral indecision and ambiguity (Douglas 1966: 158-9). Although a third of women in Britain will have an abortion during their lifetime (Moore 1993: 19), the reputational damage it may cause prevents many from admitting it publicly (Moore 1993: 19). Conversely, it is clear that screening for foetal disability is only relevant if abortion is the outcome (Wilson, quoted in Cuckle 1993: 17). The choice not to screen or not to abort becomes abnormalised, with

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<sup>34</sup> The knowledge of this faculty confers additional power in most traditions, but where pollution and contagion is concerned, the power is “impersonal” (Wallace 62).

<sup>35</sup> Exits and entries to the body can serve similar ambiguous functions: “sometimes orifices seem to represent points of entry or exit to social units, or bodily perfection can symbolise an ideal theocracy” (Douglas 1966: 14).

women being viewed as emotionally unstable or irresponsible (Corea 1988: 91). Choices for disabled women and for women pregnant with disabled fetuses are limited (Campling 91). Particularly where scientific advances make genetic manipulation possible, there is pressure by medical services to utilise technological knowledge (Corea 1988: 92). A woman may be made to feel inferior because of passing on a genetic defect (Corea 1988: 92), or helpless in the face of bringing up a child while being disabled herself (Lonsdale 9). In these cases, she may legally have a choice, but in reality she may not be presented with an option to exercise it (Corea 1988: 92). Pressure to abort disabled fetuses may provide a focus for social mores which are not invested with the authority of law (Douglas 1966: 158-9). Viewing the disabled negatively is a predicate for the debate around abortion and instrumental in the competition to obtain funding for genetic experiments. It also underpins decisive factors in the discussion of who can, and who cannot, be “saved” by medical and technological interventions and is significant in establishing the difference between whom we can and whom we cannot cure.

The potential to pollute is signified by physical disability (Palmer 83-9), but physical disabilities are also an ambiguous symbol in the Bible denoting both abjection and protection (Wright 1988: 67-8). The mark of Cain (Genesis IV: 15) emblazons him as “accursed” and “banished” (Genesis IV: 11), but also safeguards him “in order that anyone meeting him should not kill him” (Genesis IV: 15). God marks Cain as one of his people (Aycock 121). Jesus is branded with the mark of his wounds, signs of redemption and purification (Aycock 121), so that his disciples recognise him (John XX: 19-25); the male Hebrews are circumcised (Genesis XVII: 10) to show their religion (Alter 1990: 148-50). Childbirth is also conceptualised as both defiling and redeeming: although a punishment for transgression (Genesis), it is also the means by which women achieve salvation (John XVI: 21-3). A common theme in religious literature privileges the leper (Brody 1974: 103); the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus shows the latter in heaven with Abraham looking down on the rich

man in Hades (Luke XVI: 19-25). The state of physical defilement is to some extent redeemed by physical stigma (Kee 1986: 90): blindness points to the possibility of sight and the coming of the messianic age (Lightfoot 1983: 199).<sup>36</sup> Women, in covering themselves, acknowledge their innate sin, but also the possibility of redemption (Timothy II: 9-15).

Physical disabilities create a sense of separation, of difference; the female and disabled figures are obviously excluded from the general order, they are “set apart” and removed from the “moral community” (Aycock 122). David Damrosch describes this as a metaphor for “the transcendental otherness of God” which after the Fall precludes the possibility of union (1987: 74). This may partially explain the occurrence of self-flagellation among religious orders at times of crisis (Reynolds and Tanner 1983: 216), and other forms of self-immolation, such as the starvation of Simone Weil (Van Herik 1987: 277). Weber suggests that the development of punishing deities like the Christian God (from the Hebrew God) changed the meaning of suffering from a sign of guilt to a sign of redemption (quoted in Robertson 24-7). Penances and abstinences developed into voluntarily undertaken afflictions and therefore came to be perceived as pleasing to God(s) (quoted in Robertson 28).

The ambiguity of the mark of difference is consistent with western cultural polarity. It is in the castigation of the purveyors of disease that the image of the “good leper” becomes a sign of sanctity, working to invoke the other, who is justly suffering (Park 239). Racially, we tend to adopt the same metaphors; Appiah offers a cast of possibilities for the rendering of the black “Saint” in cinema, which could also be applied to the representation of other minority groups, none of which he entirely endorses: the superior value of oppressed experience; a theodicy of suffering as ennobling; the representation of moral righteousness through undeserved suffering; white audiences finding a way to channel their guilt through the creation of a black who has forgiven them, whom they can love and who loves them back.

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<sup>36</sup> The blind man of John’s parable (IX: 1-38) is born blind but attains sight through the healing powers of Jesus. His transition to enlightenment is predicated on his original state of blindness (John IX: 39-41).

Hollywood has obviously decided it must represent black people more positively (1993: 83), but such a decision does not mean that they are represented any more fairly. The point he fails to make is that these “Saints” are, like villains, two-dimensional in how they are represented.

Such two-dimensional images have effects on social relationships: a study in the 1950s revealed that people with unpleasant personalities were assumed to have abnormal features (Secord 1958: 300-15), and 1970s research demonstrates that most people believe that “what is beautiful is good” (Dion *et al* 1972: 285-90). The Judeo-Christian tradition has contributed to such representations by its use of the body to symbolise the spiritual. Although theology claims to be based on rationality (Riches 1986: 35), it is largely concerned with the physical analogy of the “corpus triforme” (Riches 1-2). The dualism of transcendence (movement beyond the conceivable world) and imminence (presence in the conceivable world) strives to reconcile the spiritual and physical knowledges of the believer (Kee 1986: XXVII). The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (that the Eucharist is the actual body and blood of Christ) similarly endeavours to address the problem of embodiment (Matthew XXVI: 20-9; Mark XIV: 17-25; Luke XXII: 14-23; John XIII: 1-20), the primary implication of which is mortality, since its design is to theologically overcome the physical fact of the body as we experience it.

In the approach to this human condition of mortality, religion plays a special role as it transcends the individual while also including her/him; it thus legitimates all social activities which may be rendered meaningless in the face of death (Shilling 179). “Religion, then, has traditionally provided a potent source of self-identity enabling individuals to locate themselves and their bodies within trans-personal meaning structures” (Shilling 179). But even in a post-Christian society, where religious fasting for example has been superseded (for women) by dieting, the relation of spiritual purification to “domination and denial of the

flesh” is evident (Shilling 179-80). Ritual is a system of metaphor (Campbell 1973: 45) and we operate in many symbolic fields which seek to unify our experience into a coherent order (Douglas 1966: 84-5). The God of the Old Testament creates the order and discipline of the Hebrew people through the rituals surrounding the emblem of bodily healing (Kee 1986: 14). The inefficacy of human power in comparison to that of God is seen in the absence in the Bible of positive representations of physicians (Kee 1986: 17), who are often viewed as contestants for God’s power. Physicians fail to save Asa (II Chronicles XVI: 11-14), fail to heal in Gilead (Jeremiah VIII: 22), fail to cure the haemorrhaging woman (Mark V: 26; Luke VIII: 43). It is only God who can heal because the disorder symbolised by the ailing body is of a spiritual and not physical nature (Fiedler 1981: 230).

In the Bible, disability in the form of leprosy, deafness, blindness, muteness, paralysis or lameness is overwhelmingly a symbol; no character is disabled as a matter of fact but always as a matter of function. Their disability is their most salient feature, informing their place, indeed their existence, in the text. Almost none of the disabled characters in the New Testament gospels are given names: the healing stories refer to their relative status to other characters in the case of Jairus’s daughter (Luke VIII: 49-56; Mark V: 35-43) and Simon Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew VIII: 14-17; Mark I: 29-34; Luke IV: 38-41); Lazarus is the only named character in the healing narratives (John XI: 1-44). This is comparable to the invisibility of women in the text of Judges which Bal has identified as crucial to their semiotic value (1990: 1). The bodily differences that identifies the characters are highly visible throughout: the mark of Cain secures his identity, notoriety and fate (Genesis IV: 15), just as physical appearance defines characters in literature for children and in film. In the Bible, as in pornography and in charity advertising, only certain categories of disability are represented; there are no amputee characters in the Bible, no dwarfs<sup>37</sup> and no conjoined twins so it follows

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<sup>37</sup> Although amputees, giants and dwarfs are specified as unclean in Leviticus, there are no narratives involving characters with these disabilities.

that a specific symbolic significance attaches to the types of disability and illness presented, rather than an attempt to document historical occurrence.

Physical healing is identified by Paul as second only to charismatic talents in the gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians XII: 9-10) and is the vehicle for the concept of transformation which appears throughout the Old and New Testaments. Elijah heals the leper Naaman, who is then converted to Israel (II Kings V: 1-14) and the healing of the blind man in John (IX: 13-17) is explained as an analogy of sight to faith. The replacement of the old covenant (Exodus XXXIV: 10-26; Deuteronomy X: 1-11) with the new (John XI: 11-26) is announced by Jesus within a healing narrative. Christ proves his identity as the son of God prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah XXIX: 8-19, XXXV: 5-6) through the healings. The mastery of disability is aligned to the mastery of women and animals since they are all ritually unclean (Leviticus XI, XIII, V, XV). It therefore demonstrates the power of God over others. Disability appears in the Bible both teleologically and etiologically in that it is the amendment of such events as well as their origin that is significant (Fiedler 1981: 230). The disabled and diseased bodies figure as exemplars of transcendence: the desire of the soul to transcend the material corpus (Johnson 1960: 9). Before this transformation, however, their images are appropriated for use as signifiers, to represent stoicism (Kee 1986: 9), frailty of the flesh (Pagels 79; Weidman 142; Ruether 81), or to demonstrate the extremes of Christian acceptance (Clark and Richardson 28).

Yet there is an ambiguity in biblical representations of the disabled and diseased body. Cain is protected, as are the blind (Deuteronomy XXVII: 17) and the tortured body of Christ is the paradigmatic icon of almost all forms of Christianity. The Roman Catholic principle of transubstantiation (the presence of the body and blood of Christ at the Eucharist) hinges on its antithesis to the Hebrew laws of hygiene (John VI: 30-58). It may be that such ambiguities contain the possibility of other readings. Kristeva has maintained that there is power at the

margins (1982: 7), and if this is the case, then bodies which refuse to conform, which do not order themselves, have the potential to disrupt the dominant reading of themselves as metaphor.

It remains the case that while states of defilement relating to gender or racial difference are redeemed in the New Testament, the state of disability is not; and this represents a fundamental difference in Christian doctrine which tends to view disability as an individual phenomenon in which the will of the affected character is implicated. Nevertheless, the prevailing implication in biblical texts is that like the female body, and unlike the male body, the disabled body is emblematic and problematic and must be altered, masculinised, or eradicated to fulfil a semiotic purpose. One might also argue that to be altered, masculinised and eradicated *is* its semiotic purpose.

In the next chapter I shall examine pornographic representations of disability. Images of disabled people in pornography are overwhelmingly female and the disabilities they exhibit are, like those exhibited in the Bible, determined by gender. A very common image is that of a woman with one, or several, limb amputations, or that of a woman in a wheelchair. While the disabilities are therefore gender specific, they do not relate to the reproductive cycle as they tend to in the biblical narratives, and they do not cross the boundary between illness and disability. Where biblical narrative depicts disability as an undesirable but redeemable state, pornographic images of disabled people portray disability as an erotic state and therefore not a state representative of transition.

## *Chapter 6: Representations of The Disabled Body in Pornography*

This chapter analyses pornographic representations of disability.<sup>1</sup> Pornography<sup>2</sup> that features disabled people is produced by both able-bodied people and disabled people. Feminism has examined pornography extensively, investigating the structures of the genre to

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<sup>1</sup> The pornography industry in the United States grosses more per annum than the music and film industries combined (*Harper's* 1985), and in Britain it is also a multi-million pound venture (Cornell 1995; Russell 1993; Rich 1987; Diamond 1985). In the UK it was estimated in 1990 that over 20 million pornographic magazines were sold and that they were read by about 5 million people, mostly men (Chancer 1998; Baxter 1990; Cohen 1989). Pornography can be purchased at any newsagents, over the telephone, on the internet and through mail order using cash, cheques or credit cards (Itzin "Entertainment For Men" 1993: 31). Lynne Segal suggests that the pornography industry has flourished in parallel with the increase in women's independence (1987: 106-7) and indeed, adult video rentals rose by 75% between 1990 and 1993 (Chancer 64). There is no clear distinction between the pornographic industry and other publishing: "the pornography on the shelves of nearly every corner newsagent is produced by respected members of the publishing industry. These are not backstreet merchants" (I Spy Productions 1993: 76). Most of the companies that produce women's magazines such as *Company*, *Cosmopolitan*, *She*, *Elle*, *New Woman*, *Vogue* and *Tatler* have business deals with the pornography industry (I Spy Productions 76). Evidently, the industry is flourishing and therefore, without legal intervention, market forces will ensure that pornography will remain widely available for the foreseeable future (Hawkins and Zimring 1991: 226).

<sup>2</sup> The definition of pornography is a matter of debate. Sexual explicitness is not synonymous with pornography (Itzin "A Legal Definition of Pornography" 1993: 448). Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon developed a radical analysis of pornography in the 1980s that led to the "MacKinnon-Dworkin Ordinances" which were passed in Minneapolis and Indianapolis in 1983 and 1984 (Bryson 1999: 174). They defined pornography as: "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words that also includes one or more of the following: (i) women are presented dehumanised as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy humiliation or pain; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects experiencing sexual pleasure in rape, incest or other sexual assault; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up, cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display; or (vi) women's body parts – including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, or buttocks – are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts; or (vii) women are presented as being penetrated by objects or animals; or (viii) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, humiliation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual" (Dworkin and MacKinnon 1988: 138-9). Although these ordinances were vetoed in Minneapolis and ruled as unconstitutional by the federal court in Indianapolis, this definition is widely used as a model by feminists (Bryson 174). In Britain, there is no legal definition of pornography, although a legal ruling in 1986 defined it as something that "an ordinary decent man or woman would find to be shocking, disgusting or revolting" (quoted in Bryson 181).



reveal the mechanisms of misogyny which have contributed to women's position in society.<sup>3</sup>

Pornography which features disabled women represents them as extreme forms of the pornographic notion of femininity that positions women as the object of the gaze and as such as a castrated figure.

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<sup>3</sup> Feminism's response to pornography has been varied. Most feminists see mainstream pornography as both purposely and effectively sexist: "the woman's body is appropriated, her body is possessed, she is used and despised; the pornography does it and the pornography proves it" (Dworkin 1981: 123). Pornography stereotypes women in that it consistently represents us as submissive, passive, sexual objects, waiting to be "acted upon by men" (Segal 1992). Feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon identify pornography as an important factor in maintaining male dominance and seek to implement legal or extra legal restrictions upon it. They acknowledge that there is a danger and violence inherent in pornography (Ferguson 1986: 106). Feminist anti-pornographers believe in a continuum from romance novels, with their formula of plots of female submission, through advertising with its traffic of the female form, to soft-core porn such as *Playboy* and ultimately to hard-core porn depicting bondage and mutilation (Segal 1987, for example). Pornography is seen by these as harmful as it defames women through portraying them as masochists who crave sexual abuse and therefore portray women as an inferior class to men (Jeffreys 1990: 254). They argue that the harm done to women in such defamation overrides any rights the individual may claim under the First Amendment in American Law or the right to free speech in British Law (MacKinnon 1977; Dworkin 1981). Pornography is described by some as "the ideology of cultural sadism" and pornographic literature as "handbooks or blueprints for sadistic violence, mutilation and even genocide" (Barr 1984: 174). Porn depicts the humiliation, torture, pain, dismemberment and even murder of women as erotic (Jaggar 1983: 265). Others accuse feminists with this viewpoint of fear of the image which is such that "meaning resides with the image itself and not in the processes of the production, circulation and consumption of the image" (Buckley 1993: 182). Liberal feminists question the desirability and indeed the feasibility of legal restrictions (Thompson 1994; Rodgeron and Semple 1992, for example). Annette Kuhn and Rosalind Coward argue that descriptions like "sexually explicit subordination of women" have changing meanings depending on subjective interpretation, as well as historical, generic context (Hunter and Law 1985: 9-18). It has been pointed out that Dworkin and MacKinnon have allied with a puritanical agenda and with right-wing anti-feminist groups in their legal campaigns (Strossen 1996; Cooper 1995). Libertarians argue that the attack on pornography in the twentieth century is the same politics as "the conservative and anti-feminist version of social purity, the Moral Majority and family protection movement" (Dubois and Gordan 1989: 20). They assert that "to maintain its attraction, porn demands strictures, controls, censorship. Exposed to the light of day, it risks a loss of power. Pornography invites policing" (Kuhn 1985: 23). Some argue that the law already exists to protect from assault, rape and battery whether or not pornography is involved (Robel 1989: 180-3). The reason that it has been claimed that we need pornography laws in addition to this is because "women's complaints about violence generally lack credibility" (Robel 181), a situation which would not be remedied by altering the law. Others such as Alison Jaggar (1983) and A. Foreman (1978) argue that the law cannot achieve meaningful change as pornography is a product of capitalist structures.

Pornography which features disabled people does not usually fall into the category of hard-core, but is more often soft-core material.<sup>4</sup> It may contain violence, but more usually it does not.<sup>5</sup> The material is available through the internet or through special interest clubs in Britain, who generally import materials from abroad.<sup>6</sup> The material is produced in several forms: magazines such as *Ampix* and *Fascination* feature photographs and line drawings,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hard-core pornography can be defined as “connecting sex with violence, hatred, pain, humiliation, and stimulated gratification of sexual desire in a deviant way” (Gubar and Hoff 1989: 22). Soft-core pornography is that which has no other function than to stimulate (usually) male heterosexual desire and is freely available. In soft-core pornography “the ‘sexual’ plot lies between the viewer and the woman on display: the viewer plays the imaginary hero in relation to the woman-‘object’” (Kappeller 1993: 93). Top-shelf porn magazines, peep shows and striptease are examples of this category. Some argue that “high” art and literature use the same structure of objectification (Kappeller 1993). Diana Russell defines “slasher” movies as soft-core pornography because they depict women being raped, tortured and murdered (1993). “The most frequent scenario in these movies has the nude or partially nude non-heroine-victim in some naked, seductive pose (for example, masturbating in a bath tub, breasts exposed) before the exciting climax of her gruesome murder is achieved by the hero in a long-drawn-out orgy of sexual violence”, a setting which mirrors that in pornography (Russell 1993: 317; see also Itzin “A Legal Definition of Pornography” 1993: 449-50; Donnerstein and Linz 1987). The distinctions drawn between soft-core and hard-core pornography may be misleading as both categories offer similar messages about the sexual relationship of men to women (Itzin “Entertainment For Men” 1993: 27).

<sup>5</sup> There are significant differences between the portrayal of sexual and non-sexual violence in the media. Malamuth (1986) found that in pornography the victim is usually female and in non-sexual portrayals of violence the victim is usually male (5) and that secondly in non-sexual violence victims “are usually shown as outraged by their experience and intent on avoiding victimization” (Malamuth 6). The victims of aggression in pornography and at times the perpetrators of the aggression, “suffer from the violence” (Malamuth 6). But when the violence is sexual “there is frequently the suggestion that, despite initial resistance, the victim secretly desired the abusive treatment and eventually derived pleasure from it” (Malamuth 6).

<sup>6</sup> There are a number of sites on the Internet that feature products depicting people with amputations: [www.stumptouch.com](http://www.stumptouch.com), [www.ampulove.com](http://www.ampulove.com), [www.amplclinic.com](http://www.amplclinic.com), [www.devolinks.com](http://www.devolinks.com) and [www.cdprod.com](http://www.cdprod.com) are examples. *Ampix* and *Fascination* both have internet sites at [www.newplaza.com/ampix.html](http://www.newplaza.com/ampix.html) and [www.access.digex.net/~vandyke/](http://www.access.digex.net/~vandyke/) where links, chat-rooms, contacts, pictures, videos and mail order materials are available. Other sites cater for specific fetishes: [www.egroups.com/group/QuadLovers](http://www.egroups.com/group/QuadLovers); [www.egroups.com/message/devotee-of-women-on-wheels](http://www.egroups.com/message/devotee-of-women-on-wheels); [www.egroups.com/message/deformed-bodies](http://www.egroups.com/message/deformed-bodies); [www.egroups.com/messages/legbraces-devotees](http://www.egroups.com/messages/legbraces-devotees); [www.egroups.com/group/HemipelvectomyDevs](http://www.egroups.com/group/HemipelvectomyDevs); [www.egroups.com/message/amputee-devotee](http://www.egroups.com/message/amputee-devotee).

<sup>7</sup> I have chosen a particular set of images to analyse in this thesis. These are low quality reproduction black and white line drawings which are rooted in a cartoon comic-book tradition widely used in Victorian pornography. They are low quality because the magazines *Ampix* and *Fascination* only have hand drawn illustrations. Issues of the magazines are photocopied for distribution and therefore in reproduction the quality of the images deteriorates. Even such material on the internet can be hand drawn and of low quality, whether through lack of funds, lack of professionalism or lack of models. A wide variety of pornographic images exist in the public domain, including images of paraplegics, wheelchair users, accident victims, people with disfiguring medical conditions and diseases, those with spinal abnormalities and people with facial disfigurements. However, images of female amputees are the most common, and for this reason I have analysed their images in this chapter (this is further explained in the main text of this chapter on pages 166-7). Many of these are of women, but some are of men and although they are predominantly heterosexually orientated, there are also lesbian and gay outlets. For ethical and legal reasons I have focused on pornography that features adults and avoided material which features children, although this is widely available on the internet now. Downloading porn that features children is a criminal offence, and furthermore is usually unobtainable on institutional networks because of firewalls. Possessing this material in other formats is also illegal. I have analysed images of disabled children in Chapter 3, and therefore have focused on adult images in Chapter 6.

and films are both mass-produced and produced as home videos which are circulated through local groups such as the Outsiders Club.<sup>8</sup> The demographics of readers as far as any figures exist reflect the consumers of mainstream pornography.<sup>9</sup> This material in its usual forms that I am discussing here is not illegal.<sup>10</sup>

As pornography in general stereotypes women, this genre of pornography stereotypes disabled people by representing them as young white female amputees or young white male paraplegics, although this is not an accurate reflection of age, race or disability incidence in the population at large. For example, much of this genre of pornography is concerned with women who have had amputations (see Figs. 8-14), although many other disabilities such as

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<sup>8</sup> The Outsiders Club is a London-based club which operates to introduce disabled and able-bodied people to one another for friendships and sexual relationships. It is run by Tuppy Owen, the editor of *The Sex Maniacs' Handbook*. Membership of the club tends to be gender specific with a tendency for most of the women to be disabled and most of the men to be able-bodied. The club publishes a monthly magazine called *Insider*, the editorials of which acknowledges the sexual fetishism of its male readers.

<sup>9</sup> Subscribers to *Ampix* are numbered in hundreds and tend to be consumers of mainstream pornography (Dixon and Dixon 1982: 2). They are predominantly white, heterosexual, middle-class and middle-aged with slightly above average levels of education (Dixon and Dixon 2). This is the same demographic as consumers of mainstream pornography. Interestingly, there is currently a flourishing academic market for pornography for the purposes of research such as this (Wicke 1993).

<sup>10</sup> There is no British law governing the production or distribution of pornography specifically. Legislation is in place to restrict the publication of materials which are considered to be obscene (Browne 1993; Smart 128), that is, likely to "deprave and corrupt" the consumer (Obscene Publications Act 1959, section 1 (1)). A later legislation, the Indecent Displays (Controls) Act 1981 forbids the public display of material that would offend the general public (Smart 129). There is a consensus that these laws are both unworkable and unenforceable (Bryson 175). Moral rights campaigners have attempted to introduce further bills that restrict the media's depiction of certain sexual activities that they perceive to be challenging to the traditional family structure. Organisations such as the Campaign Against Pornography, launched in the House of Commons in 1988, have sought to introduce legislation to limit the availability of pornography (Bryson 175). Attempts to regulate pornography have become allied to legislation such as the Education Act 1986, which limits sex education in schools, and the Abortion Amendment bill 1987, which restricts the availability of elected terminations (Smart 129-30). However, some feminists have claimed that "the harm caused by pornography is entirely different . . . from the insult to moral sensibilities on which obscenity law is premised" (Robel 178). The cultural value of obscenity changes with the historical context (Kappeler 1986: 259). In Britain, the narrow definitions of "harm" as tangible harm, and the failure to conclusively prove cause and effect have hampered efforts to make pornography answerable to criminal law (Smart 130-1). In North America, these efforts have taken the shape of Civil Rights measures which under the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment guarantees equal rights for all citizens (Everywoman 1988: 3). In Minneapolis, Catherine MacKinnon therefore argued that pornography is "a practice of discrimination on the basis of sex" and therefore unconstitutional (Everywoman 8). She later argued that discussing pornography in terms of a civil rights violation had legitimised the debate (1987). However, any argument citing rights is vulnerable to competing claims. The American Constitution's First Amendment is quoted in defence of pornography in the States and organisations such as the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce in the United States and Feminists Against Censorship in the UK dispute the usefulness of resorting to law (Bryson 175). It is arguable that any change in the law can only be effective outside an "alien totality" (Gregory 1981: 18); if every law is operated by sexist institutions, whatever women say "is listened to in the same old way" (Smart 132-3).



Figure 7: *Fascination 3.3* (1989)



Figure 8: *Fascination 3.4* (1989)



Figure 9: *Fascination 3.3* (1989)



Figure 10: *Fascination 3.1* (1989)

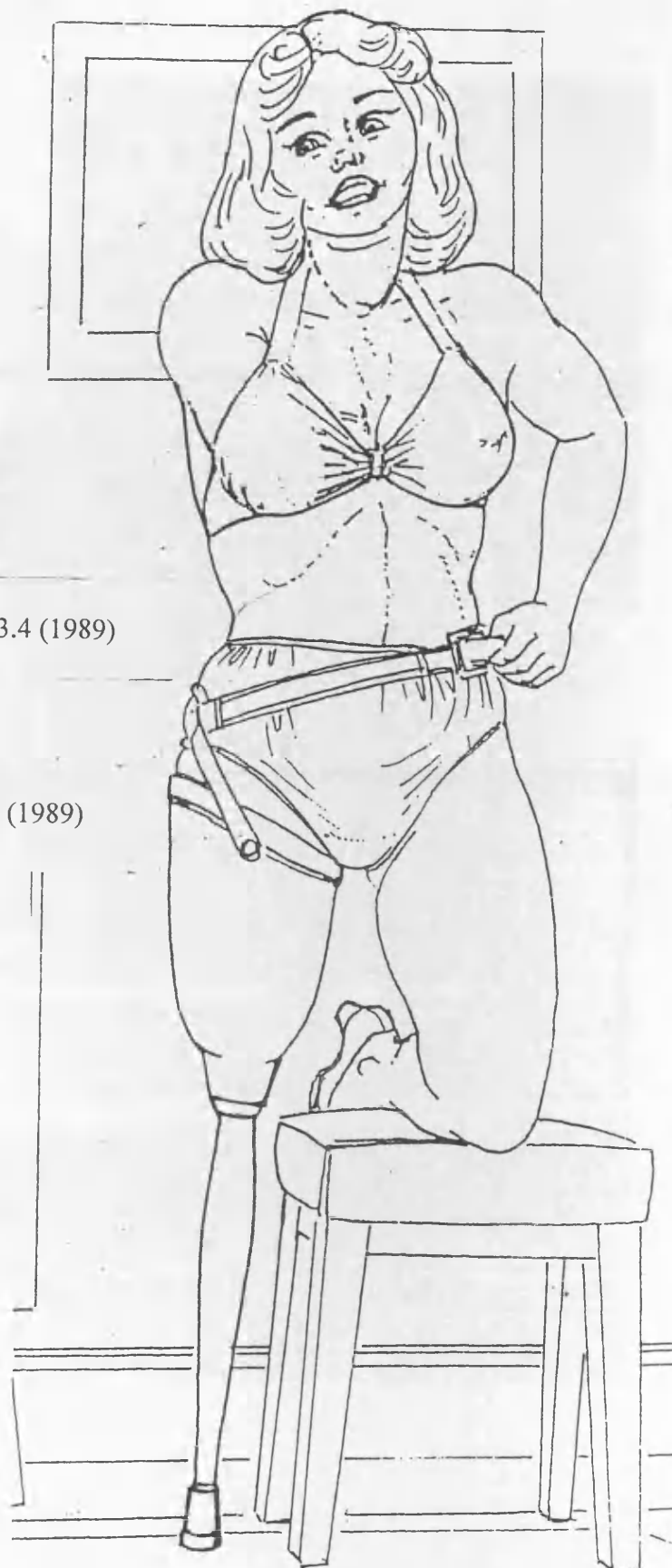


Figure 11: *Fascination 3.2* (1989)





Figure 12: *Ampix 76* (1991)



Figure 13: *Ampix 78* (1991)

arthritis and heart disease are far more common in the general population (Martin *et al* 1988). The magazines *Fascination* and *Bizarre* are concerned with various impairments and bodily extremes but tend to represent amputees disproportionately often; *Ampix* and another magazine, *The Amputee Times*, specifically focus on women with amputations.

As mainstream pornography consistently represents women as submissive, passive, sexual objects waiting to be “acted upon by men” (Segal 1992), so pornography that features disabled women depicts them as even more helpless, compliant and acquiescent than able-bodied women.<sup>11</sup> Figure 8 for example, is a drawing of a woman with both legs amputated who is balanced precariously on a stool. She is unable to move without the man’s help and passively accepts his sexual attention. This image contrasts the woman’s immobility with the male character’s potency, agility and flexibility. He is standing, ready and able to leave the situation in a way that the woman cannot; his body is able to change position in a way that hers cannot and he manipulates her body to suit his desire. She can only hold on to him for support: she is dependent on him. In the visual narrative of Figures 10 and 11 there is an absent but implied male “rider” who contrasts with the “ridden” woman of the scene. In Figure 10 he is a bus or train rider and in Figure 11 he is a bike rider; either way the linguistic overlap implies a sexually active character. Figure 9 shows a woman also vulnerable; she is on the floor and although her crutches are within reach, she would have great difficulty in getting to a standing position from where she is, seated on the floor. The crutches are an additional sign of the dependence and powerlessness of the woman in the picture (Lonsdale 1990: 68). According to the text of *Fascination*, the “fallen amputee” is an “oft repeated theme” (1989: 2). It is one that is repeated frequently in images of women in this genre of pornography (see Figs. 9 and 11 for example). The notion of “the fall”, implying a sexual fall

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<sup>11</sup> I have focused on pornography which obviously targets a male audience, and to a large extent I assume a male viewer. However, women do access pornography (Assiter 1989); they are arguable the largest growing market for it (McClintock 1993: 1). Not all pornography is misogynistic (Stoller 1991).



as much as an actual fall, seems to legitimate the sexual (ab)use of the woman who, by her very fall, is rendered sexual and available. Even in these extreme images of women's helplessness, there is another extremity to be represented: a vulnerable woman depicted in constructed situations of dependence. The common image of a disabled woman as a victim, often of a man, as helpless, inadequate and more vulnerable than her able-bodied peers is repeated here as it is repeatedly employed in all forms of representation (Boylan 1991: viii). In mainstream pornography the woman is reduced to "a two-dimensional, frozen creature helplessly impaled on the page, so that she cannot defend herself or strike back, as she might in the real world" (Stoller 1986: 133). This is even more extreme in images of disabled women in pornography. Disabled women are constructed in situations in which they cannot resist or fight back. Even if the character looks mildly dangerous "that implied risk is negated by her imprisonment on the paper" (Stoller 1986: 133), and it is clear that the suggestion of her domination is merely a response to male desire for the pornographic possibilities of the scene (see Fig. 13 for example). In her resistance, there is compliance. The woman is therefore idealised, she "does no harm, she brings satisfaction, she is aesthetic perfection . . . , she demands no revenge, she is absolutely co-operative, she keeps secrets . . . , she has no needs of her own: ideal" (Stoller 1986: 133).

In fictional narratives of all forms images of women depict "the false dualities of 'the feminine'" by presenting women as "virgins and whores, and sometimes whores dressed as little girls" but in pornography, "these dualities are contrasted and celebrated, rather than subverted" (Goodman "The Pornography Problem" 1992: 282). Pornography featuring disabled women also presents women as dichotomised characters, as helpless and innocent or as knowing and sexually available. In Figure 8 for example, the woman is depicted as very young through her stature and youthful face. Such image constructions infantilise women to

make them look like children (Itzin “Entertainment For Men” 1993: 32),<sup>12</sup> but the image is sexualised.<sup>13</sup> Figure 14 depicts a woman standing naked in a window, unself-conscious and looking out from the picture in invitation to the viewer. The picture is structured to be reminiscent of red light districts of cities where prostitutes stand at their windows on display for prospective customers.

This woman, stood at the window in this pose, could be any woman who has had amputations because both this genre of pornography and mainstream pornography is about the “elimination of difference”: pornographic models are stereotyped, differences between individuals and objects are effaced (Gubar and Hoff 150). The women in the examples shown are almost indistinguishable, they lack individual characteristics other than their disability. The disability is their most relevant characteristic: it is the reason that they are in the pornographic scenario. In mainstream pornography the necessary characteristic may be breasts or buttocks, while in pornography featuring disabled women it is their stump or other disability which is necessary. All other individuality is irrelevant to the pornographic scenario.

While stereotyping denies the depicted individuals’ differences from one another, the pornographic scenario emphasises the difference of the depicted individual from the white,

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<sup>12</sup> The infantilisation of disabled people allows a structure of control that justifies medical intrusion and social regulations (Morris 1991: 39-83).

<sup>13</sup> This is in direct contrast to other forms of Western culture which depict disabled people as unsexed. In previous chapters I have shown that charity advertising deliberately infantilises people with disabilities to emphasise their dependence on donations from the viewer. In popular women’s magazines overweight women have their sexuality questioned. Captain Hook is desexualised in *Peter Pan* by his lack of sexual partners and Verbal in *The Usual Suspects* is depicted as lacking any kind of sexual feelings. Jewish prohibitions in the Old Testament prevent women from having sexual relations while ill or suffering from reproductive disorders. Nicholas Mirzoeff has shown that deaf guards were utilised alongside eunuchs in harems, as they were considered impotent (1995). Disabled women complain that they frequently experience a “desexing” of their bodies (Lonsdale 1990: 71). Medical and educational accounts of the sexuality of disabled women stress female passivity and heterosexuality (Morris 1991: 22). Gay or lesbian disabled people have difficulty in accessing the services that the able-bodied can access with ease (Morris 1991: 22). Parents of disabled children often avoid the issue of sexual activity altogether (Boylan 52). Carers, medical staff and therapists “do not feel that they need permission to touch and manipulate the bodies of women who are disabled” (Lonsdale 73). This is a false precept: an extensive study in 1998 found that all the disabled women interviewed were, or had been, in sexual relationships (Gillespie-Sells *et al* 1998: 25). Since sexuality is inherent to identity the struggle for sexual expression and autonomy has been a major part of the disability movement and recent politics.

able-bodied, Western male (Simmonds 1992). In pornography women are objectified as “other than men”, disabled women are differentiated from able-bodied women, and black women are objectified as “other than white” (Goodman “The Pornography Problem” 1992: 280). The bodies of black women in pornography share certain meanings with the bodies of disabled women. The body of the black woman in pornography is “synonymous with deep carnality, animal desires and uncontrolled lust” (Forna 1993: 104) and historically represents deviant sexuality (Collins 1985: 264). In the early nineteenth century, an African woman, Sarah Bartmann was frequently exhibited at fashionable parties in Paris, generally wearing little clothing, to provide entertainment for assembled guests (Collins 1985: 264). At the time European audiences believed that African people had abnormal sexual practices and searched for physiological differences, such as enlarged penises and malformed female genitalia, as indications of deviant sexuality. A fascination with deformity is also evident in the explicit depiction of disabled women in pornography. Figure 13, for example, features a woman dressed like a pirate, a role implying both deviance and otherness. In particular, it was Sarah Bartmann’s steatopygia, or protruding buttocks, that the European audience found riveting (Gilman 1985: 213). The figure of Sarah Bartmann was therefore reduced to her sexual parts, both in her life and in death, when her body was dissected and publicly exhibited (Gilman 213). The fact that Sarah Bartmann was both African and a woman with specific physical differences from European women underscores the importance of gender and disability in maintaining notions of racial hierarchy (Collins 1985: 265), a common theme in

pornography.<sup>14</sup> African-American women are often depicted in pornography with “all the trappings of slavery: chains, whips, neck braces, wrist clasps,” often in bondage and slavery, and in submissive postures with white men (Bell 1987: 59). Some of the most brutal examples of sadomasochistic pornography use Asian women (Itzin “Entertainment For Men” 1993: 28).<sup>15</sup> Images of black women in pornography almost always feature them in chains, and the image of Asian women “is almost consistently one of being tortured” (Collins 1985: 265). This “corresponds with the huge traffic of Asian women into the United States for prostitution and sale as mail-order brides” and may resonate with US soldiers’ experiences of war in Asian countries (Itzin “Entertainment For Men” 1993: 28).<sup>16</sup> Mid twentieth-century Nazi pornographic depictions of Jewish people also depict them as sexually deviant (Forna 105). Racial colonialisation is therefore represented in pornography in such images of European men dominating Asian and African women; it is the hierarchy without which pornography does not work (MacKinnon 1984: 343). The pornographic scenario is but a blatant representation of the social relationship between racial groups, gender groups, religious groups and people grouped according to physical dis/ability. It is “extremely limited in scope, devoid of any action or plot besides the act of sexual subordination” (Kappeller 1993: 93). The sexual difference of differentiated groups is “the way that the masters interpret a historical situation of domination” (Wittig and Zeig 1980: 108). Women,

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<sup>14</sup> Pornography is grounded in racism as well as sexism (Collins 1985: 264). Racism may be a “key pillar upon which contemporary pornography itself rests” (Collins 1990). Black women’s “passivity, objectification, and malleability to male control” are constructed in pornography (Collins 1985: 264). “The more ancient roots of modern pornography are to be found in the almost always pornographic treatment of black women who, from the moment they entered slavery . . . were subjected to rape as the ‘logical’ convergence of sex and violence. Conquest, in short” (Walker 1982: 42). “For centuries, the black woman has served as the primary pornographic ‘outlet’ for white men in Europe and America” (Walker 1982: 42). Certainly the pornographic gaze shares a structure with the racist gaze (Goodman “Pornography and Representation” 1992: 48). For discussions on race and the gaze see Fausto-Sterling 1995; Collins 1993; Kappeller 1993; Mayall and Russell 1993; Shohat 1991; Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1989; Coetzee 1989; Sulter 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Black and Asian women are differentiated in pornography that features disabled women. For example the internet site [www.egroups.com/oriental/deformed-bodies](http://www.egroups.com/oriental/deformed-bodies) only shows materials about Asian women.

<sup>16</sup> In Britain, many agencies exist to match British men with Asian brides from countries such as Thailand and the Phillipines and it is, like pornography, a multi-million pound industry (Itzin “Entertainment For Men” 1993: 28; 52).

black and Asian women, Jewish people and disabled women are consistently presented in pornography as different and therefore indicative of deviant sexuality.

In genres of pornography that feature Asian, black, Jewish or disabled women, the necessary part is the woman as a “victim-object” to which theme others such as explicit sex or violence take second place (Kappeller 1993: 93).<sup>17</sup> All images in *Ampix* and *Fascination* feature a disabled woman in this role. The eroticisation of the difference of the victim-object in heterosexual pornography shows “the kind of sex that puts another person in their place. The kind of sex that keeps the other person *other*. The kind of sex that makes you know you are in the presence of someone who is palpably a man” (Stoltenberg 1993: 149). Through its constant re-enactment of hierarchy, pornography “*institutionalises* the sexuality that both embodies and enacts male supremacy” (Stoltenberg 150); it also “eroticises male supremacy. It makes dominance and subordination feel like sex; it makes hierarchy feel like sex; it makes force and violence feel like sex; it makes hate and terrorism feel like sex; it makes inequality feel like sex” (Stoltenberg 150). Otherness to the white, able-bodied, Western male is eroticised and sexually dominated in pornography. This can be seen in Figure 11 which depicts a disabled woman in a physically and narratively inferior position to the male figure in the scenario. Figure 9 depicts the disabled woman in chains and a leather collar, denoting her subservience to an implied male.

There are many indications that in pornography featuring disabled people the hierarchical scenario is a construct of male desire, rather than a realistic representation of sexual relationships. The white able-bodied male creates and directs the action in representation (Waterhouse 113),<sup>18</sup> making him powerful in relation to the “class or gender being

<sup>17</sup> For example, there are many instances in pornography in which women’s sexual organs are not revealed, but her relative powerlessness in a scenario creates the image as pornographic (Dworkin, Washington Declaration 7-8).

<sup>18</sup> Typically women who work in the pornography industry are “a group of non-organized, non-unionized casual workers with bad pay and worse working conditions, and without a share in the massive profits of the industry” (Kappeler 1993: 92). The image makers are usually able-bodied men (Boylan 13).

represented without access to the means of production of representation” (Kappeller 1993: 93). Pornography has emerged to reflect the interest of a “minority of race, class, gender and wealth” (Kappeller 1993: 92). As a set of ideas, pornography “centres on women, a class of people who have no access to the means of production of public ideas: they are the *objects* about whom those ideas are formed” (Kappeller 1993: 92). Disabled women do not usually expose their genitalia in public places as Figures 10 and 11 suggest, or seek postures of vulnerability and dependence.

We know that these images are constructed because pornographic depictions of disabled people focus on specific and negative aspects of being disabled: the possibility of vulnerability, of passivity, of dependence. These circumstances tend to be the ones that able-bodied people fear from becoming disabled. The images do not portray disabled people in narratives where their disability is irrelevant. Popular women’s magazines construct disabled people in the same way when they portray them in situations where their disability is disabling, but do not show those aspects of their lives where their disability does not affect their lives.

Similarly, pornography depicts women in specifically constructed situations of objectification. Pornographic models have the “status of a completely undifferentiated instrumentality” through their lack of clothes or individualising accessories (Silverman 1992: 330). While the women in Figures 8-14 may be differently dressed, it is usually in accord with a recognizable role: they are dressed provocatively in clothes designed to reveal their breasts and genitalia (Figs. 9, 11 and 12) or as sexualised characters such as waitresses and pirates (Figs. 8 and 13). Pornography is typified by women who are portrayed as lacking any subjectivity except to wish themselves to be objectified: “the chief message of contemporary pornography . . . is the suggestion that women seek, endorse and enjoy their degradation and violation” (Kappeller 1993: 99). Figure 9 for example depicts a woman who is chained and

immobilized but is not seeking to leave the situation. She poses for the viewer as “a pliant and docile body” (Silverman 1992: 341). Her narrative space is the floor, as in Figure 11, a place of degradation, but wherever the pornographic model is, she is fixed and placed there without the freedom to move (Silverman 1992: 339-46).<sup>19</sup> Her dress and position is in contrast to the males portrayed in these examples. Figures 8 and 11 feature a male who is standing, able-bodied and whose dress is neither provocative, revealing nor stereotypical. With such devices, male identity is “thus assumed to be quite stable” (Silverman 1992: 334). Other forms of pornography also feature women as not only receiving degradation, punishment and objectification, but inviting and wanting it (Suleiman 1986: 13). The female body is the “necessary element” in pornographic discourse (Silverman 1992: 338), which is depicted as an objectified collection of orifices: the mouth, the vagina, the anus (see Figs. 8-14). These have “no linguistic or generative function” (Silverman 1992: 331) but only exist as entry points for penetration from exterior objects or people (Deleuze and Guattari 1977; Réage 1964). Such restricted depictions objectify the women portrayed.<sup>20</sup>

As I have shown in the preceding chapters, the representation of disabled people in children’s literature and in film also explores male anxieties. Disabled male characters are feminised in a variety of representations, constructed in a way which equates femininity with inadequate masculinity in the public imaginary. For the male child, women’s lack of the penis and phallus represents the possibility of castration; in a phallogentric culture, woman denotes “castration and nothing else” (Mulvey 1985: 7). The “Bleeding Wound” is iconographic; we view it in representations of the crucifixion of Christ, in depictions of the

<sup>19</sup> In pornography featuring disabled women, the inability of the model to move is not just a feature of the pornographic process, but is itself eroticised.

<sup>20</sup> Alternative readings of pornography emphasise the element of male anxiety that pornography entails rather than feeding the male ego; the pornographic stress on penis size and sexual performance, with its undeniable chasm between image and reality, may actively encourage feelings of sexual inadequacy (Segal 1992: 218-20). That pornography seems to be becoming increasingly violent and predominantly focused on heterosex may imply that it is symptomatic of a crisis of the male ego (Kuhn 1982: 122).

torture of St Sebastian and in stigmata (Creed 1996: 177). Freud tied this to the castrated female genitalia, the sight of which evokes fear in the male (Creed 1996: 177).<sup>21</sup> The bleeding wound is eroticised in the film *Crash* (Creed 1998; Creed 1996: 177). Vaughan is a “crash fetishist” (Creed 1996: 178). Barbara Creed argues that Vaughan’s desire for the wound “represents the opposite of the Romantic ideal of truth, beauty and wholeness; the postmodern desiring subject yearns for an experience marked by crash culture – division, simulation, brutality, obscenity, death” (Creed 1996: 175). It is the woman that bears the wound; she is represented as “the prosthetic other” (Creed 1996: 178). A commonality that exists between pornography showing disabled women and the film *Crash* is that it is male desire that is represented, never female (Creed 1996). In Figures 10 and 11 the women portrayed are not in situations that they would conceive of as sexual. They are occupied in a task (travelling) in which they seem to be absorbed. Their participation in the scenario appears to be unnecessary. Figures 9, 12, 13 and 14 depict women as available for the implied male viewer. They are participating in the narrative knowingly and willingly but their desire is to please the implied male rather than themselves. Pornographic representations convey a “consensus as to what woman is and wants” and that consensus has been produced “through shared assumptions about the female body” (Silverman 1992: 346) which suppose that women seek to “represent to [men] their mastery” (Dipiero 1992: 258). This attributed desire reveals the “degree of wish fulfilment” that pervades pornography (Kuhn 1982: 122) and undermines the assumption that pornography is “the truth of sex” (Smart 125).

It is not entirely surprising then that in mainstream pornography, women are often presented as “parts”: breasts, hands, legs, vagina, whereas the male body presented is whole

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<sup>21</sup> Prominent wounds appear in many films: *Deadringers* (1988), *Rabid* (1976), *Videodrome* (1983), *Existence* (1999), *The Fly* (1986). The film *Crash* (1996) features a man who is sexually obsessed with his partners’ wounds that are acquired in road accidents.



(Gatens 1997: 84). Props are also common in pornography (Dietz and Sears 1987). The female body is itself fetishised in this depiction (Stoller 1991: 22-8), so that pornography is considered by many to be a deviant form of sexuality (Freud 1986: 346; Goldstein and Kant 1973). In pornography depicting disabled women, their bodies are presented as fragmented but in addition the disability and often also props such as crutches or callipers are a crucial feature (see Figs. 8-14). Psychoanalytic theory considers the specific erotic attraction to a physical impairment as a fetish (O'Donoghue and Laws 1997; Stoller 1986: 55; Dixon and Dixon; Freud 1927). The fetish can be a part of the body, a part of the body with a prop, such as a shoe or a crutch, or the prop alone if that is sufficient to invoke sexual interest (Gebhard 1969: 72). In Freudian theory, the existence of a fetish indicates that the castration complex has not been successfully negotiated (Mitchell 1974: 85). Fetishism is therefore experienced by boys rather than girls.<sup>22</sup> The most common erotic attraction to disability is that of a fetish for amputees (Milner and Dopke 1997: 398). This can take several forms. Abasiophilia is the erotic attraction to a lame or crippled partner (Milner and Dopke 1997: 398) it has also been termed "orthopaedic fetishism" (Fleischl 1960). Autobasiophilia is the focus on the self not being able to walk (Money 1990: 165). Acrotomophilia is a sexual focus on the stump of the partner as a result of amputation (Milner and Dopke 1997: 413; Money and Simcoe 1984).

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<sup>22</sup> Fetishism has been overwhelmingly associated with the male (Milner and Dopke 1997: 412-3; Stoller 1986: 9; Lacan 1982: 96; Epstein 1969: 81) although this may be because women are not encouraged to fully express their sexualities (Polhemus 1988: 100-1). Anne McClintock argues that "women cannot be allowed into the Freudian and Lacanian scene of fetishism (despite the wealth of evidence to the contrary), for recognising that female fetishism radically challenges the magisterial centrality of the fictitious 'phallus'" (2). Elizabeth Grosz has argued that lesbian use of dildos makes female fetishism a possibility (1991) and Naomi Schor has also supported this possibility (1985). Heather Findlay writes that it may be "that the maleness of fetishism is determined more by one's subject position than by biological gender" (1999: 469). Erotic attraction to disabled people has also been identified in women (Money 1990). The American definition of pornography includes the "use of men . . . or transsexuals in the place of women" because: "Other people are sometimes used in similar ways, sometimes in exactly the ways women are, but always exploiting their gender. This is the reason that the definition covers everyone regardless of sex, yet covers each person as a member of their sex: that is the way pornographers use them" (Dworkin and MacKinnon 38). Men are used in this pornography and some Internet sites have pages that are specifically devoted to pictures of male amputees (<http://mycomm.excite.com/mycomm/browse.asp?cid=131452> for example). However, these seem to be constructed to appeal to the male homosexual viewer, rather than to the female heterosexual viewer and constitute a minority of the pictures on-line.

Typically people are attracted to those who have already undergone amputations but there have been cases reported of requests for partners to undergo amputation (Taylor 1976). Cases include a focus on mutilated genitalia (Taylor 1976). Apotemnophilia is the focus on the amputation of a person's own limb and the resulting stump (Money *et al* 1977). People have requested amputations to satisfy this fetish (Everaerd 1983; Money *et al* 1977). The consumers of pornography that features disabled women are likely to have one or more of these fetishes.

The bodies that they desire are, through their disability, endowed "with a value they would not otherwise possess" (Botting and Wilson 188). The disabled females depicted in this type of pornography do not look like the usual female model in the media. Their missing body parts and use of prostheses distinguish them from the able-bodied model of mainstream pornography. The crutches, callipers and other prostheses are encoded accessories which are used to invoke sexual arousal in the viewer (Kuhn 1982: 114). All the examples contain a prop of some description: Figures 8, 11 and 13 have sticks in them, Figures 9 and 10 show crutches, Figure 12 shows a false leg and Figure 14 shows a cigarette. In this group of fetishisms props seem to be a required theme. It is noticeable that all the props used have a phallic shape.

Fetishism in Freudian theory is the result of an early infantile and repressed phase of sexual development (Freud 1927: 67) in which "the normal sexual object is replaced by another which bears some relation to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim" (Freud 1905: 65). This represents "deviations in respect of the sexual *object*" (Freud 1905: 65). What is substituted for the "normal" sexual object is some part of the body or an accessory, such as a shoe or hair, which is "in general very inappropriate for sexual purposes, or some inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the person which it replaces and preferably to that person's sexuality" (Freud 1905: 65-6). With fetishists, the fetishised

object must “fulfil a fetishistic condition”, such as a particular hair colour or clothing or “even some bodily defect – if the sexual aim is to be attained” (Freud 1905: 66). Because the fetishised condition must be present in order for the fetishist to become aroused, the sexual situations demonstrate a “variety of details within constancy of theme” (Stoller 1986: 116). Fetishists have abandoned “the genital as an object altogether, and have taken some other part of the body as the object they desire – a woman’s breast, a foot, or a plait of hair” (Freud 1986: 346-7). Here, “the fetish is a substitute for the penis” (Freud 1927: 351). However, “it is not a substitute for any chance penis, but for a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost” (Freud 1927: 352). This should normally have been given up, but “the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it from extinction” and therefore “the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and – for reasons familiar to us – does not want to give up” (Freud 1927: 352). What happens, therefore, is that the boy refuses to acknowledge “the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis” (Freud 1927: 352). In the boy’s mind “the woman *has* got a penis . . . but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor” (Freud 1927: 353). This therefore allows the subject “to maintain, despite evidence to the contrary, that castration is not a danger. In fact, it allows him to maintain that castration has not happened at all” (Findlay 1999: 468). The fetish is instituted when a process occurs which reminds the boy of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia; his interest “comes to a halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish” (Freud 1927: 354-5). After the fetishist represses the knowledge of his mother’s lack, an aversion to female genitals remains and his sexuality finds another object (Findlay: 471). The fetishist is therefore “deeply misogynistic” and “understands sexual difference simply in

terms of women's deficiency" (Findlay 471). The fetish remains both "a token of triumph over the threat of castration and protection against it" (Freud 1927: 353); both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration find their way into the construction of the fetish.<sup>23</sup> Fetishists "set up a fetish which substitutes for the missing phallus of the woman . . . they both recognise that women are castrated and deny it, so the fetish is treated with affection and hostility" (Mitchell 1975: 85).<sup>24</sup> The fetishist "reveres his fetish" (Freud 1927: 353); he condenses it into a "fragment of reality" which he endows with "a fanastic splendour" (Pfeiffer 1972: 168). Once the body part or inanimate object has been split off from the whole human person a further process of idealisation occurs to reinvent the sexual object (Stoller 1986: 132); the fetish suffers "overvaluation" (Stoller 1986: 132). Affection and hostility towards the fetish are both present in the fetish (Freud 1927: 356), for example, in the Chinese custom of foot-binding the female foot is mutilated and then revered as a fetish (Freud 1927: 356-7). When a fetish is constructed the normal sexual objects of the genitalia are replaced with another object which is less threatening (Freud 1905: 66). It is typical for fetishists to collect examples of the fetish, to fondle and smell them, and to masturbate in the process (Stoller 1986: 116). The fetish passes "beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually *takes the place* of the normal aim" and "becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the *sole* object" (Freud 1905: 67). The fetish crowds out any other interest in "normal sexual interplay" (Bootzin *et al* 1993:

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<sup>23</sup> Freud gives an example of a man whose fetish was an athletic support-belt. This piece of clothing covered up the genitals and "concealed the distinction between them" (Freud 1905: 353). Freud's analysis showed that the belt signified that women were castrated and that they were not castrated; and it also "allowed of the hypothesis that men were castrated, for all these possibilities could equally well be concealed under the belt" (Freud 1905: 353).

<sup>24</sup> This definition deliberately distinguishes between sex and pornography (Itzin "A Legal Definition of Pornography" 1993: 436). Dworkin and MacKinnon, among others, advocate an erotica premised on equality. John Stoltenberg sees erotica as opposed to pornography as "sexually explicit materials premised on equality, mutuality, reciprocity and so forth" (259-60). Diana Russell envisages "sexual representations that are non-abusive and non-sexist" (1993: 317). For others erotica is based on mutual pleasure and equality (Steinem 1985; Lorde 1984). However, when assuming the possibility of erotica premised on equality there remains the question of "whose equality?" since equality is not an unchanging value (Smart 123).

345) so that it is impossible for fetishists to experience sexual arousal without the fetish being present.

Pornography frequently depicts fetishized scenarios. The stump of the female amputee that features regularly in *Ampix* and *Fascination* is clearly a fetishized body part, as are the props such as crutches, sticks, callipers and other prostheses. The stumps and prostheses are prominent in the pictures. They are shown in the foreground. Figure 8 for example has very limited props: the woman and man appear in the picture, a stool on which the woman is perched, and the only other object is a pair of sticks. In Figures 9, 10 and 13 the crutches are more prominent than the women as they are in the foreground and thus closer to the viewer. In Figure 12 the model holds on to the belt that attaches to her artificial leg, so drawing the viewer's attention to it. The prostheses are always displayed in these pictures in very close proximity to the amputation stump. In Figure 8 the sticks are parallel to the woman, one on either side of the stump; Figure 9 show a crutch lying on the ground next to the model's stump; Figure 10 shows a woman holding a crutch next to her stump; Figure 11 depicts a woman lying on the ground with the crutch held next to her stump. Constructing scenarios in this way emphasises the connection between the body part and the prop.

Freudian theory explains the particular fetish of erotic attraction to people with disabilities as linked to morphophilia which is "an erotic focus on one or more of the body characteristics of one's sexual partner" and also to partialism, "a focus on a single body part" (Milner and Dopke 412). The deformed or removed limb may represent a female penis (Fleischl 1960). Castration anxiety is reduced when the deformed limb is shown (Fleischl 741). The fact that the object of sexual attraction is unable to walk may be significant (Money 1990: 165).

There are other explanations for the development of a fetish. Michael Balint emphasises the fact that all fetishised objects are hollow and therefore representative of female genitals (1935: 481-83). Phyllis Greenacre believes the origin lies in disturbances in body image

(1953: 79-98). Frank Caprio sees all fetishism as symbolic masturbation. Paul Gebhard argues that fetishism is symbolic of a sexually repressed society (1969: 71-80). It may also be connected to the pathological, having been found in association with senility and epilepsy. Here these obsessions have been found to have lessened with alleviation of the symptoms of the pathology (Stoller 1986: 47-8). R. C. Bak blames childhood trauma. A person who suffers trauma will isolate a fragment of the person and displace their sexual response from the whole body to a fetishised part (1968: 67). Itzin conceives the erotic attraction to amputees as a fetish for maiming in terms of sadistic pornography (Itzin "A Legal Definition of Pornography" 1993: 447). This is not tied to the material which in this category would also include snuff movies and "the penetration and evisceration of a woman's body by a knife", but is tied to the identity or condition of the woman.<sup>25</sup> For some feminists, material which uses the bodies of pregnant or lactating women,<sup>26</sup> or disabled women is in itself sadistic, regardless of what activity it depicts. This stance implies an attitude of protectionism and does nothing to liberate disabled women from infantilization. Dworkin also considers the fetish for disabled people as part of a sado-masochistic agenda when she

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<sup>25</sup> Snuff movies are films which involve the "torture and evisceration of the woman while she is alive and after she is dead" (Itzin "Entertainment For Men" 1993: 52). There is controversy over whether or not these films depict real murders. Many argue that they involve "footage of the actual (not simulated) torture of women culminating in their actual murder for the sexual climax of the 'actor'/hero and the male audience" (Russell 1993: 319; see also Forna 106; Itzin "Entertainment For Men" 1993: 52; Kappeller 1993: 97; MacKinnon 1987: 234-5). Others acknowledge that these films can be made with trick photography (Itzin "Entertainment For Men" 1993: 34) and that the prevalence of the phenomenon may be exaggerated (Bryson 174). Snuff films, like pornographic depictions of children, are illegal in Britain. Although they are very convincingly shot and often feature women from developing countries, there is little evidence that women have been killed in the making of such films.

<sup>26</sup> The August 1991 cover of *Vanity Fair* showed a photograph of an extremely pregnant Demi Moore, clad only in diamonds, with her hand covering her breast. "The cover provoked the most intense controversy in *Vanity Fair*'s history: ninety-five television spots, sixty-four radio shows, 1,500 newspaper articles and a dozen cartoons. Some stores and newsstands refused to carry the August issue, while others modestly concealed it in the brown wrapper evocative of porn magazines. Nevertheless, the cover displayed no more skin than magazines like *Allure*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Vogue* do on a regular basis. What repelled and shocked viewers obviously was the vast expanse of white, pregnant belly" (Stabile 1992: 190). "The pregnant body – even clothed – is a source of disgust in popular culture: the woman is represented as awkward, uncomfortable, and grotesquely excessive. In a culture that places such a premium on thinness, the pregnant body is anathema" (Stabile 191). It is "the most visible and physical mark of difference" and the sign for "deeply embedded fears" (Stabile 191).

cites examples of “torture pornography”:<sup>27</sup> “the exposure of a fetishized body part or ejaculate: for instance, the almost-to-term swollen bellies of pregnant women in *Knocked Up Mamas*, the breast milk used as a sexual ejaculate in *Milky Tits*, the place of amputation (maiming) where a limb is missing in *Amputee Times*” (Dworkin “Washington Declaration” 7-8).<sup>28</sup> Stoller equates fetishism with violent and criminal sexual activities: “perversions such as rape, fetishism, necrophilia, sex murder, sadism, masochism, voyeurism, paedophilia” in which is found “hostility, revenge, triumph, and a dehumanised object” (1986: 9). As stumps suggest amputation, they also imply violence done to the body, although the act of amputation is rarely depicted in *Ampix* or *Fascination*. In mainstream pornography lacerations are “points of entry” which code the depicted fully as a woman (Silverman 1992: 331). The marks left by sadistic torture symbolise compliance (Silverman 1992: 332) and therefore disabled women, bearing these marks in extremity in pornography, may encourage the view that “she’ll stay at home, she won’t run away because she’s disabled, she’ll be good” (Owen 1992). Another reading may view her prostheses as symbolic of “the phallic woman” who, in pornography aimed at the male masochistic market, “straps on a dildo and sodomizes the male” (Creed 1996: 116). Figure 13 for example shows a confident and dominant woman. In Figure 11 the crutch wielded by the woman is pointed towards the

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<sup>27</sup> Some gays and lesbians are concerned that pornography “as defined in the civil rights ordinance would restrict their legitimate sexual practice and limit their freedom in a way that it would not restrict heterosexuals” (Itzin “A Legal Definition of Pornography” 1993: 444). “Samois”, the sado-masochistic lesbian group, have argued for their own sexual ethical autonomy (Snitow *et al* 1984: 404-14). For some, sexuality should be differentiated from gender. They conceive of some people as “sexual minorities”, oppressed by the state, a system which should be replaced by one of “benign sexual variation” (Vance 1984: 310). Diverse behaviours such as “promiscuous homosexuality, sadomasochism, fetishism, transsexuality, and cross generational encounters” are presented as oppressed sexualities (Vance 1984: 283). Jeffrey Weeks also writes that sexual preferences are distinguished only by “norms” and moral relativism (Weeks 1989: 5). However, this viewpoint fails to problematise issues such as child abuse (Jefferys 1990: 277). Some gays and lesbians believe that their “right to use sadistic pornography takes precedence over considerations of sexual violence to women and sex discrimination” (Itzin “A Legal Definition of Pornography” 1993: 444).

<sup>28</sup> Sadism and masochism are partners (Stoller 1986: 58). “A person who feels pleasure in producing pain in someone else in a sexual relationship is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain which he may derive from sexual relations. A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity” (Freud 1927: 73).

viewer and therefore may be sexually threatening. However, her potential power is undermined by her position on the floor, and may offer a narrative which invites abuse rather than suggests dominance.<sup>29</sup>

For disabled people, categorising people who consume pornography with disabled people in it as fetishists may confirm an assumption that if “a man finds the disabled woman attractive, it is because her disability draws him to her” (Boylan 14-15). Pornography in general can be a strategy “to flout conventional sexual mores, to ridicule hypocrisy and to underscore the importance of sexual needs” (Duggan, Hunter and Vance 1984: 145).<sup>30</sup>

Both women and disabled people have had their sexualities denied and repressed; both have had identities imposed upon them which construct them as passive sexual partners.

Contemporary disability politics stress the right to sexual relationships and sexual expression (Boylan; Davies 1993) and pornography may form part of this project. The organisation SPOD (Association to aid the Sexual and Personal Relationships of People with a Disability) was established specifically to address this issue (SPOD 1991). The right to sexual pleasure, to depiction as sexually active and sexually competent individuals, is a high-profile issue in the disability movement (Lonsdale 63-80).

However, while sexual expression is a method of attaining self-empowerment, pornography featuring disabled people disempowers them by making them the object of the viewers’ gaze. These images are highly visual and it is the sense of sight to which they

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<sup>29</sup> Disabled people are abused nearly twice as often as able-bodied people of the same age and sex (Sobsey 1994: 35) and are more likely to be trapped in abusive relationships (Grothaws 1985: 126). In a paper presented to the Coalition of Provisional Organisations of the Handicapped in Winnipeg, Canada in 1987, Cathy McPherson said that there were three standard reactions to the rape of a disabled woman at her local Rape Crisis Centre: horror at the vulnerability of the victim, disbelief that anyone would want to, and “she got lucky” (quoted in Boylan 54-5). Disabled women are “fair game for the aggression of others and they are helpless victims more often than society is aware” (in Boylan 53). See also Sobsey; Carmody 1991; Stimpson and Best 1991.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Annie Sprinkle, an ex-porn model who now performs in her own right as an artist, uses pornographic devices for the purposes of political and personal expression (Douglas 1993; Straayer 1993; Williams *Dirty Looks* 1993).



primarily appeal.<sup>31</sup> The images in *Ampix* and *Fascination* are addressed to the male spectator. The text of *Fascination* for example features articles which are written by men recounting their fantasies of sex with disabled women. The “Problem Page” mainly advises men on how to satisfy their fetish for disabled women, with or without the woman’s knowledge or consent. For example, although the editorial advises readers to tell prospective partners about their fetish, it also cautions: “if there is something about your preference which you think may offend your partner, leave it out of your explanation” (*Fascination* 1989: 56). The problem page of *Inside*, the magazine of the Outsiders Club, also offers advice: “Certainly, most female amputees would be alarmed if you professed your fetish early on in your relationship with them. Usually it’s better to keep your unusual sexual tastes to yourself until you feel that a woman could be receptive to them” (1990: 14).

The internet sites also commonly have sections devoted to the fetishists who call themselves “devotees” which contain pictures and videos as well as a mail-order service for pornographic material, and also a section for people with amputations which appears to be factual, informative and set up as a self-help facility.<sup>32</sup> This reflects the psycho-analytic notion of a fetishist as someone who “induces and coerces another person into becoming an accomplice” in order to maintain a “manipulative ego-control of the situation” (Khan 1965:

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<sup>31</sup> This is common in mainstream pornography, which rarely targets other senses. Freud suggests that “visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused” and even that “natural selection counts upon the accessibility of this pathway – if such a teleological form of statement is permissible – when it encourages the development of beauty in the sexual object” (1905: 69). He connects this to the concept of visual curiosity which “seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts” (Freud 1905: 69).

<sup>32</sup> The sections of the sites that are for “devotees” also publish academic articles on the fetishes of abasiophilia, autobasiophilia, acrotomophilia and apotemnophilia. The work of Dwight Dixon and John Money, both established experts in their fields, appear on most of the sites for example. This demonstrates an unusual level of self-analysis (or perhaps arrogance) on the part of the fetishists.

399 and 402). The images themselves also disempower the people modelled.<sup>33</sup> Being the object of the gaze is a feature of being disabled (Morris 1991: 25).<sup>34</sup> Molly McIntosh, who was very badly scarred as a result of a fire, writes: “As I walked down the street and someone was coming towards me, they would look down and then drop their eyes or move their head, as if the horror was too much. But they could never, ever resist looking again. I used to have bets with myself about that second look. I would promise myself a treat if they didn’t look again, but they always did” (Morris 1991: 24). The pornography that features disabled women encourages the viewer to “look without the look being returned” (Kuhn 1985: 32). For the returned look by disabled people, like that of women, has dangerous and negative meanings in Western culture. One of the marks of a witch (women with some body specificities similar to those of disabled women) is the “evil eye” and women, like children, may be “castigated for possessing or giving knowing looks . . . and their reputation may be at stake” (Waterhouse 113).<sup>35</sup> Disabled people, like “the working classes, colonised peoples, the criminal, poor, ill-housed, sick or insane” have been constituted in wider culture as the passive or feminised “objects of knowledge” (Tagg 1988: 11). As such, they are “subjected to a scrutinising gaze, forced to emit signs” (Tagg 11).

There are inevitable power differentials in the relationship between the viewer and the

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<sup>33</sup> These images, as in mainstream pornography, depict the women as “asking for it”. In pornography the representation of women as “asking for it” can be viewed as the opposite of having a choice but it also implies agency on the part of the depicted character. This is a theme which recurs in representations of disabled people across Western culture. I have already described the element of agency implied in disabled characters in children’s literature, in film, in the lives depicted in popular women’s magazines and in biblical narrative. In these genres, disabled characters are implied to have power and choice over their physicality. This depiction allows the spectator to believe that the objectified person in the pornography is consensual and masochistic.

<sup>34</sup> Laura Mulvey argued that the gaze is male (Mulvey 1988: 62). She later revisited this position and posited that women can gaze but in “transvestite clothes” (1989). The issue of the female gaze has been explored extensively in relation to lesbianism (Young 1988; Waterhouse). Women have very few choices as spectators: we can identify with the visual image and imagine ourselves as the object of the male gaze (Doane 1988; Berger), or identify with the male spectator and objectify ourselves (Kuhn 1985). There is reason to question the assumption that “audiences identify on the basis of gender (or even sexual orientation) rather than on other categories that contribute to the construction of our identities” (Gammon 1988: 7).

<sup>35</sup> The norms of the nineteenth century demanded that “women should lower their gaze, narrow their vision and restrict their knowledge” (Waterhouse 113) as “the guarded respectability of the lady could be soiled by mere visual contact, for seeing was bound up with knowledge” (Pollock 1988: 71).

depicted (Berger), but particularly in any form of pornography in which “the mere fact of buying the product in order to enjoy in private the observed or described sexual activities of others implies an unequal power relationship” (Smart 123);<sup>36</sup> it “institutionalises the concept that it is man’s monetary right, if not his divine right, to gain access to the female body” (Brownmiller 393). Pornography has a “scopic regime” which is “‘objectively’ conceived”, that is “located within an architectural system which transcends any individual male gaze, but within which that gaze participates” (Silverman 1992: 333). Pornography appropriates the sexuality of those defined as “other” by creating an “eroticised power imbalance” (Itzin “Entertainment For Men” 1993: 31).<sup>37</sup> This is partly achieved through the availability of only two roles in pornography, one powerful and one powerless (Cornell 133). This limits the choices for identification for the viewer, whose desires are constructed by “offering them certain objects, certain channels, certain meanings” (Cameron and Frazer 1987: 143). Pornography “eroticises domination and power differentiation . . . it makes power sexual” (Smart 117) and relies on this device to attract the “male voyeur” (Haste 1993: 71). Pornographic representations of disabled women intensify such power differentials by making the female models more vulnerable, more masochistic, more powerless in the narratives than in mainstream pornography. A woman in chains is restricted and subjected; a woman in chains with only one leg is even more so.

The power of the gaze in the relationship of able-bodied to disabled people is evident in the phenomenon of the Freak Show. Female freaks in the side-shows of the nineteenth century were “acceptable grotesque disguises or masks for pornographic representation of

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<sup>36</sup> A variety of representations of women, including romance novels, employ pornographic devices which eroticise power differentials (Valverde).

<sup>37</sup> For example, lesbians have “suffered from the pornographers’ definition of lesbian that is so central to the violence, hatred, contempt, and discrimination directed against lesbians in society. All lesbians in societies saturated with pornography must live with the fact that the pornographers have made lesbianism into a pornographic spectacle in the eyes of men” (Dworkin and MacKinnon 38). In pornography women are often coupled with other women “but only for the pleasure of the male viewer . . . the intent is to stimulate males” (Itzin “Entertainment For Men” 1993: 31).

women” (Gubar and Hoff 25). Fiedler describes this as the “Eros of Ugliness” which prevailed in circus side-shows (1978).<sup>38</sup> He claims that “the sense of the pornographic [was] implicit in all Freak shows”, that “all freaks [were once] perceived to one degree or another as erotic” (1978: 18; 137). These “freaks” are claimed to represent “grotesque images of women . . . controlled by men” (Gubar and Hoff 24). It is common for the media to represent certain categories of women as freakish and ugly. Feminists are one group that is vulnerable to this abuse as indicated by the “wimmin” of *Private Eye* for example. An article in *The American Spectator* listed feminists of the time in order of their ugliness (Gubar and Hoff 1989: 26). Internet sites which display people with disabilities in sexual and non-sexual poses constitute a modern re-working of the Freak show, demonstrating that the desire for objectified images of disabled people still survives and that it is still easily satisfied.

Pornography is not likely to lose its popularity in the foreseeable future. It remains a “privileged form of representation . . . [which] offers positive reinforcement to its users” (Jeffreys 1990: 253). Its power is evidenced by the “existence of pornography in our society, the size of its edition and the scope of its circulation” (Kappeller 1993: 98). Whereas other texts, such as *Janet and John* books, have been unproblematically banned, pornography has

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<sup>38</sup> Joel Peter Witkin in his work *Masterpieces of Medical Photography* includes photographs of amputees, people with tumours, people with frostbite, those who have suffered war injuries and corpses (1987). Dureau photographs people of small stature and amputees in poses quoting from classical art (1985). Photographers like Witkin and Dureau enter into a mutually profitable relationship with the consumers of their work. This relationship is analogous to the relationship of the Victorian freak show manager and circus visitor. They both appropriate the image of disabled people for financial gain or voyeuristic pleasure, and ignore their subjective experiences.

survived repeated attempts to limit its availability and effects (Jeffreys 1990: 253).<sup>39</sup>

Certainly, the social climate of gender, race, economic and physical inequality contributes to an atmosphere in which such representations can thrive (Jolly 1992: 173; Diamond 1985: 52).

In this chapter I have explored the depiction of the disabled female body in pornography. Disabled women are represented in pornography as sexually passive. They are fetishised as their disability is integral to their erotic appeal. It is their disability that dictates their role in these pornographic narratives, as it is the female body that dictates the role of women in pornography. The next and final chapter, the Conclusion, as well as drawing together the chapters so far, explores the self-representation of people with disabilities through their autobiographies to describe the ways in which self-representations are the same as or

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<sup>39</sup> I have chosen not to focus here on the harm done to women in the production, consumption, and influence of pornography. There is much debate about the effects of pornography. The purgative model sees pornography as benign or beneficial in that it releases sexual or emotional tensions which might otherwise be resolved in more harmful ways (Gubar and Hoff 150-2). This model assumes that the reality of male desire is to degrade and harm women, and that that desire can be substituted. The exemplary model holds that exposure to pornography intensifies sexual tensions in its depiction of activity which the consumer perceives and acts on as a pattern of sexual behaviour (Donnerstein and Hallam 1978: 1276). There is evidence of a relationship between exposure to violent pornography and aggressive behaviour towards females, depending on other factors such as film content and personality traits (Itzin and Sweet 1993; Russell 1993; Tate 1993; Russell and Trocki 1993; Senn 1993; Weaver 1993; Wyre 1993). In connection with rape the viewing of films which depict women enjoying being raped might imply "that the assault on [the woman] had been worthwhile from the attacker's perspective; an implication which could lead the observers to believe that their own aggression will also pay off" (Donnerstein and Berkowitz 1981: 721-2). It is similarly argued that "pornography is the permission and direction and rehearsal for sexual violence" (Everywoman 107). The Minneapolis City Council hearing in 1983 provided evidence of the links between pornography and sexual violence which included cases of men forcing women to act out scenes they had viewed or read in pornographic films and publications (Everywoman 32-3). Others refute the link (Barber 1972: 141-70; Segal 1993). Certainly there are very real victims in the pornography industry. The case of Linda Marciano, who was forced "through physical, mental, and sexual abuse, and often at gunpoint and threats to her life, to be involved in pornography" demonstrates that there are victims of this "so-called victimless crime" (Everywoman 24). See also Giobbe 1993; Steinem 1993; McGregor 1989 for accounts of the abuse of porn workers. In response, some feminists focus on the unionisation of porn workers as the way forward (Cornell 1995: 97-122). Explorations into the effects of pornography rely on the proof of behavioural consequences, a link which is difficult to determine (Gubar and Hoff 152). The social consequences are equally complex to conclude (Cornell 1999: 189; Segal 1987). Some women who work in the industry defend it (Koproski 1988 and Duckens 1989 offer anecdotal evidence). For some, consequences are not the issue, pornography in itself is a violence against women which violates their autonomy (Assiter 1989: 126-42; Dworkin and MacKinnon) and "no woman should be forced to view her own body as it is fantasised as a dismembered, castrated other, found in bits and pieces" (Cornell 1995: 103). Pornography that features disabled women appears to go to unusual lengths to engage disabled women as contacts and models. Internet sites in particular are constructed to attract women with disabilities to them. The motivation in doing so may be to provide contacts for male fetishists without it being obvious that this is the case. If women who potentially access these sites are therefore vulnerable to fraudulent approaches by fetishists, they may also experience emotional or ultimately physical harm.

different from representations created by the able-bodied. The final chapter also offers some comment on the potential for new technologies to enhance the position of disabled people in culture through the erasure of the physical body in virtual communications systems.

## *Conclusion*

In this final chapter I shall summarise the main findings of each preceding chapter and consider the contributions that this thesis makes to the existing body of knowledge in the field of disability and cultural representation. I shall also look at some of the issues that have arisen for me during the writing of this thesis, and the possibilities of further research that the thesis gives rise to.

In Chapter 1 on “The Disabled Body in Charity Advertising” I analysed the representation of the disabled body in the advertising campaigns of two charities: the Multiple Sclerosis Society and Scope. Images of people with disabilities are feminised in advertising of charitable provision. This is achieved through depicting disabled people as dependent and vulnerable, as passive and helpless. They are presented in scenarios of dependence, being bathed, being supported, being looked after, which emphasise the negative aspects of being disabled without representing any positive images.<sup>1</sup> This is similar to the ways in which women are depicted in advertising. Disabled people in charity advertisements are constructed as dependent on able-bodied people for their emotional and physical needs, and further, they are depicted as dependent on the particular impairment charity being advertised. They are shown to lead solitary and inactive lives, redeemed only by the interventions of the charity concerned. This is a device used to encourage the consumer to donate money to the impairment charity as a kind of talisman against the implied indignity of becoming disabled. In order to create this effect impairment charities portray disability as a degrading experience, associated in Western culture with a certain kind of feminised representation. The images of impairment in charity advertising threaten the consumer with feminisation and with its

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast to this reading, Mary Russo sees grotesque bodies as empowering and the carnivalesque as a possible permanent disruption of the social order (1986: 226-7); she does not perceive bodies as limited by impositional representation.

attendant attributes of frailty and impotence. The consumer is confronted with images that present disability as a feminine experience and a negative state of being. The physical ability of the potential consumer is a central concern as the identity of the implied audience informs the content and tone of the advertising campaign. It is assumed that the consumer is able-bodied, deducible from the implied threat to the consumer in the advert. The threat is only applicable to a person with an able-bodied masculinity to threaten. Charitable advertising threatens the consumer in its assertions that the diseases depicted are incurable, devastating and random, and that only the charity can alleviate the life-shattering event of the disease.

Disability is also equated with femininity in the images and texts discussed in Chapter 2: *Body Spectra in Popular Women's Magazines*. In magazines such as *Best*, *Eva*, *Chat*, *Woman*, *Take a Break* and *That's Life*, generally the cheaper end of the magazine range aimed at women, disability is aligned to gender by associating certain body extremes and disabilities with male characters in the narratives and others with female characters. People who are obese or anorexic are usually women and their stories occupy the same narrative space as those of people with disabilities, resulting from use of the drug thalidomide, for example. In these narratives the disabled body is presented as chaotic, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Women's bodies are presented in similar ways (Rhodes 141-55). Disabled people are also feminised through their depiction as freakish. The female body and the grotesque body are closely associated (Russo 1995) and in these narratives, the disabled body is presented as grotesque and as predominantly female. Disabled bodies in popular women's magazines are constructed as alien, object-like, or animal-like: they are depicted as other.

The sense of otherness in these narratives is achieved through photographic images as well as through text. This imagery represents the difference between the "them" of the stories and the "us" as readers. While the images are therefore shocking, they are simultaneously comforting to the viewer: though strange, they confirm our own inclusion, our own privileged



place in the social and political order, and offer reassurance by affirming the reader's identity as other from that which is represented. The depicted remains an object, other, subject to ridicule, inquisition, patronage, object of exploration; a disruptive element which temporarily threatens disorder but which is ultimately excluded or reformed in the image of ourselves. Although superficially these images and texts represent the "unrepresentable", represent another way of experiencing life, ultimately they confirm the alienation of disability and the rightness of an order which excludes dissension, as stereotypical representations of women serve to reinforce the supremacy of masculinity. As men are often the subject of texts that appear to be about women, so in these narratives the able-bodied helper is often the subject of the text. The disability is an element of *their* life: it is an event in *their* biography.

In Chapter 3: The Disabled Body in Children's Literature I found that the disabled characters in literature for children are depicted as morally inadequate and lacking in self-control, exactly as female characters are often depicted in Western culture (Walkowitz 1984). Disabled characters are frequently monstrous in works such as *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan*, where they are the villains and their villainy is signalled by their disability. Disabled characters are also feminised in literature for children by being represented with female characteristics. I have demonstrated that characters such as Captain Hook, Long John Silver, and Blind Pew exhibit characteristics that are mostly associated with female characters in Western culture such as vanity, narcissism and being the objects of pity. They are also constructed as sexually neutralized or as asexual. This leaves them open to feminine readings. In much literature written for children the inner landscape of the characters is reflected in their outer appearance and the origin of their disability is shown to be located in their psychology rather than in anything physiological or congenital. Parental transgression, neglect or rejection, lack of self-control, the inability to self-manage, pessimism and depression, are all used to account for the incidence of disability in particular characters. In

literature for children an appropriate method of dealing with disabled characters is prescribed. The appropriate response is usually anger or impatience. Able-bodied characters respond to the disabled characters with intolerance and are redeemed within the texts for this attitude because it usually results in the cure of the disabled character. Colin Craven and Clara Seismann are both cured, not by patience and kindness, but by irritation and chastisement.

Disability in children's literature is usually curable, as its origins lie within the control of the disabled character. The redemption of disabled characters such as those in *The Secret Garden*, *Masks* and *Heidi* is achieved through their cure (Paul). Their overcoming of physical disability occurs in parallel to their emotional development and is usually facilitated by an able-bodied character. Strength of character is equated with physical recovery in these texts. For some characters their redemption, their "cure," is death. Captain Hook and the Witches are destroyed together with their disability. Female characters and disabled characters are punished more often and more severely than male or able-bodied characters in literature for children (Bottigheimer 81-122). In children's literature, disability must be destroyed at any cost.

In contrast to disability, its absence signals normality, health and happiness. Characters such as Peter Pan and Heidi are polar opposites of Hook and Clara. When characters are cured, they are restored to the health and happiness that able-bodiedness signals. Masculinity denotes the same state of normality in relation to femininity. In children's literature, because the disability is usually spiritual in origin, it is constructed as within the control of the individual who, by developing inner strength, can effect their own cure. This cured state also denotes mental health, a relationship that has been perceived since the nineteenth century when the cult of athleticism and the attraction of muscular Christianity arose, primarily in educational circles. The attributes promoted in muscular Christianity were the primarily masculine traits of physical fitness, leadership and competition. The lack of athleticism

demonstrated by disabled and female characters in literature for children represents a parallel position. By associating ill health, malignancy, lack of self-control and moral inadequacy with physical disability, children's literature feminises disabled characters.

In Chapter 4: The Disabled Body in Film I argued that in films such as *Boxing Helena* and *The Usual Suspects* disabled characters are feminised by their role in the Freudian narrative of psycho-sexual development. The disabled characters Verbal and Helena are both castrated, albeit in different ways. Verbal is castrated through his feminisation which fixes his character as passive, pathetic, grovelling, weak and acted upon. These are characteristics traditionally exhibited by female characters. Helena is castrated through her amputations which make her the bearer of the wound in Freudian theory. Masculinity is explored in these films through the metaphor of the disabled body. Nick's masculinity is explored in *Boxing Helena* through the story of his need and desire for Helena's castration. It is her castration (her disability) that establishes and confirms his masculinity. As Helena refuses to behave as the castrated woman early in the narrative, she is made to fulfil this role by Nick. The amputations that he imposes on her are an enforcement of her femininity and feminine role.

The *Usual Suspects* polarises the masculine and feminine aspects of Verbal's character, constructing a false dichotomy between them. The failure of all the male characters to fix the "true" narrative represents the ultimate inadequacy of masculinity. Like female characters, disabled characters in film are constructed as oppositional to the male able-bodied character, who is often the hero. Disabled characters are feminised by being the objects of pity and by exhibiting emotions such as terror and vulnerability, while their male able-bodied counterparts are those who impose the terror, or rescue the piteous from the threat. The female and/or disabled body is the repository of male fear of vulnerability, of dependence and abandonment (Jeffreys 1994: 385), it is "both a socio-cultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning" (de Lauretis 1987: 5). The

narrative of the two films that I have analysed reveals that the body is seen as a fixed point of certainty in Western culture. It is male, and whole, despite narrative distractions and fictions during the course of the film. Even while both the films looked at here question and undermine the fantasy of a single narrative, they endorse that fantasy in their resolutions.

The Bible contains many references to disability in the form of epilepsy, leprosy and sensate disabilities. In Chapter 5: The Disabled Body in the Bible I argue that the cures of the New Testament and the ritual purification of the Old Testament can be seen as a drive to eradicate difference from the ideal of the male body. Biblical narrative establishes women and disabled people as a violation of the ideal of the male body through their categorisation as unclean. They are not in the image of God who is constructed as male (Ochshorn 210). Most representations of the disabled body in the Bible are male. More spiritual significance is attached to narratives of male disability and hence to biblical events, so dismissing and assailing female authority. Whereas the Old Testament is concerned with the imperfect body and its role in the rituals of purification which are necessary to combat the polluting effects of disability, the New Testament is concerned with the relief of disability and therefore constructs disability as a transitional state, remedial and representative of coming redemption. Redemption is always achieved through cure for people with disabilities. Other violations against the Old Testament God, such as femininity and racial discrimination are redeemed in the New Testament by Christ, who embraces them as equals. Disability is never redeemed in this way however, and this represents a fundamental difference in Christian doctrine which tends to view disability as an individual phenomenon in which the will of the affected character is implicated. Disability appears in the Bible both teleologically and etiologically in that it is the amendment of such events as well as their origin that is significant (Fiedler 1981: 230). Only God can cure disability in the Bible because the disorder symbolised by the ailing body is of a spiritual and not physical nature. The Bible shares this notion of the origin of

disability with children's literature. Disabled and diseased bodies in the Bible figure as exemplars of transcendence and as a parable of the desire to transcend the physical body. Before this transformation of the body, however, their images are appropriated for use as signifiers in the texts.

In Chapter 6: The Disabled Body in Pornography, I suggest that the disabled women depicted in pornography represent an extreme form of femininity. Pornography which features disabled women represents them as extreme forms of the pornographic notion of femininity which positions women as the object of the gaze and as such as a castrated figure. Most of the disabled women who appear in pornography have had amputations, a recognised fetish in Freudian theory. There the existence of a fetish indicates that the castration complex has not been successfully negotiated, that the boy cannot accept the castration of the woman because of the implied threat to his own masculinity. Pornography featuring disabled women is therefore expressive of a threatened masculinity. The bodies that fetishists desire are, through their disability, endowed "with a value they would not otherwise possess" (Botting and Wilson 1996: 188). The origin of this value is the possibility of their denial of the threat of castration and by extension a protection of their masculinity. The disabled women in pornography are constructed in situations in which they cannot resist or fight back, so emphasising their castrated state. As in mainstream pornography, otherness to the white, able-bodied, Western male is eroticised in this genre of pornography, and others are represented as inferior and objectified. The disabled women in pornography are the object of the gaze, positioned in the public domain for the visual consumption of the overwhelmingly male audience. As such, they are "subjected to a scrutinising gaze, forced to emit signs" (Tagg 11). Disabled women in these representations are disempowered by being the object of the gaze and by being objectified within the images. Pornographic representations of disabled women intensify power differentials by making the female models more vulnerable, more

masochistic, more powerless in the narratives than in mainstream pornography. Disabled women are represented in pornography as sexually passive. They are fetishised as their disability is integral to their erotic quality. The role of the woman in Freudian narrative is therefore entwined with the role of the disabled person in pornography: they both represent castration and a potential threat to masculinity. It is their disability that dictates their role in pornographic narratives, as it is the female body that dictates the role of women in pornography. My argument that disability is feminised in Western culture concludes with this chapter.

The analyses presented in this thesis contribute to the field of disability research through their concentration on the issues of the representation of disabled people in a wide variety of Western cultural scenes. Most of the work in the field of disability research has tended to concentrate on medical, social or political aspects of disability.<sup>2</sup> The work of Colin Barnes (1999; 1997; 1996; 1991; 1990) for example, has examined the material aspects of disability. The work of Mike Oliver, on the other hand, has highlighted the impact of disability on the social environment rather than focussing on the pathology of disability (1996; 1993; 1990; 1989; 1983). Work has been done on the interface between feminist politics and disability politics; Jenny Morris for example has written extensively about “Gender and Disability”, looking at prejudice against disability which has led to material inequalities (1997; 1993; 1991). She identifies feminism as a field that has contributed to this prejudice in some aspects and compares the development of a feminism that includes disabled women to the struggle of black women to be included in feminist politics. The work of Jo Campling has focused on presenting more positive images of disabled women and encouraging disabled women to represent themselves (1981). Susan Wendell has examined the disabled body in

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<sup>2</sup> I have offered an overview of the existing work and theoretical background of disability studies in the Introduction to this thesis.

the context of theories of the body, particularly as it has impacted on feminist theory (1996). This thesis differs from the work of the dominant theorists in the field because it is concerned with representations of disability in Western culture. Some other work has been done in this field. Tom Shakespeare, for example, has looked at social prejudice against disabled people and the social control of their sexuality (1996; 1993; 1992). Leslie Fiedler examined freakish images of disabled people and in particular representations of groups such as dwarves and giants (1978; 1965). Hevey has examined images of disabled people in photography and proposed alternative strategies for the construction of images of disability (1992). However, their work has focused on a particular aspect of culture for its material: Shakespeare focuses on sexuality, Fiedler on representations of the grotesque body, and Hevey on representations in art and advertising. This thesis is more wide-ranging than existing work in its consideration of a diversity of representations and how disabled people are consistently represented throughout them. It indicates an underlying structure of the representation of disability in Western culture.

Some works have discussed a particular film, parable, or novel as part of their analysis of issues concerning disability. For example, film reviews of *Boxing Helena* may refer to the significance of her amputations. However, this analysis is framed within film theory, theology or literary criticism and so does not relate particular representations to more general structures regarding disability. My choice of popular women's magazines and pornography as material for analysis in terms of their representations of disabled bodies is original. Similar research has not been undertaken to date. I have framed my argument within the context of feminist theory. This is because feminist theory has a detailed theoretical framework within which to undertake analyses of representation. There is a large and diverse body of work in feminism that has examined how the female body is represented in Western culture. I have used this framework to develop an examination of images of disabled people in Western

culture that goes beyond the current developments in disability theory. My contention is that images of disabled people in Western culture are feminised and therefore have often had the same signification as the female body. This thesis therefore contributes to the existing work on the female body and to the existing work on the relationship of feminist politics to disability politics in the field of feminist theory. As this thesis covers a broad range of representations, I hope that it can contribute to various fields of knowledge within disability theory and feminist theory, and particularly compliment the body of work on representation that has already been completed in these fields.

During the writing of this thesis a number of issues arose. One of these concerned the acquisition of pornographic material featuring disabled figures. Although pornography depicting disabled people is advertised on the internet and in mainstream pornographic publications, for example, it is very difficult to acquire. Adult book shops or sex shops rarely stock such material, possibly because of the low numbers of consumers, and buying it through mail order necessitates sending sums of money or credit card details, often to America and to unknown companies. For a student with limited resources, this is a risky undertaking. Once membership of a group or groups has been established the material is very easily available and prolific. However, one is likely to receive unsolicited material through email from mail order companies. One is also likely to inadvertently download illegal material, as the legal status of material is not made obvious on many internet sites. This situation makes academic research problematic. In addition the lack of availability of the material in the public domain maintains an atmosphere of concealment around the material which may be perilous for the models who are involved in its production.<sup>3</sup> They are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than if they were employed in the public domain.

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<sup>3</sup> The lack of public organisation and representation of workers in the pornography industry has contributed to the lack of employees' rights that models in mainstream pornography have (Kappeler 1993: 92).



Another issue which has caused difficulties for me in writing this thesis is the lack of analytical writing about the representation of disability. As already stated above, some work has been done by Tom Shakespeare and others but it is limited in its scope and quantity, making continued usage throughout a thesis impractical for the wide-ranging analyses that I have undertaken here. As the field of knowledge of representations of disabled people is relatively young, no sustained debate has yet emerged in the way that it exists, for example, in feminist theory. What little work has been written often remains unanswered and therefore undeveloped.

There is also a conspicuous absence in the field of analyses of representations of disability in the mainstream, such as *Snow White*'s seven dwarves, for example. Work which does exist focuses on overt representations of disabled people who are often on the fringe of mainstream culture, while seeming to miss the significance of representations that reside at the centre of Western culture. When I researched representation of disabled people in popular women's magazines, for example, I found that no work existed on the subject. Images of disabled people appear in many forms and in all kinds of cultural expressions in the West. The images that enjoy the highest profile are those with the most impact on how we perceive disability and therefore should be investigated by the disability movement if a change in how disabled people are to be represented is to be achieved.

Further work is needed in this area. As well as academic analysis, research tools are needed to assist those working in this field, for example a database of films and works of literature that feature disabled characters. Such a database might list texts in which disabled characters appear and a précis of their function within the text.

This thesis has shown that further research is needed into the significance and incidence of images of disability in mainstream culture. Many images appear in the public arena which, while not overtly depicting disabled people, depict characters with bodily specificities similar

to those of disabled people. Characters such as Frankenstein's monster, for example, appear repeatedly in literature and film.<sup>4</sup> Frankenstein's monster is physically grotesque and deformed.<sup>5</sup> Witches also appear frequently in both adult and children's literature and film.<sup>6</sup> Like Frankenstein's monster, witches exhibit bodily characteristics in common with disabled people. They often have limps and hunchbacks, for example, and these physical marks signify their identity as witches and therefore as evil, malignant and dangerous to others. Evidently, there is room for comparison between the function of witches in cultural texts and the function of people with disabilities in these texts. The representation of transsexuals also shares some characteristics with the representation of disabled people as they challenge our certainties about the physical body (Epstein and Straud 1991).<sup>7</sup> Through characters such as witches, transsexuals and monsters we are presented with images of disabled people in mainstream culture far more often than we are aware. Further analysis of these images in the context of bodily specificity may help to raise awareness of the extent to which the disabled body is used in Western culture to denote negative emotional and moral characteristics.

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<sup>4</sup> The original text was written by Mary Shelley in 1818 and many films have derived their plots from the work. See, for example, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* (1973), *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973), *Frankenstein Must be Destroyed* (1969), *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1966), *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and *Frankenstein* (1931). The *Time Out Film Guide* (Ninth Edition) lists in total 16 films derived from the story of Frankenstein (2000: 1403).

<sup>5</sup> Frankenstein's creation is described in the novel as "monster", "daemon", "fiend", "creature" and "wretch" (Baldick 1995: 48), and as such is the "anti-image of Adam" (Brooks "What Is a Monster?" 1995: 89). This can be seen as a metaphor for the body politic (Baldick 1995), an expression of the "Narcissus Complex" (Kestner 1995), a "Circumvention of the Maternal" (Homans 1995), a symbol of the failure of a male creationist project (Mellor 1995; Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Levine and Knoepfelmacher 1979; Rubenstein 1976). Like other images of disabled people, Frankenstein's monster may be "a female in disguise" (Gilbert and Gubar 237).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, in adult literature *The Crucible* (Miller 1952), "The Witch of Atlas" (Shelley 1820), *The Witch* (Middleton 1616), *Macbeth* (Shakespeare 1606). In film, see for example *Witch Hunt* (1996), *The Witches* (1989), *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), *Satan's Slave* (1976), *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (1970), *Witchfinder General* (1968). For an analysis of the witch in children's literature see Chapter 3 in this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> The true freak crosses the boundaries of male and female, "sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth" (Fiedler 1981: 24). Therefore dwarves and giants challenge certainties of scale and hermaphrodites challenge certainties of sex (Fiedler 1981: 24). Humans use these symbols to deal with "our basic uncertainty about the limits of our bodies and egos" (Fiedler 1981: 27). Bearded saints are St Galla, St Paula and St Wilgeforte (Fiedler 1981: 145). Circus freak shows demonstrated a fascination with hermaphrodites (Fiedler 1981: 141-91). Bisexuality implies impotence and sterility (Fiedler 1981: 188). In *Ulysses* (1922) Leopold Bloom becomes female and Bella Cohen becomes male and androgyny is both loathsome and yearned for: it is a metaphor of impotence (Fiedler 1981: 337). 3-4% of births may be hermaphrodite (Fiedler 1981: 191).

The material that exists on the internet is particularly interesting. Although the sites (listed in Chapter 6) are presented as pornographic sites, many of the images are not pornographic in the usual sense. There are images of disabled women in sexually explicit poses but these are interspersed with images of disabled women fully clothed, walking down the street, eating in restaurants, talking with friends and undergoing surgery. The woman can be clothed, partially clothed or unclothed. Sometimes the stump is revealed and sometimes it is covered up. The models can be aware of their audience or unaware of them. They are sometimes shown as conscious of the camera and sometimes “caught on camera,” apparently without their knowledge. Some of the photographs are medical, obviously taken for medical journals and in places that only medical staff would usually have access to, operating theatres for example. The disabled woman is always the object of the gaze on these sites and the only requirement is the existence of a visible mark of amputation. Photographs of women are also mingled with photographs of amputated limbs, sometimes amputated surgically and sometimes as a result of accidents. The comprehensiveness of these images of women with amputations is rich material for further research. The development of these sites has meant that the potential audience for the material has increased radically. The constructors of the sites have evidently taken this into consideration and are attempting to attract a wide range of viewers, not just fetishists, to the sites. With medical information, chat-lines, self-help groups and contacts for organisations, these sites set out to attract disabled women to the sites. The meanings, consequences and implications of this require further research.

It is not only further research that will have an impact on how disabled people are represented in the future. Hevey has argued that images of disability in the public arena should be “written and controlled by disabled people” (100). He sees this as the only way to ensure that representations are realistic and positive. Jenny Morris has used a similar

argument (1991: 169-89). This assumes that the physicality of the producer of images influences the outcome of the representation and affects its bias (Ayesha 1999; Linton 1998). However, this supposition is not supported by an analysis of autobiographical writing by disabled people. Looking at three texts, *The God Squad* (Doyle 1988), *Emma and I* (Hocken 1977) and *Sounds Like Skipper* (Marchant 1987) it is evident that the same themes occur in these texts as in those produced by able-bodied people. In all three texts, the disability is the most salient feature of the writer. It is the principal trait which informs the writer's self-image and identity. Paddy Doyle writes of nights awake when he "prayed fervently for a cure" (119) and the structure of *The God Squad* belies the most significant periods of his life: ninety-seven pages are devoted to the five years that he spent in hospital (101-98), while only the last six pages describe his life history from then until the time of writing, a period of twenty-six years (198-204).

Sheila Hocken, who is blind, begins her autobiography with the words, "I had no idea that I could not see normally until I was about seven" (1), so determining the central theme of her life story. This narrative centres on her learning to do the things that sighted people do easily: her desire is to not be limited by her disability. Her interpretation of such limitations though, is an able-bodied one: she constantly strives to do everything that sighted people do, using every available method to narrow the gap between herself and sighted people. The able-bodied are thus clearly established as the norm, akin to liberal notions of demands for equality between men and women, where women strive to do all that men can.

Kerena Marchant, who is deaf, also starts her autobiography with a reference to her disability: "deafness is a frustrating world of silence," and it ends with the assertion that were it not for her family, friends and dog, she "would not have had the strength and courage to climb a silent wall and land on the other side" (1987: 1). With such assertions she reinforces the traditional notion of disabled people which positions their disability centrally in their

emotional lives and at the same time does nothing to negate the belief that disabled people are invariably dependent on able-bodied people for emotional, financial and physical support.

The work of Hocken, Marchant and Doyle reinforces the notion that able-bodied people are healthy and fulfilled and that their state is to be envied and striven towards. While they do not objectify disability, or use it as a metaphor for other meanings, they do seem to regard it as a legitimate site of regulation and control, and their writing is often concentrated on medical definitions the goals of which are remedial, with no alternative narrative considered or language trusted to express the experience of disability.

However, other representations by disabled people present the possibility of ambiguous or positive readings of disability. Alexander McQueen, for instance, used a range of disabled models including the disabled athlete and fashion model Aimee Mullins for a fashion shoot in 1998 for the magazine *Dazed and Confused*, and in his 1999 Spring-Summer show. Mullins is a below-the-knee double amputee who holds the world record in the 200-meter dash and took medals in the Paralympics in Atlanta in 1996. She has also made a widely publicised choice to be a fashion model. Her decision to enter an industry that has not traditionally featured disabled people made her an agent in relation to her work. Instead of subscribing to the notion that to be a model you have to be able-bodied, Mullins challenged that notion through inserting herself into the fashion world. The McQueen collection featured Mullins in a pair of prostheses specially created out of varnished wood to resemble sexy high-heeled boots, showing metal mesh dresses adorned with rhinestones, bodices and skirts in sculpted wood. McQueen claimed that he wanted Mullins's disability to go unnoticed. The collection attracted a lot of media attention for its unusual choice of model and it is clear that the collection posed a significant challenge to the industry's traditional notions of physical beauty.

In undertaking the McQueen collection, Mullins asserts that “my aim was to present the fashion and advertising worlds with an opportunity for diversity, to showcase feminine beauty in another form” ([www.wslegends.com/speakers\\_aimee\\_mullins.htm](http://www.wslegends.com/speakers_aimee_mullins.htm)). The fashion industry had not used disabled models before McQueen’s collection, but Mullins is now a much sought after model featuring in magazines such as *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Life*, *Biography*, *Glamour*, *WWD*, *Parade*, *Sports Illustrated for Women* and *Time*. Her case demonstrates that it is possible for disabled people to intervene in their representations and create alternative and positive images.

There are also a number of theatre companies that have been founded by, and predominantly employ disabled people. The most famous of these is the Graeae Theatre Company which is particularly interested in new work and adaptations of classical texts by disabled playwrights. It is revenue funded by the Arts Council of England and has introduced a policy of selective co-productions and of only touring venues that can offer full access for disabled audiences and actors. Graeae’s artistic policy has commitments to “create trailblazing professional accessible theatre”, to promote the interests of disabled actors, to support disabled writers, to encourage disabled people to attend theatre performances and to inspire them to consider the arts as a potential career ([www.red-art.org/ingles/reportUK04.htm](http://www.red-art.org/ingles/reportUK04.htm)). Their productions include *Fleshfly* (1995), *Two* (1998), *Fittings: The Last Freakshow* (1999) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (2000). The company score highly as a model of good practice. Disabled employees have the same terms and conditions of employment as professionals in the sector. The Artistic Director, the Education staff (Graeae have a training arm) and the freelance production team of the company are nearly always disabled and Graeae has achieved an international reputation for consistently producing high quality work informed by an awareness of disability issues. Other theatrical organisations exist for people with physical disabilities including the

Association for Theatre and Accessibility, Bilderwerfer, Mockbeggar Theatre Company, Theatre in Motion, the Uppity Theatre and the Wild Swan Theater [sic]. There are many high quality theatre companies targeting deaf people including The Perceptive Arts Theatre Company, ASL Storytelling Theatre, Australian Theatre of the Deaf, Bailiwick Repertory Theatre, the National Theatre of the Deaf, and also some for people with Learning Disabilities such as the Heart and Soul Musical Theatre and the Kaleidoscope Theatre, all of whom undertake pioneering work in the promotion of disability in the arts. Such representations by disabled people challenge and subvert dominant images of disabled people.

It is apparent then that the bodily constitution of the producer of images does not necessarily have to have on particular significant impact on the content and structure of the images; disabled artists may produce positive representations of disabled people that undermine traditional images, or alternatively may focus on themes such as physical incapacity which emphasise their disabilities. A significant aspect of a representation of a disabled person is the question of the extent to which that person is presented as a victim or as an agent in their own lives. Typically, positive images of disabled people tend to stress the agency of disabled people. Agency and (self-) determination also play a role in the context of the new cybertechnologies where questions of life and death in the form both of whether or not to abort disabled foetuses and whether to use gene therapy to eliminate certain forms of disability are key.

Cyber technology,<sup>8</sup> thus has specific significances for women and for disabled people.<sup>9</sup> The development of biological technology and of the internet has given women and disabled people more opportunities, for example, to represent themselves than ever before. With a pc

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<sup>8</sup> Cyber culture is a term used to include artificial intelligence, and biotechnology as well as the informations superhighway (Sardar and Ravetz 1996; Edwards 1995). Some have argued that cultural domains such as education, the body, health, work, social norms, morality, space and time have been “appropriated by discourses of science and the accompanying forms of technical and administrative organization” (Escobar 1996: 114).

<sup>9</sup> For analyses of the impact of the new information technologies on women’s lives see Penley (1999), Morritt (1998).

and a telephone line anyone can set up their own website, access vast amounts of information, and communicate with others across the globe. In the virtual universe, for instance, it is irrelevant whether or not the user has a disability and therefore the potential for egalitarian communication is immense. Those from “the margins” are catered for by the internet in a way that mainstream culture cannot (Kinney 1996: 143). An ideal vision of the new information technology developments is that of individual empowerment through access to information and agency at the touch of a keyboard. The belief that the internet is available to everyone, however, is a myth (Barry 1996; Squires 1996; Leigh 1995). It is available to and accessed by those with money, income, jobs and homes (Sardar 1996: 23). Research has shown that among children, girls use pcs and the internet less than boys (Furquer 1998). Pcs are not becoming cheaper as new software requires new hardware and old models are obsolete and therefore discontinued (Sardar 24). Most people on the internet are white, educated, male, middle-class Europeans (Sardar 24), the same demographic as for *Playboy* (Independent 1995) and the information on the internet is dominated by the United States (Kinney 143). A poll on the internet showed that it attracts “strong, aggressive, male, radical libertarian types” (Kinney 143).<sup>10</sup> It is a peculiarly Western phenomenon, although with potential for the developing world (Sardar 1996). Much of the information is not really information at all: “a great deal of this stuff is obscene; much of it is local; most of it is a deafening noise” (Sardar 24). The material is not necessarily less discriminatory than other forms of information. Pornography is widely available on the internet, largely uncensored, and varied in its exploitation of women, disabled women, black and Asian women, gay women. Women are represented in computer games as “cyberbimbos” (Sardar 24). The potential of the internet to give greater equality to marginalized groups is not, as yet, being utilized (Hales 1995): “thus

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<sup>10</sup> These types are referred to as cyberpunks. Cyberpunks are utopians; they think that the internet is the terminus of the spiritual quest “where everything is nothing more than the total embodiment of one’s reflected desires” (Sardar 34).



the totalising online character of cyberspace ensures that the marginalized stay marginalized: the external racism of Western society is echoed in cyberspace as online monoculture” (Sardar 30).<sup>11</sup>

Another aspect of cyberculture is the new biological technologies. Technology has made body plasticity possible (Bordo 1990). These new developments, including cosmetic surgery and the human genome project, are also a double-edged sword for groups who have historically been discriminated against. They have the potential to be liberating and egalitarian but also to be damaging and contribute to existing structures of disempowerment. Cosmetic surgery has been viewed by feminists as an example of male domination of the female body through medicine.<sup>12</sup> The discourse of cosmetic surgery supplies images of “desirable bodies” and norms of female beauty (Brush 35). These norms are not “normal” but are “established as the homogenous goal towards which the multiple and heterogeneous bodies of women must aspire” (Brush 35). They are also racist as the ideal is Caucasian beauty (Balsamo 1992: 212). Others have argued that cosmetic surgery is an example of female agency and choice, acting to control and determine their bodies. From this viewpoint, cosmetic surgery is not evidence of female victimisation but of women “using their bodies as a vehicle for staging cultural identities” (Balsamo 226). For example, Orlan, the French performance artist, undergoes cosmetic surgery as “radical body art” (Davis “My Body Is My Art” 1997: 168). Piercing is also a common contemporary practice among young women

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of the global village is therefore also mythical (Robins 1996; Stone 1995). The internet negates identity and community as it presents “community without its burdens” (Sardar 28-89): “A cyberspace community is self-reflecting, exactly what a real community is not; it is contingent and transient” and therefore it “protect[s] the race and gender mix of real community, from the contamination of pluralism” (Sardar 29). The quest for “absolute freedom without responsibilities, duties or burdens,” appears to be central to the internet as it is central to Western man’s being: “Cybersex promises intimacy without the necessity or even desirability of giving to another. It is a one-way street” (Sardar 36).

<sup>12</sup> For example, the medical profession often avoids issuing post-operative photos (McClellan 99). This implies that they do not want to discourage women from having cosmetic surgery which in turn implies that there exists a vested interest in women undergoing cosmetic surgery.

(Gange and Johnstone 1993).<sup>13</sup> This challenges the view of women as deluded victims of the medical system but instead presents a “utopian approach” to cosmetic surgery (Davis 1997: “My Body Is My Art” 179).

The human genome project has similarly been seen by many as increasing our control over our lives (Kitcher 1997; Marshall 1996). The project to identify the function of each gene and its relationship to the structure of the chromosome can potentially provide those with hereditary diseases in their families with knowledge and choices that could only have been dreamed of even ten years ago. A simple DNA test has replaced hereditary probability, genetic counselling and hope (Appleyard 1999). Like the developments in reproductive technology that have had mixed consequences for women, the human genome project has implications for marginalized groups that necessitate further debate.<sup>14</sup> For example, the possibility of biological agency can easily become prescriptive body management where “self-determination is not only possible, it becomes a responsibility” (Brush 36). As the use of biological technologies to alter the appearance or to determine the genetic make-up of offspring become the norm, women who do not choose it will increasingly be seen as deviant (Morgan 1991: 28). One of the difficulties of the rhetoric surrounding the decision to change the body is that it “focuses on the ‘natural’ body as inherently defective or unsatisfactory . . . The ‘natural’ body is presented as a site for improvement, a starting point which is – almost by definition – inadequate and only ever ‘potential’” (Brush 29). This is particularly true of the disabled body which is represented as defective, as sick and unhealthy, and of the female body which is perceived as “less effective” than men’s and “prone to problems” (Edwards and

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that pierced areas are usually primary sexual organs, secondary sexual characteristics, or erogenous zones, implying an association between this tendency and sexuality (Curvey 1993: 81).

<sup>14</sup> For analyses of the impact of the human genome project on minority groups see Zilinskas and Balint (2000), Murphy and Lappe (1994), Mehlman and Botkin (1998); Peters (1998).

McKie 1997: 137). Ultimately the project to rid the human race of perceived imperfection is a eugenics programme.<sup>15</sup> The perception of control and dominance of the natural body which the discourse surrounding mapping the human gene implies is a particularly Western project: “Western culture seeks liberation from the body by dissolving into the machine” whereas non-Western cultures enhance bodily awareness by directing the mind to the body through yoga, acupuncture, and so on (Sardar 36). Modern Western science wants to be a technological God – not just to understand the world but to create it (Rudberg 1997: 186).<sup>16</sup> An analysis of the meanings, implications and ownership of the new technologies, including information technology, the information superhighway, biotechnology and the human genome project, both for women and for disabled people, is necessary to allow a considered and ethical use of these possibilities. Finally, it is the newspapers that routinely cover stories

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<sup>15</sup> The Nazi Regime used the scientific theory of eugenics to give credence to the Jewish Holocaust. They used it to justify their genocide of the Jewish people in occupied countries and in Germany by mobilizing the concept of healthy and diseased races and expressing this in metaphors of Jews as parasites or as a cancer in the body of the German Volk (Proctor 1995: 173). Euthanasia was referred to as a part of the law to protect the German heritage (Gutman 1990: 964). The Nazi programme began with the forced sterilization of “Rhineland bastards”: the mixed race children of black Allied troops, the “hereditary diseased” and “habitual criminals” along with disabled “social elements”, “idiots” and “shirkers” (Gutman 451). 1939 was designated by the German government as the year of “the duty to be healthy” (Proctor 170) and the killing of the “incurably sick” between 1939 and 1941, motivated by this designation provided the first rehearsal for the Jewish holocaust (Proctor 170). Hitler therefore led the first “genocide” against disabled people (Fiedler 1981: 21). By late 1939 the programme was in full operation and had met with few objections from medical staff, who were predominantly volunteers (Gutman 452). It is estimated that up to 1939 200,000 to 350,000 were sterilized because they were suffering from genetic diseases (Gutman 958). By the end of August 1941, 70,273 people had been killed because they had mental illnesses (Proctor 171). The victims, who were also the aged, homosexuals, residents of welfare institutions and foreign workers were either gassed or died by lethal injection (Gutman 453) and in addition to their ultimate death also endured medical experimentation (Gutman 957-66). Dwarves and twins in particular could legitimately be experimented on because they were conceptualised as freakish (Gutman 964; Fiedler 1981: 254-5). This was not a peculiarly German event: the euthanasia discussion also reached its height in 1939-1941 in Europe and America and there too it was linked to eugenics (Proctor 171). Jewish people, like disabled people and gypsies, were represented by the Nazi regime as monstrous and freakish, a representation with a history in Western culture. For example “medieval and early modern Christians believed that Jewish men menstruated” (Johnson 1998: 273) and were therefore regarded as less masculine than Christians (Johnson 1998: 274).

<sup>16</sup> New technologies are an extension of Western domination of the rest of the world: “violence, advanced technology and sex have been the containers – vats – within which the West has existed for much of the second half of the millennium. In the normal course of events, the West has used these barrels to capture non-Western civilizations and cultures and then projected its own darker side onto them, portraying and describing – and therefore containing – them in terms of violence, sex, and primitive technology” (Sardar 14-15). For example, the recent case of the conjoined twins, Jodie and Mary, was constructed in the media as a tension between primitive Roman Catholic beliefs and advanced atheistic science (see Allen 2000 for an example of the coverage).

about disability and also developments which affect disabled people, such as the law and new scientific developments. It is largely this medium that presents the new technologies to the public. Its role is therefore significant in informing public opinion and by extension political debate and strategy. In many cases its representations of disabled people are similar to those in popular women's magazines, but they vary across the spectrum of available publications. In this there is material for an analysis which examines the representation of disabled people in public media.

The speed of change in technological developments is at present outstripping the processes of cultural analysis. The Human Genome Project, the internet, and biotechnologies are developing at an accelerating pace that is not being matched by the investigation of cultural theorists. Increasingly, discrepancies are created by these developments between what is possible and our sense of how we are to understand it. It is within this context that representations of disability and their gendered implications need further investigation.

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