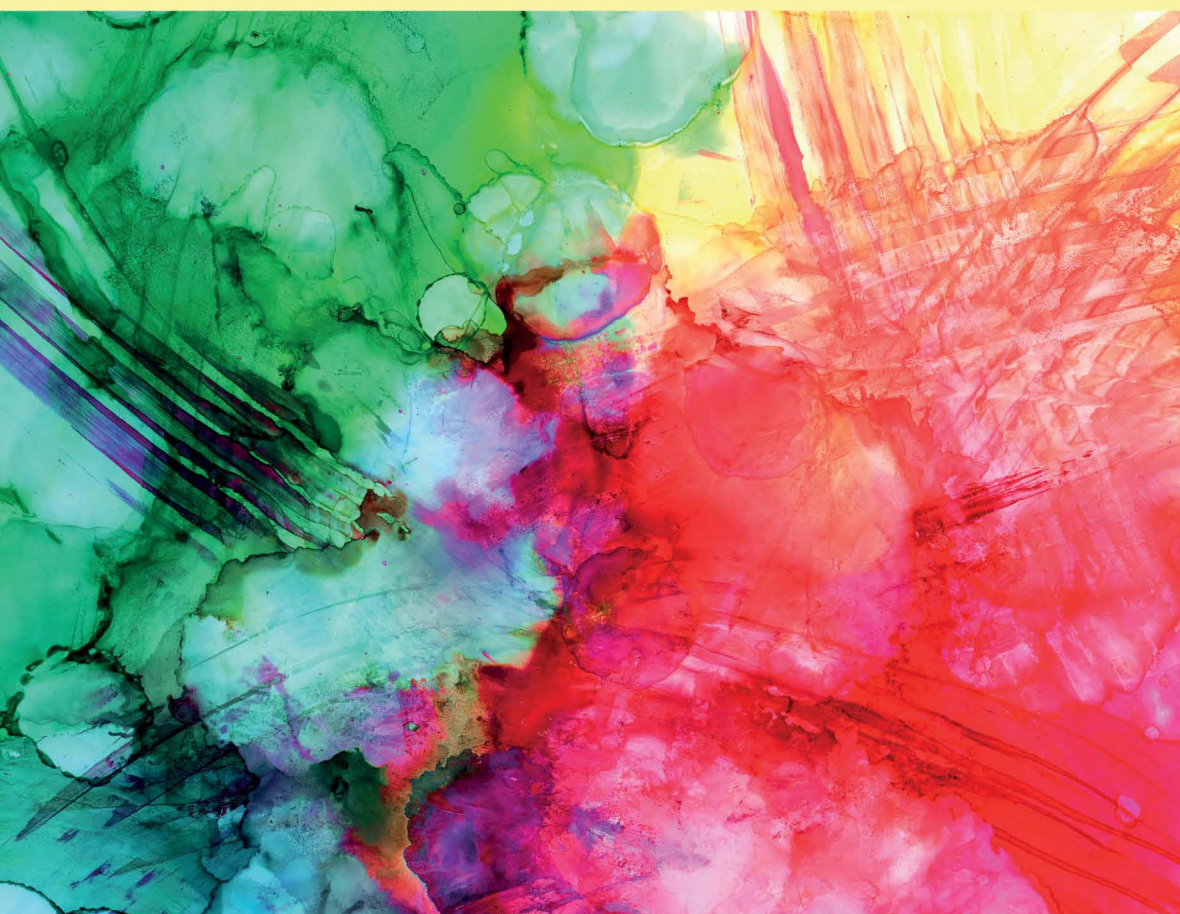


Disability, Literature, Genre

*Representation and Affect in
Contemporary Fiction*

Ria Cheyne



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in Contemporary Fiction*

Ria Cheyne

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‘Disability is the lifeblood of emotion.’
—Brian Cheyne

In memory of my dad.

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Sustained academic attention to disability in genre fiction is relatively new, but reader and fan engagement with it is not. For years, readers, writers, and others involved in genre communities have discussed and investigated disability in genre fiction: making lists of novels featuring specific disabilities or tropes; debating topics such as the appeal of the disabled detective or the erasure of disability from romance novel covers; and critiquing representations they find discomfoting or problematic. In accordance with the genre conventions of the academic book, this volume draws primarily on peer-reviewed scholarship published in academic books and journals. I am mindful of the ways in which such an approach risks ‘reproducing a reductive binary in which academic practices surrounding texts are deemed critical and nonacademic practices are deemed uncritical’ (Stephanie Moody, 120–21). I want to make clear at the outset my debt to the readers who came before me, and who shared their knowledge, insights, ideas, and frustrations.

In addition to readers and reader–critics, this project builds upon, argues with, and was inspired by the work of scholars in disability studies, literary studies, and affect studies. These intellectual debts are, I hope, adequately signalled in the pages that follow. Here I acknowledge those who provided crucial support, encouragement, and guidance. Stuart Murray and David Bolt supported my initial forays into cultural disability studies; in the intervening years, their belief in my work has sustained me when my confidence faltered. My compatriots Laura Waite, Irene Rose, and Clare Barker have supported this project—and me—wholeheartedly, over a number of years. At Liverpool Hope University I have benefited from sharing ideas and experiences with wonderful colleagues in disability studies and literary

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Introduction: Affective Encounters and Reflexive Representations

Disability makes us feel. This is what guarantees its perpetual representation in literature, art, film, television programmes, video games, and other forms of cultural production. Whether it is encountered in representation or reality, adhering to one's own body or someone else's, disability evokes and invokes a host of affective responses that blur the boundaries between emotion, sensation, and cognition. Disability encounters are affective encounters, and while those encounters may produce discrete, recognisable emotions (such as pity, inspiration, acceptance, or desire), more often the feelings disability generates are complex and difficult to parse. In contemporary culture, too, such feelings are increasingly bound up with and complicated by meta-feelings or meta-emotions: how you feel about how you feel. This book examines the affective—and effective—power of disability representations in contemporary genre fiction, offering an 'affectively attuned criticism' of disability and of genre (Thraikill 17).

In calling for scholars to engage with disability and genre fiction on affective terms, I assert that both the disability encounter and the process of reading genre fiction are always already affective. Affect is a crucial part of how both books and bodies are read. Readers and writers expect that genre texts will facilitate a particular affective experience or trajectory, and these shared expectations are a crucial part of genre fiction's importance as a site of disability representations. As the chapters of this book explore, the affects invoked by disability intersect genre affects in multiple ways: from enhancing desired affects and thus the reader's pleasure, to creating an affective conflict or confusion which, while it may also be pleasurable, may disrupt or unsettle disability's associations. At the same time,

contemporary genre fiction is always reflexive fiction, meta-genre fiction that explicitly or implicitly comments upon genre history and context. This reflexivity makes genre fiction particularly suited to the exploration of how disability is conventionally narrativised, and enables the creation of representations which act as a powerful catalyst for readerly reflection. This combination of affectivity and reflexivity takes unique forms in contemporary genre fiction, and genre fiction's handling of disability diverges in important ways from that found in other types of literature. This book examines the intersection of disability and genre in works of horror, crime, science fiction, fantasy, and romance published from the late 1960s onwards, with three key aims: to demonstrate that a disability-informed approach can offer new and transformative insights into the workings of genre; to establish genre fiction as a key site of investigation for disability studies; and to demonstrate the value of an affective approach to both disability and genre.

Though genres are not infallible affect-generating machines,¹ affect is at the heart of genre fiction's powerful appeal for readers.² It is not just that readers of genre fiction are always 'reading with feeling', to adopt Susan L. Feagin's term, or that they are especially adept at securing particular kinds of affective experience through fiction, though both of these things are true. Rather, genre fiction differs from mainstream or literary fiction in that the desire to experience a particular kind of feeling is the underpinning motivation for genre reading—in other words, the feeling drives the reading.³ I position

- 1 My assumptions about genre and affect are broadly similar to those of Warhol, who reads popular forms such as the sentimental novel and the soap opera as 'technologies of affect' (7). Warhol adopts a performative model under which 'the physical signs of emotion are not expressions or reflections of an interior state' but 'constitutive elements of the emotion itself' (18). She therefore focuses on affects perceptible to an external observer (such as crying, yawning, and laughing). I assume that affects are not necessarily perceptible to an observer, and that they may be expressed in a variety of ways.
- 2 In framing genre as affective I build upon the work of Berlant, who defines a genre as 'an aesthetic structure of affective expectation, an institution or formation that absorbs all kinds of small variations or modifications while promising that the persons transacting with it will experience the pleasure of encountering what they expected, with details varying the theme' (*The Female Complaint* 4). Though Berlant offers some consideration of popular genre forms, her primary interest is in cultural rather than specifically literary genres—in femininity as a genre, for example.
- 3 For alternative perspectives linking affect and genre, see Ngai, Vermeulen, and Berlant. Ngai examines particular 'ugly feelings' through the forms

genre reading as a form of what Margaret Wetherell terms *affective practice*, 'a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning-making and with other social and material figurations' (19).⁴ Affective practice is about the everyday and mundane, rather than the extreme or extraordinary; it is ongoing, and 'every member of society possesses a wide-ranging, inarticulate, utilitarian knowledge' of it (Wetherell 78).

The five genres examined in this book have diverse histories, conventions, and connotations, but they all aim to elicit characteristic affective responses, or patterns of affective response, in their readers. Though affect involves 'bodily, sensory, inarticulate, nonconscious experience', the quest for affect can nonetheless be 'planned, self and other regulated, narrated, agentic and negotiated' (Gould 20; Wetherell 115). Readers' encounters with genre fiction are driven by an affective desire or hunger, which may be fully conscious or only incompletely intuited.⁵ Lauren Berlant suggests that genre involves 'a loose affectual contract that predicts the form that an aesthetic transaction will take' ('Intuitionists' 847), and for genre fiction the key word is 'loose'. While some readers know exactly how they want texts in their favoured genres to make them feel, others may articulate their experience in different terms or frame their enjoyment in terms of the pleasure they take in favoured tropes or subgenres.⁶ However, all kinds of reader feel displeasure, or at least a reduction in their enjoyment, when a genre text fails to provide the anticipated affective experience.

We can therefore understand genre fiction as fiction that works to produce an anticipated affective experience by means of characteristic

and genres they generate, but her primary focus is on those feelings (24). Vermeulen draws on Berlant's work to claim that 'Genres are defined by particular modes of emotive address', but his interest in genre stops at the level of 'the novel' as genre (6).

4 Wetherell argues that affect is best understood by shifting the focus from unhelpfully abstract conceptualisations of affect to a notion of *affective practice*, which 'focuses on the emotional as it appears in social life [...] It finds shifting, flexible and often over-determined figurations rather than simple lines of causation, character types and neat emotion categories' (4).

5 Though the term 'desire' might suggest a psychoanalytic approach, like Warhol I 'detach the affective experiences of reading from the sexually defined notion of desire' (62).

6 Some established subgenres, such as romantic suspense, are effectively genre hybrids, and can productively be read in terms of affective combinations. Others, like the cosy detective novel, offer particular variations on primary genre affects.

tropes, devices, icons, or storylines.⁷ Authors and editors work to satisfy readers' desire for affect, creating texts which produce the desired feelings through the deployment of specific plot patterns, tropes, themes, and motifs. This book examines how the most significant popular literary genres produce particular affective responses and the role of disability within these affective systems. Of course, affects, like meanings, 'are not simply locked up within texts but produced at the juncture of text, context and reader' (Pepper 81). It is a truism that reading is complex, individual, and mediated. The affective theory of genre proposed here is in a broad sense a theory of reader response, but it might more precisely be framed as a theory of affective intent.⁸ It focuses on the ways in which texts from a particular genre create (or attempt to create) affects anticipated by the genre community, rather than individual readers' affective responses.⁹ As Matt Hills points out in his study of horror, any attempt to attribute genre based on the 'emotional disposition of the specific reader/viewer [...] misses the fact that audiences [...] may evaluate entirely non-scary horror texts as "bad" or "failed" horror, but as horror nonetheless' (34). A text can fail to produce fearful affects for a particular reader, but this does not mean that the reader necessarily understands that text as not-horror. 'Horror' thus refers to the feeling that the genre 'characteristically or rather ideally promotes', rather than one it invariably generates (Carroll 14).

Horror is an instructive example because it is a genre already widely understood in terms of affect as aiming to create sensations of fear, discomfort, and (of course) horror.¹⁰ Horror has 'a *generic obligation* to evoke or produce fear' (Baldick and Mighall 222).¹¹ The genre is widely theorised as producing responses in readers that go beyond the purely cognitive or intellectual. Noël Carroll writes that the feelings horror

7 In some texts, authors deliberately disrupt or withhold the anticipated affective experience. While such texts might appear to offer a break with the genre's affective conventions, they are still working in relation to and are reliant upon those conventions. For example, postmodern detective fictions that refuse resolution can only function successfully if the dominant expectation is that detective fiction *will* provide resolution.

8 For a similar point see Reyes, 'Gothic Affect', 16.

9 For a useful contextualising discussion see Warhol 21–22.

10 This fear is often conceived of in psychoanalytic terms, either in terms of a Freudian return of the repressed or in Kristevan terms as the fear of the abject. For a detailed discussion of horror scholarship see Hills.

11 Baldick and Mighall refer specifically to Gothic horror, but their point holds more broadly.

produces involve body as well as mind: the ‘cognitive states’ evoked by art-horror ‘generate some sort of physical agitation’, from ‘tremblings and stomach churning’ to ‘tingling sensations or a heightened physical sense of apprehension, alertness, or foreboding’ (53).¹² Readers engage with horror texts in multiple ways and on multiple levels—including the corporeal—and these processes cannot be untangled without oversimplifying readers’ engagement with the genre. The same holds for the other genres examined in this book.¹³

In much the same way as the affirmative model of disability rejects negative framings of disability as a problem or tragedy, instead positioning disability as a ‘positive identity’ (Swain and French 578), an affective model of genre frames genre fiction positively, rather than as the marginalised other of canonical, literary, or mainstream fiction. It provides an underpinning logic for considering these five genres together, beyond the obvious verities of their shared popularity and similar position in the literary–cultural marketplace. This framing of genre involves a break with most existing genre fiction scholarship—both the traditions focusing on individual genres and the body of work considering ‘genre fiction’ as a category. It therefore allows me to omit much of the ground-clearing work with which scholarly works on genre traditionally begin. However, the following chapters will demonstrate that an affective model of genre is entirely compatible with key insights from genre scholarship, as well as strands of thought from the critical histories of particular genres.

An affective view of genre fiction involves certain assumptions about how genre works, as well as problematising some enduring concepts in genre scholarship. Most obviously, genre-specific expectations, affective or otherwise, are dependent on the reader having some idea of the generic identity of the text.¹⁴ Much previous genre

12 Carroll makes a distinction between art-horror and ‘natural horror’ (the emotion felt in response to factual, rather than fictional, horrific events) not pursued here (14).

13 For discussion of the ways in which particular film genres work on the body see Williams, who argues that horror, melodrama, and pornography are ‘body genres’ (a term borrowed from Carol Clover): genres that ‘promise to be sensational, to give our bodies an actual physical jolt’ (2). For applications of Williams’ work in a disability studies context, see Snyder and Mitchell’s *Cultural Locations of Disability* (chapter 5), Gill, and Carr.

14 As Eaglestone notes, ‘you can *always* judge a contemporary novel [...] by its cover’ (location 540). For readers, generic cues trigger a set of expectations that significantly shape their encounter with the text. These cues may be extra-textual (such as cover art, back cover copy, or e-book category

scholarship relies upon two constructs: the expert or experienced reader of genre fiction, who has read widely in a particular genre, is familiar with its tropes and conventions, and occupies a privileged interpretive position; and the naïve or inexperienced reader, who lacks this expertise and thus has a different kind of reading experience, often assumed to be inferior.¹⁵ For contemporary genre literature, though, the dichotomy between the naïve and expert reader is unhelpful, because it fails to take account of the fact that readers may have a deep understanding of the tropes and affects of particular genres through their encounters with them in other media, such as film, television, or games.¹⁶ While I do not wish to flatten the differences between instantiations of genre in different media forms, contemporary readers' engagements with genre fiction are undoubtedly informed and shaped by genre texts they have encountered in non-literary modes. This means that a reader may have clear expectations of the features a genre text should have, and the affects it should evoke, without having much (or indeed any) experience of that genre's literary manifestations. For example, A.P. Canavan argues that role-playing games have an important influence on contemporary fantasy fiction, identifying key writers who are gamers and asserting that 'Games, gamers, and game designers have become part of the dialogue through which the genre is defined.' It follows that consumers of fantasy may have a highly developed awareness of the conventions of the genre without having read extensively in fantasy literature.¹⁷ In other words, those who might traditionally have been

descriptors) or within the text (such as style, setting, or character types). As Todorov writes, 'readers read in function of the generic system, with which they are familiar thanks to criticism, schools, the book distribution system, or simply by hearsay; however, they do not need to be conscious of this system' (19).

- 15 See, for example, Thomas J. Roberts, and Selinger and Frantz on romance. Chapter 6 of Gerhart discusses what she terms 'generic competence' (160).
- 16 In a similar vein, Roach can assume that her readers are 'astute and well-informed readers' of romance: 'Even if you don't read actual romance novels [...] you sop up this storyline through your daily doses of pop culture and have done so since you were a child' (10).
- 17 In a similar vein, Sawyer argues that the population familiar with the 'icons' of science fiction is much larger than the population of science fiction readers. His assertion is borne out by my experience teaching courses on genre fiction. Typically, I begin by asking students what they already know about the genre in question. Even where students claim not to have read any works from that genre, they are able to generate lists of tropes, character types, and plot patterns.

positioned as naïve or inexpert readers may in fact have a high level of generic expertise—which includes specific expectations of genre affects.

Framing genre fiction in terms of affect has far-reaching consequences for genre scholarship. This book focuses on the intersection of disability with the affective strategies of specific popular genres. Genre context shapes and inflects disability representations in ways that have not hitherto been examined,¹⁸ influencing how and when disability is invoked or depicted. At the same time, images and narratives of disability form a crucial part of the affective repertoire of genre fiction: in romance, for example, disability is often cured as a means of enhancing the happily-ever-after ending. Each genre examined in this book has characteristic disability icons: recurring figures which have a particular affective resonance or charge in that genre context.¹⁹ For example, horror's disability icons include the deformed monster, the psychotic villain, and the vulnerable blind character, while romance's disability icons include the wounded hero, the plucky heroine, and the

18 For discussion of disability as a generic marker, see my 'Freaks and Extraordinary Bodies'. Works which examine disability representation in a specific genre are noted in the relevant chapters, though genre texts are often analysed with little or no consideration of genre (for examples see Davis 20–22, and chapter 5 of Bolt's *The Metanarrative of Blindness*). Some works in cultural disability studies have gestured towards the significance of genre as a factor in disability representation—Quayson, for example, writes that 'generic conventions serve to situate the disabled characters differently from genre to genre' (35)—but Wilde's recent book on film, comedy, and disability is one of very few works to make genre a central focus. Other discussions of genre (also in the context of film) can be found in Murray's *Representing Autism*, Snyder and Mitchell's *Cultural Locations of Disability* and Church's 'Fantastic Films, Fantastic Bodies'. Snyder and Mitchell discuss patterns of disability representation in comedy, horror, and melodrama; Murray examines how genre conventions may work to contain disability as a source of threat or concern in narratives of autism; while Church offers a detailed discussion of disability in fantastic film (broadly defined) as well as in specific genres. In a different vein, Schalk's analysis of the 'supercrip' as narrative type emphasises genre and medium as key factors in how supercrip narratives are created and received ('Reevaluating the Supercrip').

19 Wolfe argues that elements such as the spaceship, the city, and the robot are more than stereotypes or conventional settings in science fiction, functioning instead as 'recurrent iconic images' containing 'the dynamic tensions between known and unknown' central to the genre (*The Known and the Unknown* 16). My conception of the disability icon shares with Wolfe's formulation the idea of icons as having 'emotional power', and iconographies as genre-specific and evolving over time (17).

needy disabled child. These emotive figures appear in other types of narrative, but in genre fiction they function as affective nodes, underpinning and enhancing characteristic genre affects. Disability icons are embedded within and embody familiar narratives or tropes.²⁰ The wounded hero of romance is embedded within a story of heroism or sacrifice—sacrifice that will, in due course, be rewarded by true love. The psychotic villain of horror cues a fearful narrative of danger or death. Such figures play an important role in shaping the reader's affective experience.

Affect and the Disability Encounter

Affect is fundamental to the workings of genre, but it is also central to the disability encounter, and affect theory provides a rich and generative vocabulary for analysing the ways disability is experienced and encountered. Affect encompasses the complexity of the feelings involved in the disability encounter: affects are inherently unwieldy, intractable, and impure, resisting precise definition.²¹ The term 'affect' also draws attention to the way that disability encounters are never just of the mind or just of the body. Margaret Price borrows the term *bodymind* from trauma studies, using it to emphasise 'the imbrication

20 Disability icons are not static: new icons may emerge, or others lose their iconic status, as genres (and feelings about disability) evolve over time. Thus, while the cognitively exceptional disabled detective is a longstanding icon in crime fiction, a specific variant upon this figure has attained iconic status since the turn of the century: the neurodivergent detective whose investigatory skills are inseparable from their disability.

21 There are almost as many definitions of affect and its relationship to emotion in scholarly circulation as there are scholars working on the subject; for a recent overview see Goodley, Liddiard, and Runswick-Cole. Ngai understands the difference between affect and emotion as 'a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than a formal difference of quality or kind' (27). However, other scholars of affect assume a clear distinction between affect and emotion. Gould views emotions as only approximations to affects, always inadequate to encompass them: the translation from affect to emotion 'diminishes potential' and is always reductive (21). However, Gould acknowledges that affective experience triggers cognitive efforts to understand what one is feeling by conceptualising it in terms of known emotions, and that in practice 'affect and emotions usually are simultaneously in play and can be difficult to distinguish' (22). In order to discuss how the affects of disability and genre work 'in actual bodies and social actors', I use the vocabulary of emotion as a convenience which makes it easier to talk about what affect might do 'in concrete terms' (Wetherell 159, 160).

(not just the combination) of the entities usually called “body” and “mind” (“The Bodymind Problem’ 270). Affects always work on the bodymind; indeed, the notion of bodymind is implicit within the notion of affect, and vice versa.²²

Affect is widely framed by scholars as having transformative potentials. The title of Deborah Gould’s *Moving Politics* captures the way in which political and social change is often catalysed by individuals being moved or *affected*. For Gould, the indeterminacy of affect means that it has particular (radical and transformative) potentials, which can ‘be used, directed, mobilized—in a variety of nonpredetermined ways’ (21). The idea of transformation is inherent in the very notion of affect: affect presupposes some form of transformative experience, however temporary or trivial. Affective and emotional factors are often much more powerful at changing minds and attitudes, and challenging prejudice, than arguments based in reason and logic. As Mark Bracher writes, ‘The emotions and other forms of nonpropositional knowledge are key [to prejudice], because social action is often driven much more by these forms of knowledge about other people than by propositional knowledge or belief’ (11). Wetherell, paraphrasing Berlant, observes that ‘we are trained to believe that good arguments matter but social and political change seems more frequently based on emotional valence’ (141). While awareness of injustice does not necessarily lead to social change,²³ an affective engagement can be a step in that direction.²⁴

Like most scholars in humanities-based disability studies, I understand ‘disability’ as a complex attribute arising from the intersection of bodyminds with the natural or built environment, social expectations, systemic barriers, and cultural norms. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, ‘the various interactions between bodies and world make disability from the raw material of human variation and precariousness’ (‘The Politics of Staring’ 75). Disability is perceived—or, more precisely, ascribed—on the basis of an interpretation of

22 See Orlando 106–07 for a similar argument.

23 See Kolářová 268.

24 Disability activism, and indeed social justice activism more broadly, has a complicated relationship with affect. The investment of activists and allies is often driven by feeling, but displays of emotion perceived as excessive may undermine the group’s ability to achieve meaningful change. Disability activists are likely to be particularly mindful of the ways in which levels of emotionality perceived as inappropriate are pathologised; some disabled people may also find it difficult or impossible to display an ‘appropriate’ level of affect.

particular bodies or behaviours. Disability is thus a meaning-making process and therefore affective in the relatively trivial sense that 'all meaning-making is affective' (Wetherell 96). Prevailing understandings of disability position it as an individual biological deficit, understand disabled people as worthy of pity, and assume that cures or therapies should be utilised if available. We live in what Robert McRuer terms a 'system of compulsory able-bodiedness' and, in such a system, the dominant assumption is 'that we all agree: able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferable' (2, 9). The field of disability studies aims to challenge such assumptions.²⁵

As Alison Kafer writes, compulsory able-bodiedness should be paired with 'compulsory able-mindedness' (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 16). Exceptional minds and extraordinary bodies both generate affective responses. Disability studies scholars have identified the ways in which encounters between disabled people and nondisabled people involve a range of emotional and sensational responses on both sides,²⁶ placing a burden of emotional labour on the disabled person.²⁷ While the paradigmatic disability encounter might be understood as an encounter between a disabled person and a nondisabled one,²⁸ the notion of the disability encounter, as I use it in this book, is broader

25 As Price writes, adopting a disability studies perspective may itself involve 'a disorienting shift away from presumptions of tragedy, courage or brokenness' (*Mad at School* 4). In other words, it may involve an unsettling affective shift.

26 Garland-Thomson writes that in order to be granted 'fully human status', 'disabled people must use charm, intimidation, ardor, deference, humor, or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort' (*Extraordinary Bodies* 13). Disabled people have to perform disability in particular culturally sanctioned ways to defuse or manage the affective responses it generates.

27 *Emotional labour* is Hochschild's term for 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' (7). Hochschild distinguishes between emotional labour, which is 'sold for a wage' in the workplace, and *emotion work* or *emotion management*, its parallel in non-wage earning or private contexts (7). For an exploration of emotion work in disabled people's lives see Liddiard. I use the term *emotional labour* here to highlight that a disabled person's skill at managing their emotions may be a key determinant of their ability to gain access to, and their success within, the labour market.

28 Disability encounters can equally be between disabled people, or involve a single individual, and I do not mean to privilege a nondisabled perspective here. My positioning of the encounter between disabled person and nondisabled person as paradigmatic reflects the fact that this type of encounter has received the greatest amount of scholarly attention to date (for an account of selected critical work see Bolt, 'Social Encounters, Cultural Representation and Critical Avoidance'). For an example of a disabled person's affective response to encountering disability see Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 45.

and encompasses moments when disability is claimed, embodied, disavowed, or rendered perceptible or imperceptible. Such occurrences always carry an affective freight. I divide disability encounters into three categories, though these are not mutually exclusive, nor are their boundaries entirely distinct.²⁹ Interpersonal disability encounters involve an encounter with another person to whose bodymind disability adheres, an encounter in which one or both sides perceive disability as present.³⁰ They might be encounters between multiple disabled people. While such encounters may involve the outward signs of negative affect (the averted glance, the quick exit, the palpable discomfort), this category also encompasses moments of solidarity between disabled people, including times when disability is claimed or embraced.

Individual or personal disability encounters involve the experience of or encounter with disability as it adheres to one's own bodymind, including pain, fatigue, and mental states coded as abnormal. The category includes situations where a disabled person confronts structural barriers or a lack of access. Yet individual disability encounters may also include moments of gratification, as when David Bolt writes of the pleasure he feels when someone notices if he is the first to hear a taxi arriving outside—a pleasure not erased by his awareness of the complex effects of the stereotype of blind people having 'extraordinary senses' (*The Metanarrative of Blindness* 12). As well as moments of awareness, individual disability encounters also encompass moments of disavowal and times when invisibly or ambiguously disabled persons must choose between declaring disability or passing—or occasions when that choice is taken from them.³¹

The final category, the representational disability encounter, is the focus of this book. While this type of encounter most obviously includes readers' or viewers' encounters with disability representations as they read, view, listen, or game, the representational encounter also includes occasions where disability metaphors are invoked or disablist language used. Texts themselves, of course,

29 Chandler's account of falling provides an excellent illustration of the ways in which different kinds of disability encounter are intertwined: 'Painfully I fall into disability as I am introduced to and recognized as disability, again and for the first time, in the midst of others...'

30 Disability also adheres to those in close relationships with disabled people. As Kafer writes, 'friends and family members of disabled people are often affected by ableist attitudes and barriers' (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 8).

31 For an alternative model which also foregrounds the emotional, see work on psycho-emotional disablism by Thomas (*Female Forms*) and Reeve.

can depict all kinds of disability encounter, and disability studies scholars have long observed that encounters with fictional disabled characters influence attitudes and behaviours in real-world encounters with disabled people. Ato Quayson argues that the ‘epistemological effect of representation is quite different from the emotional effects of misunderstanding and stereotyping in the real world [...] the first may be used to illuminate aspects of the second but must not be taken to have exhausted or replaced it’ (30). When our focus shifts to the emotional or affective aspects of representations, though, it is unproductive to try and maintain a firm distinction between different kinds of disability encounter.

Disability studies has long sought to achieve recognition of the fact that disability is not a niche or minority interest, but a topic of vital importance to all people, whatever their disability status.³² A focus on the disability encounter, thus defined, makes clear that our lives are a succession of disability encounters; frequent disability encounters are an inevitable element of *all* human lives. Scholarly work on disability’s relationship with affect or emotion has often focused on negative emotions such as discomfort, distress, or pity,³³ or has demonstrated suspicion of any kind of emotional response to disability. However, it is important to acknowledge that disability encounters can equally involve ‘positive’ feelings such as admiration, pride, or hope—though part of my project is to unsettle this binary division. Tobin Siebers writes that ‘the disabled body and mind always elicit powerful emotions’ (*Disability Aesthetics* 10).³⁴ Disability’s difference from the putatively neutral territory of the norm ensures that disability produces affect in all types of disability encounter. Though these affects can sometimes be predicted or anticipated, they are highly context-dependent.³⁵

32 Typically, this has been achieved by citing statistics about the proportion of disabled people in the population, asserting that all people will become disabled if they live long enough, or demonstrating the ways in which disability is bound up with other identificatory categories.

33 See, for example, Quayson, who notes the ‘embarrassment, fear, and confusion that attend the disabled in their everyday reality’ (19).

34 See Holmes for discussion of how social and cultural factors in Victorian Britain produced and encouraged the association between disability and feeling.

35 Wetherell rightly criticises sociological research on affect which presents social actors ‘as operating like jukeboxes. Press the right buttons and the affective tunes appropriate to status, position and habitus will blare out’ (114).

In the British disability studies tradition, a distinction between *disability* and *impairment* is foundational to that movement's core concept, the social model of disability. The social model holds that people with impairments are disabled by social, structural, and attitudinal barriers. The person who does not perceive visually, or who uses assisted communication, or is paralysed, *has* an impairment, but has disability imposed upon them.³⁶ 'Disabled person' is understood as shorthand for a person disabled by structural barriers, inaccessible environments, or negative attitudes. Impairment, then, can be understood as value-neutral physical or psychological difference: difference which is not understood as deviance. Many scholars, including those working outside the UK tradition, use 'impairment' to signal a non-stigmatising approach to physical or psychological difference. In this book I use the term 'disability' throughout, partly in recognition of the fact that 'it is hard to separate impairment from disability in the everyday lives of disabled people' (Shakespeare 23), but primarily to emphasise that, from an affective standpoint, our encounters with corporeal or neurological difference are always encounters with disability, rather than impairment. Impairment is value-neutral, but our encounters with difference always come with a freight of cultural value attached, a weight of past experiences, associations, and assumptions; we cannot perceive disability neutrally or unaffectedly. This holds for all types of disability encounter and experience. From an affective standpoint, impairment can only be hypothesised, never encountered.

Disability Studies, Emotion, and Exploitation

Affect, then, offers a particularly useful way of thinking about disability experiences and encounters. Disability studies needs to examine the effects of affects—how what we feel in disability encounters shapes attitudes and behaviours. The engagement with affect and emotion in disability studies has been both limited and sporadic, though a new body of scholarly work is just beginning to emerge.³⁷

36 For a useful overview of the social model and its significance see Thomas, 'Disability and Impairment'. For a critique of the social model and the disability/impairment distinction, see Shakespeare, especially chapter 2.

37 In a piece published in 2013, Orlando writes that so far 'there has been little exploration of affectivity and emotion in disability studies scholarship' (101). For disability studies work that engages with emotion prior to

Elizabeth J. Donaldson and Catherine Prendergast, editors of a 2011 special issue of the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* on emotion, use ‘There’s No Crying in Disability Studies!’ as the subtitle for their introduction. While their statement is meant ironically—the piece clearly demonstrates that there *is* crying in Disability Studies, and calls for a greater engagement with emotion—it illustrates the way in which the work that does exist on affect and emotion tends to enact an unspoken divide between acceptable and unacceptable affects.³⁸ Pride, anger, or a sense of community or solidarity are perceived as legitimate feelings, whether in the context of personal experience or scholarly engagement. Pity, fear, shame, and disgust are illegitimate, and the only acceptable engagement with them comes in the form of critique (for example, of media images that use disability to evoke such emotions or in narratives of feelings prior to discovering disability activism).³⁹ It is not that the field has ignored affect and emotion, but that its engagement with them has been channelled in particular, limiting, ways.⁴⁰

2013, see Shildrick, Reeve, Price’s *Mad at School*, Matthews, and Hughes; for more recent scholarship see Elman, as well as Goodley, Liddiard, and Runswick-Cole.

- 38 For a useful related discussion, see Price, who observes that typically ‘the undesirable goes unmentioned’ in feminist disability studies (‘The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain’ 276). Kolářová troubles the idea of affects as singular in her discussion of shame.
- 39 For a brief but nuanced exploration see Chandler, who writes that ‘Disability pride does not always write over the stories of shame—stories of frustration, pain and humiliation—with new ones full of satisfaction with one’s way of being-in the world’. For further discussion see Kafer, who concludes that ‘A cripp refusal to see disability as tragedy, as traumatic, can be just as restricting on our politics and our theories as the ableist insistence that disability is always and only tragic’ (‘Un/Safe Disclosures’ 6).
- 40 As Orlando states, the work on emotion and affect that does exist in disability studies ‘often call[s] attention to the presence or influence of negative affect’ (102). Shildrick notes ‘the negativity associated with those who are differently embodied’ (7), while Donaldson and Prendergast write that a main focus of their special issue is the recuperation of emotions which have previously been ‘devalued or flagged as problematic in Disability Studies’ (132). Chrisman’s article in that issue, for example, recuperates inspiration for disability studies, positioning it as ‘valuable, rhetorically strategic emotion’ (184). Though Chrisman’s article does important work, it—and indeed the issue as a whole—ultimately remains fixed in a pattern of binary thinking where particular emotions are either ‘productive’ or ‘valuable’ for disability studies, or not (180, 184). Inspiration is moved to a hypothetical check-list of productive disability emotions, while fear, pity, shame, etcetera, remain on the naughty list.

This is also the case in cultural disability studies,⁴¹ and particularly so for literary disability studies, which is heir to a dual legacy of suspicion of affect. From disability studies, literary disability studies inherits a general suspicion of emotion and an unwillingness to engage with particular emotions. From literary studies, it inherits a set of negative assumptions about explicitly emotive texts. Despite important work revaluing affective, sentimental, and sensational texts,⁴² devaluing overtly emotional or affective texts remains the norm rather than the exception within literary studies. Texts that are perceived as manipulating the emotions, or as excessively emotive, tend to be viewed with suspicion. Particularly in the context of contemporary literary studies, there is no more cutting criticism than to describe an author's work as 'sentimental'.⁴³

The result is a suspicion of emotive texts within literary disability studies and in particular of texts where disability is used to generate affect. As with the broader field of disability studies, it is not that literary and cultural disability studies has ignored affect or emotion, but that most existing work has been shaped by a set of largely unquestioned assumptions about the relationship between narrative, disability, and emotion. In parallel with the common critical deployment of Mitchell and Snyder's concept of *narrative prosthesis*—often used in a shorthand way to designate 'problematic' images or uses of disability⁴⁴—affecting images of disability in literature are often perceived as a kind of *emotional prosthesis*, a tool to enhance the affective impact of the narrative, and thus as inherently problematic

41 Though some scholars use *cultural disability studies* synonymously with *humanities-based disability studies*, to denote scholarship across the humanities that embraces the ideological goals of disability studies, I understand cultural disability studies as combining the activist imperative of disability studies with the analysis of particular forms of cultural production. Cultural disability studies embraces the struggle to break down disabling barriers, and focuses on examining the role disability plays in texts of all kinds, with the aim of better understanding both disability and the texts themselves—and by extension, the genre or medium those texts function in. Literary disability studies is the branch of cultural disability studies focusing on literature.

42 See, for example, Tompkins and Burdett. For an important reframing of the sentimental, see Berlant's *The Female Complaint*.

43 For a detailed discussion of the prejudice against sentimentality see Warhol 32–40. Warhol's discussion is particularly helpful in drawing out the ways in which emotional responses to high and popular cultural forms have been understood differently.

44 See Bérubé, *The Secret Life of Stories*, 44–45.

and/or exploitative of disability.⁴⁵ Where the field engages with such representations at all, they are positioned as of interest only in specific circumstances, after being legitimised, reclaimed, or recuperated. Yet this recuperative drive in itself signals the potentials that are opened up when readers engage affectively with narratives of disability.⁴⁶ In a critical sleight-of-hand, representations that provoke a productive emotional engagement are removed from the 'prosthetic' (negative) category and repositioned as worthy of critical consideration.⁴⁷

The end result of these critical practices is an ingrained suspicion of emotive texts and images of disability in cultural disability studies, meaning that the field's engagement with the affects invoked by images of disability has been restricted.⁴⁸ This suspicion is sometimes justified: the invocation of disability in narratives to generate emotion *is* often problematic, and *can* have harmful consequences. I argue, though, that the focus should be on analysing, rather than decrying, the narrative deployment of disability for affect. Rather than dismissing emotive depictions of disability as inherently exploitative, a more productive starting point is to see them as inevitable and to investigate disability's complex affective power. Martha Stoddard Holmes, in her study of disability in Victorian texts, observes that even today 'Disability is still emotional shorthand, a word where sorrow, suspicion, and a host of other emotions love to cling' (194). We need a better understanding of how and why particular emotions 'cling' to particular disability images and narratives, and examining genre fiction can help to achieve this.

Genre fiction provides a rich body of representations of disability that function as part of a codified affective system. We understand, at least broadly, what genre fictions are trying to make the reader feel, meaning that it is possible to examine how disability functions

45 Such emotive images of disability are viewed as being divorced from the reality of life with disability, as providing unrealistic or inauthentic representations, or as diverting attention from the interests and struggles of disabled people. See, for example, Bérubé, 'Disability and Narrative', 570.

46 For an important related counter-argument, see Keen.

47 Sklar's article includes the heading 'Sympathy for the Disabled: Narrative Prosthetic or Genuine Emotional Engagement?' (143). As the 'or' makes clear, the assumption is that a representation which provides a 'genuine emotional engagement' by definition *cannot* be prosthetic.

48 While critics do on some occasions map the affective resonances of depictions of disability, it is generally either to criticise or to recuperate (for example, by observing that the disabled character is complex, or has agency).

within a larger affective system. Genre fiction also reminds us of the complexity of disability's affects. While genre narratives sometimes deploy disability in straightforward ways—to evoke fear in horror, for example, or to enhance (through its erasure) the happiness of the happily-ever-after ending in romance—it is more difficult than one might expect to find such uncomplicated depictions. In genre fiction disability rarely signifies in only one way, or does only one thing. Even when disability is used to evoke affects traditionally understood as 'negative' or problematic⁴⁹ it nearly always does other things as well, and it is vital to be mindful of the distinction between texts that use disability to generate negative emotions and texts that generate or encourage negative feelings about disability. The examination of disability's affective role in genre fiction challenges a binary division between 'productive' and 'unproductive' disability affects, just as the concept of affect itself resists reduction to the singular.

Genre Fiction and Reflexive Representations

The examination of genre fiction, then, can illuminate affects in all kinds of disability encounter. However, genre fiction's representations of disability are particularly significant from a disability studies perspective not only because genre fiction is affective but because it is both affective and reflexive. Genre fiction is reflexive fiction in that it always writes back, directly or indirectly, to the conventions of the genre as shaped by its history. Both writers and readers work with a conscious or unconscious sense of the genre tradition and texts are created and interpreted in relation to that tradition. Genre fiction is thus reflexive fiction, with individual texts engaging implicitly or explicitly with the norms and narrative possibilities of the genre as a whole.⁵⁰

49 For a problematisation of the idea of 'negative' feelings see Warhol 30–31.

50 In different forms and with different nuances, variations of this observation have been made about all of the genres examined in this book. Attebery notes that 'fantasies often take on a metafictional dimension' ('Structuralism' 83), while Landon argues that 'science fiction is perhaps the most recursive and most self-reflexive of all major literary movements' (xviii). Scaggs observes that 'individual works of crime fiction are built from the devices, codes and conventions established by previous works' (3). Carroll notes that 'works of contemporary horror often refer to the history of the genre quite explicitly' (211).

Drawing on the work of Tzvetan Todorov and Jacques Derrida, Mary Gerhart positions genre reading as reading that always encourages reflection. For Gerhart, genre should not be understood as a 'logical category'; rather, genre 'functions as a hypothesis that calls forth rigorous reflection on the complex factors that make individual works successful or not' (28). The reader of genre fiction is always considering whether a particular instance of genre 'works' as an example of that genre, whether it fulfils their expectation of what a text in that genre should be like.⁵¹ Where genre fictions represent disability, it too is the subject of this 'rigorous reflection', with readers evaluating how well particular representations of disability embody (or fail to embody) their expectations of the genre in question. Affect is a crucial aspect of this. As well as evaluating whether a text possesses the key elements they anticipate encountering in genre fiction (such as particular plot patterns, character types, or tropes), readers reflect upon whether a text is successful in generating the anticipated affects. Thus, representations of disability in romance are judged on whether they enhance or detract from the progression towards a joyful conclusion, while images of disability in horror are assessed on the basis of their contribution to creating fearful affects. This process of reflection and evaluation is profoundly shaped by a reader's existing notions of what the genre fiction text and the image of disability should be like, and how they expect the genre text and the disabled bodymind to make them feel.

Where there is no conflict between the reader's conceptualisation of disability and the way it features within a particular genre text—including the way it makes them feel—the reflective process comes to an end. Often, though, there is a misfit, where the representation of disability in the text does not harmonise with the reader's understanding of disability or of genre. Garland-Thomson proposes the *misfit* as a new critical keyword for disability studies: a misfit 'describes an incongruent relationship between two things', but the problem 'inheres not in either of the two things but rather in their juxtaposition' ('Misfits' 592–93, 593). Misfits are unstable and profoundly relational. Garland-Thomson uses the term to develop a materialist analysis of the relationship between bodies and worlds; I use it here to conceptualise the relationship between representations of disability and the genre texts in which they appear. Readers perceive disabled bodyminds on a spectrum of fit, or misfit, with their genre contexts.

51 For Roberts, 'Genre reading is system reading', with the reader 'reading not the text but the genre by means of the text' (151, 63).

All misfits are affective in the sense that a misfit produces discomfort or surprise, as what is anticipated is not encountered. As discussed above, the misfits between disability and genre may be specifically *affective* misfits, where the affects invoked by the disability representation are incongruent with the reader's affective expectations of a particular genre. There are also other kinds of misfit between genre context and disability representation. Representations of disability in genre texts are produced and read in the context of that genre's history of disability representations.⁵² In genre texts, the disability narratives and tropes that circulate in wider culture frequently take on genre-specific flavours. Thus, when disabled characters appear in genre texts, specific expectations about the possibilities for those characters are mobilised. Readers of romance, for example, may anticipate that a disabled protagonist in a romance novel may be cured en route to finding true love, while a reader of crime fiction might expect that a neurodivergent detective will have unique insights that will allow them to crack the case. This is not to say that these texts will always satisfy the reader's expectations—one of the key pleasures of genre fiction is its reworking of familiar tropes—but that the expectation of a particular kind of disability narrative, or of particular tropes, is mobilised.

Genre texts, then, may satisfy or resist these expectations, reiterating anticipated disability narratives and tropes or resisting them—resulting in a misfit between the reader's expectations and what the text actually does. Garland-Thomson notes the 'political potential' of misfitting in terms of creating community among disabled people and awareness of social injustice ('Misfits' 597). Fictional misfits can likewise work towards social justice by fostering readerly reflection. Where there is a misfit between the depiction of disability and the genre context the reader may respond by dismissing the genre text as a 'bad' text, abandoning it unfinished, or avoiding the work of that particular author in the future.⁵³ However, the reader may also attempt to reconcile the depiction of disability with what they understand about disability and genre, encouraging a critical reflection on the norms of genre, their conceptualisation of disability, or

52 Authors often signal their awareness of that history through references to previous disability representations, as in the invocation of disabled television detective Ironside in Slaughter's *Criminal* (2012).

53 As Nussbaum writes, 'Reading can lead us to alter some of our standing judgments, but it is also the case that these judgments can cause us to reject some experiences of reading' (10).

both. To reduce or eliminate the discomfort of the misfit, the reader may reflect on why they find a particular disability representation incompatible with the genre context, or why disability is so often depicted in a particular way in that genre. This reflection may lead to a shift in the reader's understanding of disability, or genre, or both.

Genre fiction is therefore particularly suited to producing what I term *reflexive representations* of disability: representations which encourage the reader to reflect upon what they understand about disability and potentially to rethink it. Because dominant perceptions of disability in contemporary western culture are still generally framed in terms of loss, lack, and tragedy, such reflection has transformative potentials at both individual and social levels. While the production of reflexive representations is particularly closely linked to the textual misfit, genre fiction can also produce reflexive representations in other ways. Texts in the horror genre, for example, repeatedly enact a dichotomy of disabled person as monster/disabled person as victim, but some horror texts do so in a way that actually draws attention to the repeated use of these tropes. Such works offer a metafictional commentary on how disability is conventionally narrativised that encourages the reader to reflect upon representational habits: a process better understood in terms of fit than misfit, but likewise enabled by the always-reflexive nature of genre fiction. Other genre texts foster reflection on disability by engaging explicitly with topics such as how disability is conceptualised, or by depicting disability-related prejudice or discrimination, though this type of reflexive representation is not limited to genre fiction. Thus the encounter with disability in genre fiction is always reflective, and may also be reflexive, with the reader encouraged to think about (and potentially rethink) their own understanding of disability.

Unlike some genre scholars, I do not seek to legitimise genre fiction by identifying the qualities it shares with some more highly esteemed fictional other. Rather, it is precisely the qualities that have led genre fiction to be devalued that make it significant: the extent to which it is shaped by convention, the centrality of familiar and anticipated affects, and its popularity. Genre fiction enables reflexive representations of disability precisely because it is conventional, because readers have a set of expectations about what genre texts should be like and what those texts should make them feel. Misfits, with all their productive potentials, are much more likely to come into being where there is the expectation of fit. Often, politically engaged genre scholarship assumes that the extent to which a text diverges from genre norms is a straightforward index of the extent to

which it challenges the status quo.⁵⁴ The result is an implicit—sometimes explicit—dismissal of more conventional genre texts and an oversimplification of the workings of genre. However, as the readings in the following chapters demonstrate, normative genre conventions can enable politically productive representations of disability.

Overview

Like recent work by scholars such as Julie Passanante Elman and Sami Schalk, this book aims to increase engagement with forms of representation ignored or neglected by disability studies, exploring how such representations ‘function culturally to promote particular values, affects, or politics’ (Elman 21). Each chapter offers close analysis of a small number of core texts, chosen to illuminate the affect/disability/genre intersection as well as the ways in which the affective practice of genre reading might be consequential or productive in terms of readers’ understanding of disability. However, the key arguments of this book are borne out by a much wider range of fictional examples, rather than being dependent on the selective analysis of a few exceptional texts. The central textual analyses are therefore contextualised by broader consideration of genre norms and conventions, as well as brief discussions of a larger selection of textual examples. As an aid to future scholarship, an annotated bibliography of over 250 genre texts featuring disability is appended to the main text.

The texts selected for close analysis are intentionally texts which are central, rather than peripheral, to the specific genres in which I locate them. Part of the point is that these consequential disability narratives are produced and consumed within the mainstream of the genre industry, in works published by major presses and which aim to engage a substantial audience. Many of them are highly popular; often they have been recognised with genre-specific awards.⁵⁵ Some of these texts traffic in generic ambiguity or multiplicity, but the generic identity labels I have attributed to them are nonetheless reasonably uncontroversial.⁵⁶

54 See Burke for a problematisation of this idea with specific reference to crime fiction.

55 For example, Harris’s *The Silence of the Lambs* and King’s *Duma Key* received the Bram Stoker award, Deaver’s *The Bone Collector* received the Nero award, and Bujold’s *Mirror Dance* received the Hugo and Locus awards.

56 Detailed examination of the affect/disability nexus in relation to genre hybridity or ambiguity is beyond the scope of this book.

In line with my aim of establishing genre fiction as a key site of investigation for cultural disability studies, the texts which receive the most detailed analysis are generally those in which genre, disability, and affect coincide to produce reflexive representations of disability. Genre fiction is particularly hospitable to the creation of reflexive representations. Though such representations are experienced and interpreted in varying ways, they always encourage the rethinking of disability via the mobilisation of affect. I assert that genre fiction affects what is 'thinkable' (and feelable) about disability in important and often productive ways (Elman 21). However, this is not to claim that all genre texts necessarily produce reflexive representations, or result in a productive rethinking of disability or disablist attitudes. Thus, my examination of the generative intersections of disability, genre, and affect in contemporary fiction includes instances where the results are problematic from a disability studies standpoint—as explored in Chapters 2 and 5 in particular. By examining the affective practice of genre reading we can attain a better understanding of both the workings of a major form of contemporary cultural production and the ways in which disability feelings circulate and are shaped.

As a genre which aims to generate negative feelings, horror might seem to offer limited scope for the creation of reflexive representations of disability. Indeed, Lennard J. Davis, in one of the foundational works of cultural disability studies, writes that 'there is a case to be made that horror films involving physically disabled characters are in fact the equivalent of racist films' (183 n.76). Chapter 1 traces the subsequent avoidance of horror by disability studies scholars, as well as the genre's embrace of disability as a means of generating and enhancing fearful affects. Through a reading of horror giant Stephen King's *Duma Key* (2008) I demonstrate that horror works can disrupt as well as enact the association of disability with fearful affects, as well as encouraging readerly reflection on how disability is conventionally narrativised. The second part of the chapter examines Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter novels (1981–2006). As well as problematising the mind sciences that have pathologised and treated 'deviant' minds, these books depict an ambiguously monstrous, cognitively exceptional protagonist, demonstrating the insufficiency of labels to encompass the diversity of human minds. The conclusion of Harris's *Hannibal* (1999) confronts the reader with both generic and affective ambiguity, creating a deep uncertainty about what they know and what they feel—including what they feel about disability.

Like horror, crime fictions frequently produce discomfort and anxiety, but crime differs from horror in that readers expect that

crime fiction will ultimately produce closure and reassurance. Within this affective system, disabled detectives, victims, and villains have particular affective functions, and these indispensable character roles provide the framework for Chapter 2. I analyse Jeffery Deaver's *The Bone Collector* (1997)—the first in a popular series of novels featuring a quadriplegic forensic investigator—to examine how Deaver's protagonist, and disabled detective figures more broadly, produce feelings not commonly associated with disability by situating disabled people as figures of achievement. The affective conflicts developed in Deaver's novel challenge received assumptions about the value of disabled lives in multiple ways. In contrast, Peter Robinson's *Friend of the Devil* (2007) depicts a disabled victim/villain figure in ways that actively discourage reflection upon received assumptions about disability, something that is partly, though not entirely, a consequence of the genre roles occupied by the disabled characters. Examining the novel's handling of disability, gender, genre roles, and genre affects reveals that it simultaneously shores up what Ellen Samuels terms *fantasies of identification* and situates particular kinds of bodymind as deviant. The chapter concludes with a broader consideration of crime character roles and of the possibilities such roles generate—and constrain—in terms of positioning disabled people as affective agents.

Early commentary positioned wonder as an integral, even defining, aspect of science fiction reading, but it is rarely mentioned in contemporary scholarship. Meanwhile, disability studies has been ambivalent about wonder as a response to disability and has often been critical of representations (and representational forms) which use disability to generate wondrous affects. Chapter 3 reinstates wonder at the heart of science fiction, using the genre to argue for a reconsideration of the relationship between wonder and disability. In particular, I connect science fiction's wondrous affects both with the perceptual shift required to think about disability differently and to Tanya Titchkosky's work on the 'politics of wonder' (16). The productive possibilities of wonder and wondering are illustrated in novels by two key contemporary authors. In Lois McMaster Bujold's long-running 'Vorkosigan' series (1986–), the author disrupts the affective associations of mental illness, producing wonder and enabling a transformative shift in the reader's understanding in processes that are intimately linked. Cognitive exceptionality is reframed as mental illness (and vice versa) in ways that blur the boundaries between the two, inviting reflection on how minds outwith the norm come to be coded as extraordinary—or as deviant. In contrast, Peter Watts's 'Rifters' trilogy (1999–2005) offers a self-conscious engagement with science-fictional wonder,

using disability to generate wondrous affects, but also frustrating attempts to understand disability in simple or singular ways.

In fantasy, the journeys, quests, and struggles depicted in the fantasy text encourage both an affective engagement with the protagonists and a deep immersion in the fictional world. Fantasy has also traditionally been a genre of affirmation, and the reader expects that quests will be completed, evil forces vanquished, and recognition secured—although contemporary fantasy texts write back to this expectation in various ways. In the popular culture phenomenon that is the ‘A Song of Ice and Fire’ series (1996–), George R.R. Martin explores possibilities for working with, reclaiming, or subverting aspects of what Bolt terms the *metanarrative of disability*: the network of expectations, narratives, and assumptions cued by an encounter with disability. My reading of Joe Abercrombie’s ‘The First Law’ trilogy also focuses on narrative. Abercrombie deploys disability as part of a metafictional problematisation of the norms of the fantasy genre: a technique that challenges the affirmation typically offered by fantasy narratives, but also encourages recognition of the ways in which particular cultural narratives of disability exclude or marginalise disabled people.

Like fantasy, romance is a genre of achievement: the central couple overcome a variety of obstacles to secure true love, producing a powerful affective response in the reader. Romance is also a genre of imagined futures, and I use Kafer’s work on disability and futurity to explore the affective functions of disability and cure in novels by Barbara McMahon, Christina Dodd, and Barbara Delinsky, suggesting the need for a reconsideration of cure narratives. Romance offers a particularly intimate and immersive reading experience, and I argue that the genre therefore has unique abilities to make prejudice *felt* by encouraging readers to engage affectively with the experience of prejudice or rejection. I analyse novels by Mary Balogh to demonstrate how romance texts may work on disability feelings and meta-feelings, mobilising affect in ways that destabilise habitual affective responses to disability.

The codified conventions of genre fiction make perceptible not just the representational habits of fictional narratives but the feelings involved in a much wider range of disability encounters. The Conclusion places my examination of disability and affect in genre fiction in a wider context. Challenging William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley’s notion of the *affective fallacy*, I draw out the implications of an affective approach to genre fiction. Building upon the work of Sianne Ngai and Robyn Warhol, I explore the idea of meta-affects or meta-feelings in relation to disability, arguing that

genre fiction's reflexive representations often work at the level of meta-feeling as well as feeling, and that disability meta-affects have the potential to disrupt the feelings and emotions disability creates. Finally, I situate my approach throughout this book in relation to a much-debated topic in literary and cultural disability studies: the question of evaluative approaches to disability representation. Despite ostensible adherence to post-structuralist principles that position any attempt to label particular representations as 'positive' or 'negative' as reductive, evaluative approaches remain prevalent in cultural disability studies. An affective approach enables the development of a new evaluative criticism that retains the focus on the effects of representations vital to disability studies, while avoiding reductive dualisms.

CHAPTER ONE

Horror: Fearful Bodyminds

In his nonfiction study, *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King presents a paradigmatic horror narrative.¹ In it, a young couple hears a radio broadcast about ‘The Hook’, a ‘homicidal maniac’ who has escaped from a nearby insane asylum (location 407). The killer has a hook for a right hand, and uses it to decapitate his victims, couples he targets at local make-out spots. The protagonists drive to Lover’s Lane nonetheless, but while they are there the girl hears a noise and thinks she sees someone hiding outside the car. Her boyfriend dismisses her fears at first, but she eventually persuades him to leave; he speeds away, aggrieved. At their destination he gets out to open her car door, then falls down in a faint: ‘She gets out to see what’s wrong, and when she slams the car door she hears this funny clinking sound [...] there, hanging from the doorhandle, is this razor-sharp hook’ (location 426).

In this vignette—the full version is less than 600 words—non-disabled teenagers (we can safely assume) are threatened by a doubly deviant disabled monster. The Hook’s disability functions as a narrative hook, catching the reader’s interest and attention and generating ominous affects. The character’s physiological and psychological abnormality is inseparable from his murderous acts and works alongside them to generate a sense of fearful anticipation, a dis-ease only partially dissipated when disaster is averted. In this miniature horror narrative the genre is stripped down to its essentials, and the central role of disability is indicative of larger generic trends. In horror, disabled characters are frequently monstrous perpetrators of evil acts or

1 This story is King’s version of an urban legend with a number of variants.

vulnerable victims or potential victims.² Both types of representation work to evoke fearful affects, whether fear of a disabled monster, fear for a vulnerable disabled character,³ or a cluster of related sensations including uneasiness, vulnerability, anxiety, repulsion, and revulsion.⁴

The generation of such affects is horror's *raison d'être*: the 'cross-art, cross-media genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror' (Carroll 14).⁵ Readers expect that a horror text will arouse, or attempt to arouse, feelings of fear and discomfort, and horror differs from the other genres examined in this book in that this affective imperative has been widely recognised and acknowledged. For example, Carroll identifies the response evoked by horror texts as 'a combination of fear and repulsion' (53), while King puts forward a three-part schemata of the feelings horror evokes, distinguishing between feelings of terror, horror, and revulsion (see *Danse Macabre*). King's tripartite model privileges texts that work on the mind over those that work on the body,⁶ but the feelings horror generates

- 2 There are also a number of variants which similarly associate disability with evil and use it to generate fear or repulsion. In Masterton's *Blind Panic* (2009) a Native American man takes revenge for the acts of white settlers by rendering much of the population of the USA blind as a prelude to completely destroying the country, while in the same author's *Fire Spirit* (2010) characters have a chromosomal disorder which allows them to hear voices from Hell. In James Herbert's *Shrine* (1983) characters with illnesses and disabilities, including a child who is deaf and mute, are cured by an evil force.
- 3 While these affects may seem to be contradictory, this only reflects the variety of (often conflicting) associations that disability has. For a horror text which capitalises upon disability's simultaneous associations with threat and vulnerability, see Nevill's *House of Small Shadows* (2013).
- 4 For a discussion of horror affects, see Reyes, 'Gothic Affect'. Reyes writes that under an affect-focused approach 'there is little distinction between horror and gothic fiction, as both are seen to share the same affective goals and discourse' (19).
- 5 There is little critical consensus on the definition of horror. Bloom lists the emotions provoked by horror, but also provides a list of 'technical conventions' largely drawn from Gothic fiction (155). Gelder sees horror as a site of collision between the archaic and the modern, a genre 'routinely linked to excess, to a *lack* of restraint' (2). Mendlesohn notes that much modern horror takes the form of intrusion fantasy, in which a fantastic intrusion 'disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated', but that the two are not identical (115). Bloom concludes that the answer to the question 'What is horror fiction?' is 'as complex and problematic theoretically as it seems simple and uncomplicated practically' (155). The authors of several recent scholarly works refuse to put forward definitions at all (e.g. Morgan).
- 6 For King, terror is 'the finest emotion', while horror 'is slightly less fine,

are best understood as affects, encompassing the emotional, the cognitive, and the physiological. Influenced in particular by the work of Linda Williams and Carol Clover on horror film, horror is frequently understood as a 'body genre': a type of fiction that works on the body, aiming to produce a physiological response in readers or viewers. In the dominant critical discourse horror 'means bodily exertion: to shudder, to sweat, to squirm in our seats' (Hantke 2).⁷ However, these corporeal reactions cannot be separated out from cognitive responses, or from emotional ones. A corporeal reaction is not merely compatible with but imbricated in emotional and intellectual responses.⁸

Horror, then, is not just a body genre but a genre that works in and on the bodymind.⁹ It aims to produce a range of discomforting affects, the experience of which is paradoxically pleasurable. Horror also engages the bodymind in that these affects are often produced by an intense focus on the body and/or mind *within* the horror text, which frequently centres upon either a frightening or dangerous body/mind or a vulnerable body/mind at risk of harm.¹⁰ Disability's entrenched associations with both fear and vulnerability have attained it a central, though rarely acknowledged, position in the horror tradition: horror's disability icons include the deformed monster, the vulnerable blind or deaf character, the psychotic villain, and the protagonist (often female)

because it is not entirely of the mind'; below these is 'the gag reflex of revulsion' (*Danse Macabre* location 444, 451, 506).

- 7 Skal's comments on the work of Stephen King exemplify this: 'King's books may more passionately and viscerally *involve* their readers than literary fiction. King readers groan, gasp, experience knots in their stomach and tingles on the back of their necks. [...] Fiction like King's is sensual, pulse-pounding, immediate' (364–65).
- 8 For Carroll, it is the 'cognitive states' evoked by art-horror which generate the physiological response (53). See also Hantke, who writes that 'even the most spontaneous gut-level response to a text is mediated by acts of critical reflection' (3).
- 9 The term 'body horror' is used loosely by some critics to denote horror's general focus on the body (e.g. Wisker in *Horror Fiction*), but it is also used to denote a specific subset of texts in which 'the human body is radically figured and disfigured' (Darryl Jones 175). This version of body horror tends to be associated with a particular set of authors who came to prominence in the 1980s. For detailed discussion of body horror see chapter 2 of Reyes, *Body Gothic*.
- 10 Horror's fearful affects are often understood in terms of fear for one's own bodily integrity, or fears about the vulnerability of the body. Morgan writes that that 'Tales of terror turn upon threats to the body's coherence', and the same could be said about the mind ('Toward an Organic Theory of the Gothic' 63).

teetering on the brink of madness. Deployed individually or in combination, these images of disability work to elicit feelings of anxiety, disturbance, or perturbation.

Though horror embraces disability, scholars of the genre have generally avoided it.¹¹ This might be viewed as just another instantiation of what Bolt terms the ‘critical avoidance’ of disability in the humanities: the dominant practice whereby scholars avoid discussing disability, despite its prevalence in the texts they examine, or engage with disability in ways not informed by disability studies (‘Social Encounters, Cultural Representation and Critical Avoidance’).¹² However, this habit does not fully explain horror scholars’ evasiveness, and there are additional contributing factors particular to the genre’s critical and cultural history. Bolt claims that scholars in disability studies are ‘generally open to research and scholarship on literary and other cultural factors’, in contrast to a lack of openness in the wider humanities (‘Social Encounters, Cultural Representation and Critical Avoidance’ 295). However, a focus on horror makes it clear that disability studies scholars are no strangers to avoidance.¹³ Both horror scholars and disability studies scholars have been reluctant to engage critically with disability in horror, and the aversion felt by scholars in disability studies is bound up with both genre and disability affects.

Why Disability Studies is Afraid of Horror

The avoidance of horror within disability studies arises partly from the same factors that have limited the field’s engagement with other popular genres: perceptions of genre fiction as escapist, socially disengaged, poorly written, formulaic, reactionary, or inferior to canonical, literary, or mainstream fiction.¹⁴ Also relevant is the critical and

11 The most notable exception is Smith, whose *Hideous Progeny* is the most significant critical work on disability and horror to date. Olney examines disability in horror film, while Carr discusses disability and horror in digital games. Reyes includes some discussion of disability in *Body Gothic*, but deliberately brackets his work off from disability studies.

12 Such critical avoidance is itself at least partly a result of ‘the unsettling disease occasioned by the non-normative body’ (Shildrick 72).

13 It is rare for disability studies scholars to discuss horror. For exceptions see Melinda Hall (literature), chapter 5 of Snyder and Mitchell (film), chapter 7 of Longmore (film and television), and page 154 of Waltz (autism in film and literature).

14 This becomes particularly important given the historically marginal position

popular understanding of horror as a sensational genre, which discourages scholarly engagement for the reasons set out in the Introduction. However, there are further, genre-specific factors that contribute to the avoidance of horror.¹⁵ The first of these is the sheer frequency with which problematic images of disability have appeared in the horror tradition. As Ian Olney writes, horror ‘has initiated and perpetuated many of the most insidious and enduring stereotypes about physical disability’ (294). In particular, horror has frequently depicted disabled people as villains and as the instruments of evil forces, or framed its monstrous characters in terms of disability. This is true both of classic works in the wider gothic and horror traditions, such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and of contemporary horror fictions such as Stephen King’s *Misery* (1987) and Joe Hill’s *Horns* (2010).¹⁶ Such depictions are perceived as reinforcing a link between disability and criminality or evil.¹⁷

Depictions of disabled people as victims likewise resonate with and reinforce conceptualisations of disabled people as helpless or vulnerable, already victims of circumstance or chance. In Graham Masterton’s *Unspeakable* (2005), for example, hearing-impaired Holly Summers is repeatedly threatened and attacked both physically and verbally, and is described as ‘vulnerable’ (18).¹⁸ In Dean Koontz’s 77

of disability-informed approaches within literary studies. Even today many literary disability studies works devote significant space to explicitly making the case for a disability-informed approach. Thus, it is a strategic choice to apply this critical approach to canonical (i.e., thoroughly legitimate) texts: ‘there is more mileage to be had from demonstrating the new insights a disability-informed perspective can offer into Shakespeare than into science fiction’ (Cheyne, ‘Introduction’, 119).

- 15 Melinda Hall writes that ‘it has become commonplace to consider horror fiction (perhaps inescapably) ableist’.
- 16 For a disability-informed reading of Stevenson’s novel, see Schalk and Powell. For a discussion of madness in *Dracula* see chapter 5 of Pedlar. In King’s *Misery* the protagonist is imprisoned and mutilated by a character who is mentally ill. Hill’s *Horns* offers a metafictional commentary on the convention of the physically deviant villain through the horns the protagonist grows, but also a more conventional depiction in Lee, the novel’s real villain, who is blind in one eye.
- 17 Longmore notes the prevalence of ‘handicapped horror “monsters”’ on film and television, arguing that the physical impairments of such characters ‘express disfigurement of personality and deformity of soul [...] disability may be represented as the cause of evildoing, punishment for it, or both’ (131, 135).
- 18 Holly is rescued from gang rape near the end of the novel, only to be shot, and presumably killed, in the book’s final chapter. With this, the role of

Shadow Street (2011), Iris, an autistic girl, is positioned as a vulnerable potential victim requiring the protection of a younger, nondisabled character, and her life is consistently portrayed as tragic.

Much of the critical work published on representations of disability in the last two decades has sought to move beyond reductive discussions of disability representation in terms of negative imagery or stereotypes,¹⁹ or has aimed to recuperate texts or specific representations previously dismissed as problematic.²⁰ Horror's representational habits, however, have largely barred the genre from this recuperative programme, reflecting 'the assumption that works of horror fiction and film dealing with corporeal difference almost inevitably reflect and reinforce' the 'prevailing "hegemony of normalcy"' (Olney 294, citing Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*).²¹ Yet other sites or types of representation which have narrativised disability in ways perceived as problematic have been recuperated. Horror is far from the only genre to harbour a preponderance of problematic images, and certainly canonical literature has no shortage.

The problem that horror has posed and continues to pose for disability studies is fundamentally a problem of affect. It is not simply that horror is widely understood as a genre that attempts to create a fearful response. Rather, the issue is the resonance between the affects disability is used to generate in horror and the affects involved in interpersonal disability encounters. In horror, people with non-normative bodyminds have frequently been framed in particular ways in order to evoke feelings of fear, horror, and revulsion.²² Carolyn D. Williams suggests that in contemporary popular culture 'an ominous ambience is often intensified by the display of a grotesque human body', and the use of disability to generate or enhance ominous affects is particularly

vulnerable victim that she embodies throughout is taken to its logical conclusion.

19 This is particularly the case since the publication of three key works around which the field of cultural disability studies crystallised: Davis's *Enforcing Normalcy*, Garland-Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies*, and Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*. Mitchell and Snyder's book specifically argues for a move away from negative image approaches. See the Conclusion for more detailed discussion.

20 Such recuperative readings are firmly within the evaluative paradigm based on identifying 'positive' or 'negative' images of disability, rather than representing a break with it.

21 See Smith 27–28 for further discussion of this point; her own work is a notable exception.

22 Hughes argues that fear, disgust, and pity are the major 'building blocks of the emotional infrastructure of ableism' (68).

common in horror (119).²³ At the same time, many disability studies scholars have noted a cultural association between disability and fear: the notion of the disabled person as a frightening or sinister figure, or of disability itself as fearful, recurs in critical work.²⁴ As Siebers writes, ‘The ideology of ability makes us fear disability’ (*Disability Theory* 9). This association between disability and fear is one of the key reasons for disability’s frequent appearance in horror texts. The same quality that makes disability attractive to horror authors renders the genre anathema to disability studies scholars.

Horror texts are perceived as exploiting the negative associations of disability by using disability as a tool for generating fearful affects—and, crucially, as doing so regardless of the ways in which such narrative deployments shore up these associations. Texts in the genre are therefore understood as perpetuating an ongoing cycle of prejudice and discrimination. Snyder and Mitchell write that, in horror, ‘emotions are encouraged that serve to cement longstanding associations of stigma with bodily difference’ (168).²⁵ The dominant poles of disability representation in horror work to evoke fear, anxiety, and discomfort. In contemporary horror fiction, a generic pressure towards generating a particular affective response combines with pre-existing cultural associations of disability in ways that make horror seem unproductive territory for any disability studies engagement beyond the identification and critique of negative imagery.

Why Horror Scholars are Afraid of Disability

Disability studies scholars have avoided horror, but horror scholars have also neglected disability, and the critical avoidance identified by Bolt offers only a partial explanation. Horror scholars have not hesitated to read the genre’s monsters as emblematic of a variety of minority groups, or horror texts as commentaries on a range of

23 See, for example, Grey’s *The Ward* (2012), in which the frequent appearance of figures with mutilated or altered bodies is central to the fearful affects the novel evokes.

24 Longmore notes that disabled people frequently encounter ‘fear, revulsion, hostility’ (123), while Hubbard writes that ‘People shun persons who have disabilities [...] They fear them as though the disability were contagious’ (93). For further discussion of disability and fear see Fiedler, Coleman, Shildrick, and Barnes.

25 See also Longmore, who observes that ‘The subtext of many horror films is fear and loathing of people with disabilities’ (134).

identity issues.²⁶ However, disability has been notably neglected in this critical tradition. Just as there are specific reasons for disability studies scholars' neglect of horror, there are particular factors at the root of horror scholars' lack of engagement with disability.

As Matt Hills's metacritical study of horror theory demonstrates, much horror scholarship is concerned with repositioning horror as a legitimate subject for academic investigation.²⁷ In critical attempts to reclaim horror it is a requirement that 'the genre's excessively, problematically corporeal forms' be translated into 'gender, racial, or class terms'—repressed elements of society or of 'individual psyches' (Smith 26, 25). Horror's excessive corporeality is contained by understanding it in terms of something else. This process of translation enables horror to be positioned as a genre that is 'not just trivially about rampaging monsters' but which 'returns to the centres of social/cultural power' (Hills 51). Because of horror's denigrated cultural position, the drive to reclaim the genre as suitable for *intellectual* interpretation and engagement has been, and continues to be, pressing for horror in a way that it is not for mainstream literature or film. As Angela M. Smith sums up, classic horror films 'can only be salvaged for intellectual and subversive interpretations by "reading" impairment as a placeholder for multiple (nondisabled) social identities and abstract "otherness"' (25). Thus, for horror scholars, the critical avoidance of disability is closely tied to the process of validating the genre as worthy of intellectual investigation. Disability must be understood as representing something else, and therefore erased or rendered invisible, for the genre to be legitimised. Metaphorising the monster—refusing the more obvious reading of 'deviant' bodies and minds in terms of disability—is a means of positioning the genre as having hidden levels of complexity or significance and thus increasing its worth within the value system of the academic-critical establishment.

The relationship between horror studies and disability, and disability studies and horror, is therefore one of mutual avoidance, arising from prejudices, misconceptions, and anxieties around affect and legitimation.²⁸ Horror's embrace of disability has resulted in a

26 See, for example, Wisker, *Horror Fiction*, 170.

27 Hills's book was published in 2005, but the same state of affairs holds today. For example, Reyes's *Body Gothic* (2014) aims to demonstrate the complexity of horror texts which produce a visceral response.

28 See also Church, who writes that the focus on social realist film in disability studies analyses (and the neglect of fantastic film, including horror) leaves a 'conspicuous gap' in critical discourses. By legitimating one body of work

genre tradition that has invoked and shored up problematic images of disability, as well as exploiting and reinforcing the association of disability with fearful affects. My project is neither to disavow nor to attempt to recuperate the uses to which disability has been put in the larger gothic and horror tradition. Instead, this chapter examines how recent horror fictions function in relation to those larger traditions, since contemporary horror's engagement with disability is far from monolithic. The meshing of convention and variation, and the metafictional tendencies that characterise genre fiction, create a space in which authors can facilitate and encourage readerly reflection on disability and its representation. As Smith writes of classic horror film, revelations of disability 'work to excite shock and horror in viewers' (121). However, they may also 'bring to light the spectacular, manipulated and performative—that is, the culturally and textually generated—elements of disability' (Smith 121). Works in the genre encourage readerly reflection on disability in a number of ways, from foregrounding disability-related prejudice to disrupting reductive images of disability.

Stephen King's *Duma Key*

King's life-threatening 1999 car accident and subsequent rehabilitation have triggered a renewed focus on the body in his work, but disabled characters have always populated King's fiction.²⁹ In *Duma Key* (2008), King invokes disability as part of the novel's strategy for generating ominous affects, but also challenges the assumption that disability is fearful. In a long novel with a notably small cast, disability adheres to most of the central characters. The protagonist, Edgar Freemantle, lost his arm in a near-fatal accident that left him brain-injured and mobility-impaired. Elizabeth Eastlake has Alzheimer's disease, uses a wheelchair, and sustained a traumatic brain injury as a child, while

and dismissing the other, disability studies 'appears to inadvertently serve the same naturalizing and normalizing functions that it condemns' (Church, 'Fantastic Films, Fantastic Bodies').

29 Works such as *The Stand* (1978), *Needful Things* (1991), and the Dark Tower series (1982–2012), feature disabled characters in central roles, while novels from *The Shining* (1977) onwards feature disabled characters in secondary or minor roles. King's publishing career began in 1974 with *Carrie* and a string of bestsellers followed; Mendlesohn and James attribute the 1980s horror boom largely to the success of King's work. For a brief discussion of disability in King's work see Melinda Hall.

her carer Wireman suffers the physiological aftereffects of a suicide attempt that left a bullet in his brain. *Duma Key* depicts multiple disabled characters and multiply-disabled characters. It is also a novel centrally concerned with the power of representation and specifically with disability narratives, affects, and effects.

At the beginning of the novel Edgar, the middle-aged owner of a construction empire, is recovering from the accident in which he was injured. His marriage fails, and at his therapist's suggestion he leaves his Minnesota home to make a fresh start on Duma Key, an island off the Florida coast. Inspired by his new home, Edgar discovers a talent for painting, but his paintings have increasingly disturbing supernatural effects. In its depiction of Edgar, the novel invokes images and narratives of disability familiar not only from the horror genre but from culture more broadly. At the novel's opening, the newly disabled Edgar is a figure of tragic loss, in constant pain and living 'in hell' (4). Despite making progress with his physiological rehabilitation, Edgar is suicidal. He plans to kill himself and make it look like an accident, an act postponed only because his therapist warns that his family will guess the truth. At the same time, one consequence of Edgar's brain injury is that he feels constant and sometimes overwhelming anger. He has bouts of uncontrollable rage where he is verbally and physically abusive, at one point stabbing his wife Pam with a plastic knife badly enough that she needs stitches. Thus, as well as being a tragic figure of loss, Edgar is depicted as violently out of control, 'the disabled avenger of horror', whose disability causes them to seek revenge on others (Snyder and Mitchell 162).

Later, Edgar is framed in terms that evoke another familiar figure: the plucky cripple determined to overcome, as best he can, the restrictions imposed by his condition. Initially barely able to walk without crutches, Edgar walks along the beach from his house every day, pushing himself to go further each time with a mental game in which he continually resets his tally of steps. Reaching the house where Elizabeth and Wireman live and being able to walk home again becomes the goal of his 'Great Beach Walks' (94). The destination is less important than what it represents: the overcoming of his physical limitations.

Overcoming narratives are often linked with the figure of the supercrip or 'disabled hero' (Wendell 251). The combination of Edgar's extraordinary talent for painting and the detailed narrative of his rehabilitation positions Edgar as a supercrip in an additional sense: the disabled person whose extraordinary abilities or powers 'operate in direct relationship with [...] their disability' (Schalk, 'Reevaluating

the Supercrip', 81).³⁰ Edgar's extraordinary talent is consistently linked to his injury. He discovers his artistic abilities only after the accident and his desire to paint is almost always accompanied by phantom limb sensations in his missing arm. His story thus appears a straightforward variant of the myth of compensation: lose an arm, gain a talent. Edgar himself understands it in those terms, searching the internet for stories that show that he isn't 'the first person to lose a body-part only to gain something else' (96).

The novel thus presents a series of highly conventional disability narratives, flipping between them in a veritable kaleidoscope of reductive images. Yet the mobilisation of these tropes ultimately serves to undermine them. Edgar is framed as a pitiful cripple, a rage-driven monster, a plucky striver, and a compensatory genius, but in positioning him as *all* of these things, *Duma Key* actually conveys that he is *none* of them—or, at least, that none of them are the sum of him. The very invocation of these reductive images of disability calls into question their accuracy as representations of disability experience, highlighting their inability to encompass the complexities of disabled lives. As the novel progresses, the misfit between Edgar's feelings and experiences and these conventional disability tropes becomes increasingly obvious. The framing of Edgar as rage-driven disabled avenger is undermined by his physical therapist's sarcastic dismissal of what Edgar perceives as his most abhorrent act, his attempt to choke Pam: 'being choked by a one-armed invalid must have been a pants-wetting experience' (10). Later, Edgar finds that he can actually walk further when he stops playing mental games and just walks for pleasure, and the idea that he acquired his artistic talent at the same time as he acquired disability is problematised by Pam's recollection of the wonderful picture books he drew for their daughter years before.

The conventional disability images and narratives invoked in the novel each carry a corresponding affective charge, evoking a series of emotional responses in the reader, such as empathy for Edgar's pain, revulsion at his attack on his wife, admiration at his persistence, and wonder at his talent. The specific feelings at each point—the reader might feel pity rather than empathy at Edgar's pain, or be more sympathetic to his violent outbursts—are less important than the shifting series of emotional responses evoked. These affective shifts serve to

30 In terms of Schalk's typology, Edgar's story is both a 'regular supercrip' narrative (his achievement of the ordinary act of walking along the beach is framed as extraordinary) and a 'superpowered supercrip' narrative ('Reevaluating the Supercrip' 79, 81). For in-depth discussion of the supercrip, see Chapter 2.

undermine any perception of disability as simple, singular, or easily reducible: the novel enacts the idea that there is no one way to feel about disability.

This foregrounding of the feelings evoked by conventional disability images and narratives is just one element of a larger exploration of the relationship between disability and narrative in the novel. *Duma Key* repeatedly draws attention to how disability is represented, reported, and narrated.³¹ Two pages of the novel are devoted to the results of Edgar's online searches for other amputees with extraordinary abilities. *Duma Key* undoubtedly uses disability for emotional impact: the narrative of Edgar's struggle to recover control of his bodymind and adjust to his newly disabled body is both involving and affecting. However, the novel also draws attention to the ways in which narratives *habitually* exploit disability for emotional impact. Edgar reflects on the narratives others construct around him, and the ways in which disability makes a story worth telling or limits the stories that might be told. Initially, he fears that a local gallery's interest in his work is a result of his disability rather than the quality of his paintings. After he is interviewed for the local paper Edgar becomes a 'local celebrity', but, as he reflects, it is not his artistic talent but the combination of his artistic talent and his disability that makes the story newsworthy: 'Artist was good [...]. Artist Who Used to Build Banks and Then Turned His Back on Mammon was better. One-Armed Artist of Blazing Talent was the absolute Golden Motherfucker' (330). Wireman mocks the media tendency to make story from disability, telling Edgar that his missing arm is 'gonna be golden', and imagining the newspaper headline 'Edgar Freemantle Bursts Upon the Suncoast Art Scene Like a Phoenix from the Smoking Ashes of Tragedy!' (245). King's novel uses disability to generate affect, but it also foregrounds the ways in which narratives routinely use disability to generate affect.

Duma Key is a novel about the power of representation, refuting the idea that representations are 'just' representations, without wider significance. In the novel, 'Art is magic' and, after suffering a brain injury as an infant (the same sort of injury later experienced by Edgar), the young Elizabeth Eastlake 'literally drew herself back into

31 King's work often draws attention to the ways disability shapes our assumptions about individuals. For example, in *Rose Madder* (1995) the murderous Norman Daniels disguises himself as a wheelchair user in order to attack his ex-wife, knowing that the wheelchair will mean he is not perceived as a threat. This trope is repeated with only slight variation in *Mr Mercedes* (2014).

the world' (141, 418). Elizabeth's drawings are not just drawings, just as Edgar's paintings are not just paintings. At first, their effects seem neutral or even positive, as when one of Edgar's works reveals that an old friend is suicidal, allowing Edgar to intervene. Later, they become more disturbing: when Edgar paints a portrait of a paedophile, omitting the man's mouth and nose, the man dies in his jail cell. Edgar and Elizabeth's artistic creations act upon the world in a very real and direct way. The novel's central theme might be summed up in the phrase *representations have power*—one of the foundational tenets of cultural disability studies.

As an affective representation about affective representations, *Duma Key* invites readerly reflection on what representations can do and how they make the reader or viewer feel. Like the novel itself, Edgar's paintings are disturbing, and at one point the feeling they produce is explicitly labelled as 'horror' (239). Disability is bound up with the creation of representations: Edgar feels his lost arm itching when he has the desire to paint and actually sees his missing arm at one point while he is painting.³² On Duma, 'broken people' become 'special people' (273), but the novel makes clear that the horrific situations that occur arise not from the disabled bodyminds of its central characters but from the supernatural force dwelling on Duma Key, which seeks to use the island's human inhabitants for its own ends. The novel explicitly rejects the collapsing together of disability and evil conventional in the horror tradition. At one point, as he realises the extent of the danger he and his friends are in, Edgar thinks that he would 'cut off' his arm 'all over again' to change the situation, but immediately corrects himself: 'it wasn't my gone arm, or the hand which had once lived at the end of it, that was the problem' (444).³³ By making clear that disability is not 'the problem', *Duma Key* disrupts the association of disability with fearful affects. The novel foregrounds reductive representational habits and positions disability as a complex and varied experience. In King's novel, the affective and the reflexive combine in a representation of disability that disturbs conventional representational tropes through the way it enacts them.

32 Similarly, the young Elizabeth began drawing after a head injury, and complained that her head hurt when she was prevented from drawing.

33 For a similar rejection of disability as the locus of horror, see Dean Koontz's *Fear Nothing* (1997) and *By the Light of the Moon* (2002).

Monstrous Uncertainty: Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter Novels

While King's novel foregrounds how disability makes us feel, the works of Thomas Harris disturb by leaving the reader uncertain of what to feel. Harris's *Red Dragon* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), and *Hannibal Rising* (2006) are linked through the character of Hannibal Lecter, an eminent psychiatrist who is also a serial murderer. The original trilogy of Lecter novels³⁴ disturb conceptualisations of madness and sanity, and the idea of a clear distinction between them. Ultimately Harris's works disrupt not just the labelling of their central characters but any attempt to encompass the complexity of the human bodymind through such labels.

In *Red Dragon*, retired FBI profiler Will Graham is forced to consult with Lecter in order to catch a serial killer, despite the fact that Lecter previously attacked and almost killed him. *The Silence of the Lambs* has a broadly similar plot, with FBI trainee Clarice Starling visiting Lecter in the asylum in which he is imprisoned to consult him on another serial killer case. Starling's hunt for the latest victim—who has been kidnapped but is still alive—is a main narrative thread, as is the developing relationship between Starling and Lecter. Lecter escapes from the asylum in *The Silence of the Lambs*, and *Hannibal* follows the efforts of a corrupt Italian police chief to capture Lecter and trade him to one of his surviving victims.

While Lecter's body diverges in some ways from the norm,³⁵ the focus in the trilogy is on his psychological difference: his extraordinary mind and, specifically, if and how that mind should be pathologised. Just as Starling and Graham compile clues and snippets of information to help them build an understanding of the killers they are hunting, so too the reader is invited to 'detect' or 'diagnose' Lecter.³⁶ In *Red Dragon* Graham notes that the psychologists say Lecter is a 'sociopath because they don't know what else to call him', and in *The Silence of the Lambs* Starling disagrees with a psychologist's labelling of Lecter

34 *Hannibal Rising* is a prequel focusing on Lecter's childhood and youth; my discussion focuses on the original trilogy.

35 Lecter has maroon eyes and in *The Silence of the Lambs* it is revealed that he has an extra finger on one hand, which is later removed.

36 In part, this reflects the extent to which the trilogy adopts the conventions of crime fiction; see Plain for an analysis of *Hannibal* in this context. Like horror narratives, crime narratives work to generate tension or anxiety, but crime fictions conclude with a cathartic resolution in which those feelings are resolved.

as a 'pure sociopath', saying that she is still 'waiting for the shallowness of affect' characteristic of sociopathy (61, 529). Graham says that Lecter is 'not crazy, in any common way we think of being crazy', and instead describes him as 'a monster', comparing him to 'one of the pitiful things that are born in hospitals from time to time. They feed it, and keep it warm, but they don't put it on the machines and it dies. Lecter is the same way in his head, but he looks normal' (*Red Dragon* 61).³⁷ Lecter is very much capable of surviving (and thriving) unaided, but Will's comment positions Lecter as both incapable of 'normal' life and subhuman, a theme to which *Hannibal* returns:

In fact, there is no consensus in the psychiatric community that Dr. Lecter should be termed a man. He has long been regarded by his professional peers in psychiatry, many of whom fear his acid pen in the professional journals, as something entirely Other. For convenience they term him 'monster'. (877)

Sociopath, insane, monster, inhuman: Lecter defies labels, and the reader's picture of him remains fragmentary and incomplete. In *Hannibal*, a character who comments that Lecter beat his trial 'on an insanity plea' is corrected by Starling: 'The court found him insane. Dr. Lecter did not plead' (804). While those characters who describe Lecter as a monster mean the label to be unambiguously negative, I suggest that Lecter is a monster in the sense of the term used by Margrit Shildrick. For Shildrick, monsters are 'deeply disturbing [...] always liminal, refusing to stay in place, transgressive and transformative. They disrupt both internal and external order, and overturn the distinctions that set out the limits of the human subject' (4). Lecter is a transgressive figure, disrupting order (and encouraging readerly reflection) not only through his violent acts but through his very unclassifiability.

The ambiguity over what Lecter is calls into question the value of labels for psychological difference. The inability of medical science, as well as individual characters, to explain or adequately pathologise Lecter is part of a broader critique of the mind sciences which seek to label and treat 'deviant' human behaviour. Psychology, in particular, comes under attack in the novels. Lecter, a psychiatrist, dismisses

37 This statement foreshadows the later revelation of Francis Dolarhyde's treatment during his infancy. The casual disablism of Will's positioning of children with severe congenital disabilities as inhuman is never interrogated in the novel.

psychology, and particularly the FBI's use of it: 'most psychology is puerile [...] and that practiced in Behavioral Science is on a level with phrenology' (23). Lecter's sanity is repeatedly called into question in the novels, but his intelligence is not, meaning that such pronouncements carry weight. The main representative of psychology in the first two novels, Chiltern, is shown as petty, weak-minded, egotistical, and foolish. He makes advances towards Starling, spies on her, treats the inmates at the asylum he runs badly, and is culpable in Lecter's eventual escape after brokering a deal that allows him to leave the asylum. Chiltern's professional ethics are also suspect: focused on building his career, Chiltern hopes to use Lecter for professional advancement. The antipathy Chiltern feels for Lecter is based not on revulsion at his deeds (which might generate empathy in the reader), but on petty professional jealousies. Despite having the greatest access to Lecter of any professional, Chiltern is incapable of attaining even a limited understanding of Lecter's mind. His one accurate pronouncement on Lecter is that he and other doctors are not 'any closer to understanding him now than the day he came in' (*Red Dragon* 68). Chiltern, the personification of psychology, is both incompetent and morally repugnant.

The skewering of psychology continues in *Hannibal*, which notes that 'Whole tomes of scholarly conjecture on his [Lecter's] mentality were available, most of it authored by psychologists who had never been exposed to the doctor in person' (791). Psychiatry, too, is called into question, in contrast to the previous two novels, which indirectly affirmed it through repeated comments about Lecter's professional expertise and demonstrations of his understanding of the human mind. In *Hannibal*, psychiatrists are also shown to be motivated by professional resentments. Like the psychologists, they fail to understand Lecter, as when psychiatrists Lecter 'had skewered in the professional journals' say that Lecter will be driven to commit suicide (791). As the rest of the novel demonstrates, Lecter has no urge to kill himself, and relishes his new life.

In *Hannibal*, the asylum in which Lecter was held has been closed and is soon to be demolished, symbolising the failure of psychology. Chiltern is absent from the novel (missing and possibly killed by Lecter), but another psychologist functions as his double. Doemling shares many of Chiltern's faults: he is motivated by ego and ambition, demonstrates fundamental misunderstandings of Lecter, and refuses to listen to others with superior knowledge, belittling asylum orderly Barney when he offers insights into Lecter's psychology. Doemling works for the novel's real villain, Mason Verger, and is fully aware

that Verger is a child abuser. Doemling is a worse version of Chiltern and, in *Hannibal*, Chiltern's character is rewritten to be worse than it appeared in the first two novels. It is revealed that Chiltern was guilty not only of mismanagement of the asylum but of theft. The representatives of psychology in all three novels, then, are depicted as at best incompetent and petty, and at worst criminal.

While Lecter himself rewards a disability-informed analysis—Shildrick's designation of the monster is 'taken always to include the modern category of disabled bodies' (7)—there are a number of other characters to whom disability adheres in the trilogy. In *Red Dragon* these include Will Graham; Francis Dolarhyde, the serial murderer Graham is hunting; and Reba McClane, a colleague of Dolarhyde who becomes his lover. In his depiction of Graham, Harris employs a conventional device in crime narratives, the positioning of the detective as the double of, or akin to, the perpetrator. Like Lecter, Graham has been institutionalised, spending several weeks in a mental hospital after a traumatic confrontation with a serial killer earlier in his career. Graham's mental state, and in particular his sanity, is repeatedly questioned in the novel. A newspaper prints a picture of him outside the asylum with the words 'Criminally Insane' above him, like a caption, and, as Graham closes in on Dolarhyde, Dolarhyde thinks Graham is a 'monster' (75, 341).

Graham's particular skill is catching serial killers on the scantest of evidence. His greatest fear is that he can do this precisely because he is like those serial killers, and Lecter taunts him with the words 'WE'RE JUST ALIKE' (75). Some of Graham's reluctance to consult Lecter in *Red Dragon* comes from the fear that Lecter's brand of insanity might be catching: before visiting, Graham thinks 'If he felt Lecter's madness in his head, he had to contain it quickly, like a spill' (69). Just as Graham unwittingly picks up the speech patterns of those he talks to, he also picks up patterns of thought. His colleague Bloom describes the talent as 'pure empathy and projection', saying that Graham can 'assume your point of view or mine—and maybe some other points of view that scare and sicken him' (166). Graham fears that his point of view, like his speech, will come to mimic the serial killers he works to catch; that in thinking like them he might become like them, contaminated by them. By the end of *Red Dragon*, and after being attacked and nearly killed by Dolarhyde, Graham understands that his fears are unfounded. In the novel's final paragraphs, he thinks that he 'contained all the elements to make murder' and 'understood murder uncomfortably well' (385). However, he realises that 'old, awful urges are the virus that makes vaccine' (385). This struggle between virus

and vaccine reflects both the internal struggle within Graham and his role in the social body. As a man who can empathise with serial killers, he functions as a social vaccine, catching those who act upon their destructive urges.³⁸ It is Graham's understanding of horror that ensures he can never commit horrific acts.

In *Red Dragon* Graham is called upon to catch Francis Dolarhyde. As with Lecter, psychologists speculate on Dolarhyde's psychology, but though their pronouncements are not necessarily inaccurate, they are of little practical use in catching him or preventing him from killing. Dolarhyde has a cleft palate poorly mended in childhood, leaving him with a slight speech impairment and facial disfigurement. Dolarhyde is paired with another disabled character, Reba McClane. McClane is blind, and the two of them tentatively begin a romantic relationship, opening up the possibility of redemption for Dolarhyde. Under her influence, Dolarhyde begins to question the desires that have led him to kill. Though transformation is a major theme in the novel—Dolarhyde believes that, by killing, he is transforming himself into the Red Dragon of William Blake's paintings—Dolarhyde's transformation from insane villain to ordinary man remains incomplete. Though he does not kill McClane when he has the chance, he does go on to attack Graham, with Lecter's help.

Red Dragon focuses on processes of enfreakment, on how a person with an extraordinary bodymind becomes identified or labelled as deviant.³⁹ The novel emphasises the prejudice Dolarhyde has experienced throughout his life. At the orphanage where he spent his childhood, the manager 'called the other boys and girls together and told them that Francis was a harelip but they must be careful never to call him a harelip' (215). In the words of the manager and the taunts of the children, Dolarhyde is reduced to his facial disfigurement. Later Dolarhyde experiences prejudice based on his appearance; indeed, one of the things that draws him to McClane is that her visual impairment prevents her from seeing it. McClane and Dolarhyde are drawn together, too, by a shared experience of prejudice, and the anger it makes them feel.

Red Dragon offers a sustained discussion of prejudices and misconceptions about visual impairment, with McClane reflecting upon

38 Graham does share some features with serial killers like Lecter and Dolarhyde. At the end of *Red Dragon* the facially disfigured Dolarhyde stabs Graham in the face, leaving him with a face that 'looks like damn Picasso drew him', further establishing their kinship (*The Silence of the Lambs* 396).

39 See chapter 5 of Hevey.

various myths about blindness, including the idea that ‘blind people hear so much better than we do’ and ‘the popular belief that the blind are “purer in spirit” than most people’ (264). The novel demonstrates the role of environments in disabling people: McClane is not functionally impaired but ‘free’ and able to move ‘effortlessly’ in certain settings (258). Indeed, when Dolarhyde kidnaps McClane towards the end of the novel, her actions challenge horror genre stereotypes of both disability and gender. In contrast to a long tradition of passive horror women able only to react (and typically to react ineffectually) to the dangers around them, McClane remains active. Despite the probability of imminent death she plans ways to escape, tries to talk Dolarhyde out of killing her, and briefly manages to escape from him. The positioning of McClane as Dolarhyde’s partner and double encourages the reader to perceive him not only as evil but as a victim of prejudice, and the revelation of his traumatic childhood likewise helps to create sympathy for him. Towards the end of *Red Dragon* Dolarhyde makes clear attempts to change, destroying the iconic Blake painting that is integral to his madness. Yet Dolarhyde is never fully redeemed and, despite the fact that he does not kill McClane, Graham’s claim that he was not a ‘freak’ but ‘a man with a freak on his back’ is undermined by the fact that Dolarhyde calculatingly used McClane’s blindness when staging his own death, allowing him to escape and attack Graham (*Red Dragon* 363).

Harris’s novels foreground social processes of enfreakment, but they also explore the possibility of genuine transformation. While *Hannibal* continues the themes of the previous two novels, it focuses on two key possibilities for Lecter and his extraordinary bodymind: redemption and contagion. At the start of *Hannibal*, Lecter is still at large. After surgery to remove his extra finger and change his features, he has built a new life as a scholar in Italy. Meanwhile, Starling’s FBI career has been stalled by a combination of sexism, sabotage, and incompetence at the political game-playing required for career advancement. The novel opens with Starling being scapegoated for an operation which went wrong. At the same time, Mason Verger, one of Lecter’s surviving victims, is hunting him down to torture and kill him. Also on Lecter’s trail is Rinaldo Pazzi, an Italian policeman who has recognised Lecter. In a plot-heavy book, Lecter is captured, saved by Starling’s intervention, in turn saves her life, and kidnaps her. The end of the book, set several years later, shows Lecter and Starling as a couple, living a glamorous life with new identities.

This ending—notably absent from the 2001 film adaptation—polarised readers and resists straightforward recuperation. It opens

up two entirely different readings of the novel. The first of these involves a Lecter redeemed and transformed through his relationship with Starling, in effect transforming the second and third novels in the trilogy from horror to an extended romance. After the events of the first two novels this might seem entirely implausible, but *Hannibal* performs a complex intervention into the reader's perceptions of the title character, with many of Lecter's past acts reframed. When Lecter kills in *Hannibal*, it is carefully considered: he kills the man who held his academic job before him, to create a vacancy; he kills Rinaldo Pazzi, to avoid being captured; and he kills to avenge wrongs done to Starling and himself. The irrational violence of the previous novels, such as the mauling of a nurse's face referred to in *Red Dragon*, is left behind. In *Hannibal*, Lecter kills and maims with a purpose, rather than only for pleasure. He is violent only when he chooses to be and has reason for it, raising the possibility of him choosing not to be violent at all.

In *Hannibal* the framing of Lecter shifts from Lecter as monster—in the unambiguously negative sense of the word—to Lecter as a person who has committed monstrous or horrific acts. The statement that 'His ego, like his intelligence quota, and the degree of his rationality, is not measurable by conventional means' raises the possibility that Lecter is not insane but in fact hyper-rational, possessed of an extraordinary mind rather than a deviant one (877). Despite having ample opportunity, Lecter kills very few people in *Hannibal*. Though Chiltern is missing, possibly dead at Lecter's hands, the novel leaves open the possibility that he is alive and has absconded to escape prison. Mason Verger, who plots to torture and kill Lecter and almost succeeds, is killed not by Lecter but by his sister Margot. Finally, the description of Lecter and Verger's past encounters reinscribes Lecter's previous killings as potentially just or justified: Verger sexually abused numerous children, including his own sister, and as the novel progresses he is revealed as the worst kind of villain. Lecter's attack on Verger years earlier is thus shown in a new light, opening up the possibility that other atrocities committed by Lecter might look different if the full story was told.

In *Hannibal* Lecter is surrounded by monsters, and the effect is to place Lecter's own deeds in a hierarchy of evil where his acts come to seem less extreme (or, alternatively, to desensitise the reader to acts of violence through their proliferation). The ultimate monster is Verger, who, despite being left severely injured after Lecter's attack on him, continues to abuse children by torturing them psychologically. Verger is so extreme a villain as to appear almost parodic: he drinks martinis made with children's tears, and plans an elaborate and hideous death

scenario in which Lecter will be slowly eaten alive by specially trained pigs. Police officer Rinaldo Pazzi is corrupt, and willing to risk the life of a young mother and her baby for financial gain in the form of Verger's reward. A host of minor characters perform or condone awful acts or deeds: Doemling facilitates Verger's child abuse, Margot Verger is a killer, and FBI agent Paul Krendler harasses and mocks Starling. In a world where virtually everyone is corrupt or evil, Lecter's acts seem less extreme. Lecter is also humanised by the revelation of further details about his traumatic childhood. One branch of Lecter's research, it transpires, has been in mathematics, in an attempt to create a set of equations that would allow him to go back in time and prevent his younger sister's death.

Redemption, or the possibility of redemption, is a prominent theme in the novel. Mason Verger claims to have found Jesus, but acts in ways quite contrary to the teachings of Christ; Margot Verger is redeemed by killing her brother and rescuing one of the children he abused; and the reader is left with the possibility that Lecter himself has been redeemed. The redemption of the dangerous or wounded hero through love is a common trope in romance and was invoked, though ultimately denied, in *Red Dragon*. *Hannibal* opens up the possibility of a Lecter redeemed and transformed by Starling's love, and a parallel generic transformation of the text, from horror to romance. Yet the novel also enables another, opposing, reading: that, far from Starling redeeming Lecter, Lecter's evil has contaminated Starling.⁴⁰ *Hannibal* begins with a striking image of potential contagion. During the disastrous operation that effectively ends her FBI career, Starling has to shoot an HIV-infected woman who is holding an infant. After the shooting Starling frantically grasps the child and washes the blood off in an effort to protect the infant from infection. The baby is unhurt (and uninfected) but Starling is contaminated by the stigma of the disastrous raid. Though she followed FBI procedure, she is set up to take the fall.

Graham feared contamination by Lecter's 'madness' in *Red Dragon* (69), and *Hannibal* suggests that Starling, whose relationship with Lecter is far closer than Graham's ever was, has been contaminated.⁴¹ In learning to think like Lecter, Starling has become *too* like him. At several points in the novel Starling is positioned as Lecter's double. She creates a replica of his asylum cell in the FBI building and spends long

40 For a detailed discussion of disability and contagion, see Shildrick, chapter 4.

41 As Shildrick writes, 'the monstrous body is not just deviant in itself, but is characteristically metaphorised as dangerously contagious' (68).

hours there in an attempt to understand his mind. Monsters produce both 'fascination and fear', and it is clear that Starling, like Graham, and indeed like the reader, is fascinated by Lecter (Shildrick 4). Eventually, she chooses Lecter over her FBI career, by withholding information about Lecter's kidnapping from the FBI. It is unclear whether Starling's decision is motivated by the desire to save Lecter's life or capture him herself, but in either case it is a choice of Lecter over the FBI.

As Morgan writes, if one type of fear is based on 'being the material for some *other* to do with what it will [...] violated from without and appropriated into the system and agenda of the predator', even more awful is 'the idea that something might overwhelm us from *within* and redefine us in its own terms' (*The Biology of Horror* 72). From the beginning, Lecter had the ability to get inside Starling's head. In *Hannibal* Starling rescues Lecter, saving his life, and he in turn rescues her. Later in the novel, the two of them live together, Starling drugged and Lecter providing an extreme form of therapy. The ends of this therapy, which includes Lecter posing as Starling's dead father while wearing items dug up from his grave, are unclear, with the reader left unsure whether Lecter is genuinely motivated to help Starling or simply trying to get her fully within his power.

In a key episode a heavily medicated Starling, becomes, like Lecter, a cannibal. Lecter has kidnapped Krendler, the FBI agent who victimised Starling. In a gruesome scene, he cuts off and cooks pieces of Krendler's brain while Krendler, still alive, sits at the table with them. Starling, Lecter, and Krendler eat pieces of Krendler's brain during an elegant dinner party that is simultaneously luxurious and horrific. Like much else in the novel, this scene opens itself up to conflicting interpretations. In eating the brain, is Starling becoming a zombie, consuming (and being consumed by) Lecter's particular brand of insanity? Or is eating the brain an empowering act, representing Starling's encompassing of a man and a system which systematically belittled and undermined her? Is the destruction of Krendler motivated by love—a gift, like the expensive Italian toiletries Lecter sent to Starling earlier in the novel—or some other emotion? To what extent does Starling know what she is doing in this scene? The novel refuses to answer these questions, producing an affective disorientation. The reader is left unsure of what they know and how they feel, as a visceral response of revulsion mixes with concern for Starling, satisfaction at Krendler's comeuppance, and fearful anticipation of what will happen next.

The novel's conclusion, which offers a description of Lecter and Starling's life together, resists any attempt to pinpoint whether Starling has been corrupted or Lecter redeemed. Though it presents a

series of observations about their life together, including glimpses into the minds of both, the omniscient narrator withholds key information that might enable the reader to definitively resolve the ending of the trilogy. Instead, the reader is left with an unopenable Schrödinger's box: Starling has either been utterly destroyed or is living happily ever after, and Lecter is either redeemed or irredeemably evil. Interpretive uncertainty and affective uncertainty are bound together; just as the two different interpretations are incompatible, so too are they affective opposites. The reader is left unsure whether they should feel uplifted at the unlikely (but therefore all the more powerful) redemption of Lecter, or devastated at Starling's corruption, for surely no one is safe if Starling, the moral heart of the series, can be thus degraded.⁴² The novel's unwillingness to provide not just resolution but any degree of affective certainty is deeply unsettling. As with the earlier cannibalism scene, the reader is left unsure not only of what they know but of what they *feel*: a profoundly disturbing sensation.⁴³ Lecter as liminal monster produces a correspondingly monstrous uncertainty, one that is both 'transgressive and transformative' (Shildrick 4).

However the reader responds to the ambiguities of its conclusion, Harris's trilogy disrupts any attempt to classify individuals as normal or monstrous, good or evil, sane or mad. The uncertainty of the novel's ending rejects comprehension and classification, leaving the reader questioning their own assumptions, expectations, and beliefs. Writing about Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932), Smith claims that the movie functions as 'both a product of and a commentary on the horror genre' as it 'both enacts and points to the enfreakment of disability on which our cultural texts rely' (96, 95). The same could be said of the Lecter novels: in the depiction of Graham, Verger, Dolarhyde, and McClane, and most of all in its refusal to clearly position Lecter as one thing or another, the novels enact processes of enfreakment and *in so doing* highlight those processes, encouraging the reader to reflect upon the ways in which bodyminds are designated as abnormal or monstrous.

42 Even the reader most open to the idea of redemption through love must have some reservations about a happily ever after for Lecter, or some suspicions that he has not been completely transformed, while those who are convinced Lecter is evil must recoil from his being rewarded with a relationship with Starling.

43 This affective uncertainty is deeply uncomfortable. Ngai notes the 'dysphoric affect of affective disorientation—of being lost on one's own "cognitive map" of available affects' (14). The novel fulfils the reader's expectations of the horror genre by generating discomfiting affects, but does so by creating affective confusion.

Conclusion: Disturbing Representations

In beginning with the genre that might appear the least promising territory for any sort of disability-informed engagement, I seek neither a wholesale recuperation of the horror genre nor the legitimation of a few exceptional texts. Rather, these works by King and Harris illustrate that a problematic representational tradition does not prohibit and can even enable the creation of reflexive representations of disability. King's novel denaturalises the conventions of disability representation, inviting readers to reflect on disability's relation to story, while Harris's novels offer a productive critique of the mind sciences and their inability to encompass the complexity of the human mind. Disability is one of several tools used to generate fearful affects, but these novels also problematise the conventional positioning of disability as fearful: *Duma Key* insists that the disabled body is not the locus of horror, while the conclusion of *Hannibal* produces an affective confusion where what the reader thinks they know is called into question—including their beliefs about disability. These novels are disturbing representations in two senses. They work to produce a sensation of fearful disturbance in the reader and use disability to help achieve this. At the same time, though, they disturb readers' preconceptions and assumptions about disability. Disability feelings always blur the boundaries between emotion, sensation, and cognition; what we know, or believe to be true, is profoundly shaped by what we *feel*. King's *Duma Key* and Harris's *Lecter* novels disturb and destabilise both what the reader knows and what the reader feels.

Horror is sometimes positioned as a genre that is ultimately conservative or reassuring: King's comment that the horror story is 'as conservative as an Illinois Republican in a three-piece pinstriped suit' is one of the most frequently quoted phrases in horror scholarship (*Danse Macabre* location 6884). Often, scholars assume that the horror text, in its invocation of the excessive, abnormal, or disturbing, offers at best a temporary disruption of the status quo.⁴⁴ The restoration of

44 For example, Magistrale and Morrison argue that the status quo is 'reaffirmed' in horror (5). Darryl Jones writes that 'the horror genre has often been understood as an inherently radical one, dealing as it does in the violation of social taboos—but here again it is worth suggesting that the contrary may well be true, that horror works to enforce social norms' (34). Wisker argues that the 'typical narrative trajectory of a horror tale proceeds from disturbance and transgression, to comfortable resolution and closure' ('Don't Look Now!' 20). In later work, she makes a distinction between 'radical

the status quo is conflated with conservatism in the genre's handling of identity issues—in other words, the containment or defeat of the monster at the end of the horror narrative is assumed to correlate with an unwillingness to challenge the situation of oppressed or marginalised groups.⁴⁵

Such assertions, though, are problematic—as is the invocation of King's work to support them. King continues, in a comment that is rarely cited:

Suppose that the creator of the horror story was, under his/her fright wig and plastic fangs, a Republican in a three-button suit [...] ... ah, but suppose below *that* there is a *real* monster, with real fangs and a squirming Medusa-tangle of snakes for hair? Suppose it's all a self-serving lie and when the creator of horror is finally stripped all the way to his or her core of being we find not an agent of the norm but a friend—a capering, gleeful, red-eyed agent of chaos? (*Danse Macabre* location 6910)

Horror is marked not by resolution, closure, and containment of the disruptive and the disturbing, but by the rejection of resolution and containment. Again, the story of 'The Hook' serves as an exemplar: the teenagers may have escaped this time, but the Hook remains at large—and he's going to want his hook back. The monstrous is not vanquished so much as temporarily evaded, and horror texts often end with portents of the future return of evil or supernatural forces.⁴⁶ Even when the forces of darkness are unambiguously vanquished, things cannot return to how they were. Those who survive are left with bodyminds marked by horror: scarred, disabled, grieving, traumatised (as is the case for Edger in *Duma Key*).⁴⁷ Any restoration of the status quo is illusory. Horror's characters sometimes survive, but they rarely get to live happily ever after.

For both characters and reader, then, horror's disturbing affects endure, echoing beyond the conclusion of the narrative. Horror authors cannot be agents 'of the norm', since, however conservative their depiction of gender, sexuality, class, race, or disability might be, horror

horror' which 'challenges and breaks boundaries' and 'conservative horror' which 'reinforces and replaces those boundaries' (*Horror Fiction* 244).

45 See, for example, Badley, Darryl Jones, and Wisker's 'Don't Look Now!'

46 See, for example, King's *Carrie*.

47 The long-term repercussions of the horrific encounter are particularly well illustrated in King's *Doctor Sleep* (2013), the sequel to *The Shining* (1977).

texts aim to disturb or disrupt not just for the period spent reading the text but after the book is closed. Horror can likewise disrupt or disturb how a reader feels about disability. Disability studies scholars have understandably been wary of horror's affects and the ways they have been used in relation to disability. Yet, as this analysis of works by King and Harris has demonstrated, texts that feature disability and produce 'negative' feelings such as fear or discomfort, and even texts that use disability to produce feelings of fear and discomfort, might actually have positive *effects* in terms of shifting readers' perceptions of disability through the creation of reflexive representations. There is a crucial distinction between using disability to produce 'negative' feelings, and producing negative feelings about disability.

The next chapter, on crime fiction, examines a genre that shares many features with horror, including a tradition of using disability to produce fearful affects and the depiction of disabled people as pitiful victims or monstrous villains. The boundaries between the two genres are often porous, with texts such as Harris's Lecter novels, King's *Mr Mercedes* (2014), and many others drawing upon a shared set of tropes and conventions. Where crime fiction differs from horror, though, is in its relation to closure and resolution. While horror offers at most a partial dissipation of the fearful emotions it provokes, crime is a genre whose readers expect closure, containment, and, ultimately, reassurance. Both genres trade in anxiety and disturbance, and frequently use disability to achieve these affects. However, crime promises an ending in which these feelings will be resolved—a convention that has important implications for the genre's depictions of disability.

CHAPTER TWO

Character and Closure: Disability in Crime

Blind Man with a Pistol, the title of a 1969 crime novel by Chester Himes, is a phrase designed to generate a potent affective response. Primary among the range of feelings evoked are anxiety and curiosity, manifesting in a set of questions: why would a blind man want a gun? What would, or could, a blind man do with a gun? The titular blind man simultaneously brings to mind and draws upon cultural framings of disability in terms of chaos, lack, and potential danger, triggering feelings including pity, uncertainty, and anxious anticipation.¹ The title of Himes's novel brings the reader into an affective encounter with disability, with the blind man used to evoke feelings of anticipation and anxious curiosity: the affects characteristic of crime fiction.²

Though horror fiction works to evoke a broadly similar set of unsettling sensations, crime offers a distinctly different affective experience. In contrast to horror, the crime reader expects that the feelings of suspense, anxiety, and tension educed by the narrative will be defused or resolved by the narrative's conclusion. As Eyal Segal writes, 'the (typical) detective story' is 'a paradigm of strong closure'

- 1 While the blind man's blackness is also crucial to the character's affective function in the novel, the title generates affect by evoking disability in particular. For detailed discussions of the novel's handling of race see Munby 98–112 and Bryant.
- 2 'Crime fiction' is used throughout as an umbrella term encompassing the crime, detective, and mystery traditions. (For genre taxonomies see Cawelti and Malmgren.) For contemporary crime fiction I assume that it is more productive to consider what such fictions share than to divide them into categories.

(155), meaning that the reader's experience of the discomfiting affects generated by the narrative is shaped and modulated by their anticipation of a cathartic resolution.³ In a typical crime narrative, a crime occurs and is investigated by a detective or team of detectives. By the end of the novel the crime has been solved, or at the very least the investigators have gained new understanding of it.⁴ The reader of crime fiction expects that the case will be resolved just as romance readers expect that the central couple will be united. In both genres, though, there remains a powerful sense of anticipation about *how* this predictable outcome will be secured, as the author's job is to make the inevitable seem unlikely or impossible. Crime fictions also generate suspense about what else the perpetrator might do before they are apprehended, and about whether and how they will be brought to justice. Crime narratives therefore involve an affective trajectory wherein feelings of curiosity, anxiety, and suspense are generated, increased, and then resolved, producing a powerful—and pleasurable—sensation of closure. These anticipatory affects are important in and of themselves, but they are also a crucial ingredient in the feeling of closure and resolution generated at the text's conclusion, as the satisfaction of the ending is directly proportional to the intensity of the anticipatory feelings generated. The more dangerous or ingenious the perpetrator, the more opaque the mystery, the greater the sense of closure at the conclusion of the narrative.⁵

Crime's affects are best understood in terms of a characteristic affective trajectory: anticipatory affects (including curiosity, anxiety, and suspense) are generated, intensified, and ultimately resolved.⁶ Segal notes the 'closural force' generated by the ending of the detective story and the way in which this produces 'a certain *effect*, or perceptual quality' (154, 155). This feeling is best understood as an affect, functioning at cognitive, emotional, and sensational levels, and

3 Walton writes that in the dénouement of Golden Age detective novels the 'sense of fear and instability' that has been generated is 'exorcised' (94).

4 However, the mystery may not be fully elucidated, nor the perpetrator brought to justice.

5 In some crime series, the closure produced by nullifying the threat of the primary perpetrator is deferred, stretching the affective arc over multiple volumes. In such cases, other narrative elements are deployed to produce a sense of closure (e.g. a secondary perpetrator is caught, or another threat is averted). For example, this technique is used repeatedly in Cornwell's long-running 'Scarpetta' series.

6 For a detailed discussion of curiosity and suspense in different types of crime narrative see Segal.

bringing together satisfaction, relief, and pleasure.⁷ In crime fiction, the detecting protagonist and the interpreting reader move from ignorance towards knowledge or understanding, as the *who*, *why*, and *how* of the crime is uncovered.⁸ Closure at the level of plot, through the identification and apprehension of the perpetrator, is intimately tied to the production of closure as an affect. Ultimately, a disordered or disrupted world is restored to order through the identification of the perpetrator or the explication of the mystery, events often (though not always) coupled with the achievement of some kind of justice. Crime readers expect both revelation and resolution: uncertainty transmuted to certainty, ignorance to understanding, anxiety to reassurance, and disorder to order.⁹

From the earliest crime narratives authors have exploited disability's affective charge,¹⁰ and contemporary crime fiction has a range of disability icons. Some of these overlap with other genres: the helpless disabled victim or psychotic perpetrator enhance the emotional impact of the narrative in a similar manner to their counterparts in horror (and likewise draw upon disability's associations with vulnerability and malevolence). Crime-specific icons include the 'silent witness' character, in possession of vital information but unable to communicate it,¹¹ and the neurodivergent detective, whose atypical insights or methods are key to solving the case. This chapter explores how disability enriches crime affects by examining its deployment in relation to the genre's three indispensable character roles: investigator, perpetrator, and victim.

7 Though some contemporary crime fictions do end 'on more ambivalent and insecure notes', the genre is 'built on a tradition of closure' (Kinsman 11).

8 See Malmgren 28–31 for discussion of the parallels between detecting and reading.

9 Plain identifies 'repetition, resolution, containment' as 'what we expect from crime fiction' (14).

10 See, for example, Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) and Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). For critical discussions of disability in these texts see Mossman and Samuels, 'Reading Race through Disability'.

11 See Murray, 'Neurotecs', 179–80. For examples, see Padgett's *Strawgirl* (1994) and May's *The Lewis Man* (2012).

Disabled Detectives

Disabled investigators appear throughout the history of crime, detective, and mystery fiction,¹² and have fascinated authors, readers, and scholars.¹³ Notable disabled detectives include Dorothy L. Sayers's shell-shocked investigator Peter Wimsey, George C. Chesbro's dwarf detective Robert 'Mingo' Frederickson, and Abigail Padgett's bipolar protagonist Bo Bradley.¹⁴ It is conventional in crime for the central detective to be in some way exceptional (in terms of intelligence, tenacity, or some other attribute), and disability makes for a distinctive detective, creating the illusion of a unique protagonist.¹⁵ As the back cover copy of one novel proclaims, 'Deacon Monroe is a unique investigator. Intelligent, cultured, well-connected. And totally blind' (Cross).¹⁶ The exceptional investigatory abilities of the disabled detective are often bound up with their disability, with disability positioned less as an obstacle than as a generative force which encourages or enables alternative (and productive) ways of thinking and working. The cognitive exceptionality of the neurodivergent investigator, for example, is always integral to their skills as a detective. Literary examples include Karin Slaughter's dyslexic investigator Will Trent, whose skill lies in looking at 'how the pieces were put together to make a crime work' (*Triptych* 187), and Padgett's Bo Bradley, who is almost always able to tell if a person is lying.¹⁷

The contemporary boom in neurodivergent protagonists is partly a function of specific social changes, as well as 'the fascination

12 Zola gives examples of disabled detectives from the first decade of the twentieth century to the 1980s, while Hoppenstand and Browne discuss 'defective detectives' in the detective pulps of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

13 Much of the existing critical work on disability in crime focuses on disabled investigators. See, for example, Hoppenstand and Browne, Murray's 'Neurotecs', and Hafferty and Foster. For discussions of disability in crime not focused on the disabled detective see Burke and Zola.

14 Wimsey first appears in *Whose Body?* (1923), Frederickson first appears in *Shadow of a Broken Man* (1977), and Bradley first appears in *Child of Silence* (1993).

15 Hoppenstand and Browne suggest that historically 'nearly every detective character seems burdened by some sort of personal abnormality' (1). Segal identifies the police procedural subgenre as an exception.

16 Despite these claims, Cross's *Blind Justice* (2013) is not even the only crime novel with a visually impaired investigator titled *Blind Justice*: Alexander's *Blind Justice* was published in 1994.

17 For detailed discussion of neurodivergent detectives see Murray's 'Neurotecs' and Loftis.

our contemporary culture has with cognitive difference' (Murray, 'Neurotecs', 182). However, it also forms part of a larger tradition of disabled detectives which arises from the complementarity of disability affects and genre conventions. As this chapter explores, disability enhances crime genre affects in a variety of ways, from generating additional types of curiosity or suspense to enhancing the sense of closure via its erasure or containment. A detective's disability may prove an obstacle to cracking the case or provide an additional mystery to be solved, as in Anne Perry's *The Face of a Stranger* (1990), where the amnesiac protagonist has to piece together his own history as well as solving the case. Such deployments enhance both anticipatory affects and the sense of closure.

Affect and Achievement in Jeffery Deaver's Lincoln Rhyme Novels

In crime fictions featuring disabled detectives, dominant cultural assumptions about disability clash with the genre convention of the exceptionally able detective. This clash generates affective engagement in readers, but also challenges received wisdom about disabled people's incapability, as is particularly apparent in Jeffery Deaver's series of novels featuring quadriplegic investigator Lincoln Rhyme.¹⁸ Deaver's series is notable for the extent of the central detective's physical impairment: Rhyme can move only his head, shoulders, and one finger. However, the series, and particularly the first Rhyme novel, *The Bone Collector* (1997), also serves as a case study of how an affect-focused approach can open up perspectives inaccessible to the critical paradigms more typically deployed in cultural disability studies.¹⁹ It is undeniable that a social realist approach to *The Bone Collector* and its sequels finds much of which to be critical. The protagonist needs to be catheterised every five or six hours, but has only a single aide, who appears never to need a holiday or an uninterrupted night's sleep. Rhyme is wealthy as a result of a compensation payout, and his choices about medical treatment, personal assistance, and technological support are unaffected by financial considerations. The extent to

18 Rhyme is the protagonist of fourteen novels and several short stories as of early 2019, and appears as a secondary character in several books in Deaver's Kathryn Dance series.

19 On methodological approaches in cultural disability studies, see chapter 1 of Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*, and Mallett.

which Rhyme's wealth minimises the effects of a disabling social environment is largely unacknowledged, as are the privileges he enjoys as a white, middle-class, heterosexual male. The novels also frequently trade in stereotypes. Nonetheless, Deaver's series offers reflexive representations of disability. In *The Bone Collector* Deaver manipulates disability affects and genre affects to create a compelling crime narrative, at the same time as his novels work with and upon the reader's feelings about disability in generative ways.

The Bone Collector is set three and a half years after Rhyme became paralysed, and utilises a common crime motif: the brilliant detective called out of retirement for one last case. Rhyme's former colleagues in the NYPD are investigating the gruesome murder of a man who was kidnapped the day before; the woman he was with is still missing. Baffled by the case, and with a UN peace conference about to begin, they ask Rhyme, the former head of forensics, to consult. However, Rhyme no longer wishes to live and is actively pursuing suicide. When his ex-colleagues arrive to try and persuade him to take the case, Rhyme is about to have a long-awaited meeting with a representative of a pro-euthanasia group, and hopes that the man will help him die that day.

In crime narratives that utilise the 'one last case' motif, there is generally little real suspense about whether or not the detective will take the case, but Rhyme's situation generates some genuine uncertainty. He has no intention of looking at the forensic report his former colleagues leave, and his repeated assertions that he doesn't have time to take the case are the literal truth. Just minutes after they depart Rhyme asks the euthanasia group representative to help him end his life, and it is only the man's caution about prosecution that leads the act to be postponed (and then only for a couple of days). Of course, Rhyme looks at the report and spots a vital clue, but it is fifty-four pages into the novel before he agrees to work on the case, and then only for a single day.

Deaver's novel deploys a range of conventional suspense-generating devices, including frequent references to time and attacks on the investigating team. However, the choice of a quadriplegic—and suicidal—protagonist allows for a further, unusual source of suspense: the possibility that Rhyme will kill himself before the case is solved.²⁰ Later, a health crisis triggered by long hours of work offers a further

20 For an alternative deployment of disability to create suspense, see Elliot Hall's *The First Stone* (2009). Hall's protagonist has an unidentified war-related syndrome, and must solve the case to access medication that will save his life.

twist. Rhyme takes himself off the case and resumes work only when Amelia Sachs, an officer who has become his unwilling partner, offers him a deal: she will not interfere with his suicide if he will keep working until they find the latest victims. Crime's anticipatory affects are often generated and enhanced by the sense that time is running out. Deploying disability enables Deaver to intensify those affects by creating a scenario where time is running out for the detectives in multiple senses.²¹

Rhyme's plan to kill himself as soon as the case is solved complicates the usual affective dynamic of crime fiction. With very rare exceptions, the crime detective is on the side of life, working to catch those who kill, prevent them from killing again, and bring them to justice. The detective investigates in order that life will triumph over death, and *The Bone Collector* offers a memorable variant of this conventional ideology: detection literally is life for Rhyme. As long as Rhyme is investigating, and as long as the case remains unsolved, Rhyme remains alive. While the successful resolution of the case is typically a victory for life, in *The Bone Collector* it will mean Rhyme's death. Every piece of evidence analysed, every deduction, is therefore a step closer to his suicide. The resulting conflict renders the novel an affective misfit. The reader's desire for the case to be solved and closure achieved—a desire mandated by genre convention and typically taken for granted—is unsettled and problematised by a simultaneous desire for the case to remain unsolved, since that means Rhyme will continue to live. The end result is a compelling, and sometimes uncomfortable, reading experience.

This affective conflict is particularly significant because it relies upon the reader feeling that the quadriplegic Rhyme *should* continue to live—a sentiment that cannot be taken for granted in a cultural context where a life with significant physical impairments is frequently assumed to be a life that is not worth living. Although it has been argued that the disabled body in general 'is culturally figured as a signifier of death (or the potential for death)', the specifics of Rhyme's condition are crucial (Church, 'Fantastic Films, Fantastic Bodies'). The disabilities more frequently attached to crime's detectives, such as deafness, blindness, and amputation, may connote an inferior or limited life under dominant ideologies, but they are not likely to suggest an invalid one. Readers are unlikely to assume that Dick Francis's amputee detective

21 Time is also running out for Sachs, who responds to the first crime scene during her final shift, just hours away from a transfer to a desk job because of arthritis.

Sid Halley or Slaughter's dyslexic investigator Will Trent would be better off dead.²² In contrast, suicide, and particularly assisted suicide, is central to the cultural narrative or *metanarrative* of quadriplegia: it is a key part of the 'story' in relation to which people with quadriplegia find themselves defined (Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness* 10).²³ The expectation that a quadriplegic person might or should want to end their own life is exploited by *The Bone Collector* as source of anticipatory affects, but it is also challenged. The successful achievement of the novel's affects requires the reader to feel that a life with quadriplegia is a life worth living and to accept that Rhyme's current life has value.²⁴ Though it depicts a protagonist with a deeply held desire to die, the affective setup of Deaver's novel actually functions to challenge perceptions of disabled life as a form of death.

Suspense about whether Rhyme will commit suicide is prolonged until the book's final paragraph. Rhyme, Sachs, and their team have saved the remaining victims, and the perpetrator has been captured. Sachs has agreed to help Rhyme kill himself, and Rhyme is drinking a drugged brandy when his colleagues arrive with news of a bombing at the peace conference. Rhyme agrees to help investigate, and the novel ends with Sachs tossing the brandy out of the window. As the series develops, Rhyme rebuilds his career and develops a romantic, as well as professional, partnership with Sachs. Although suicide remains on the horizon as a possibility, it recedes as the series develops.

The Bone Collector is both a novel centred around a quadriplegic character's efforts to kill himself and a text which works upon the reader's feelings to encourage a potentially productive reflection upon the value of disabled lives. A similar interplay of unpromising context and generative reflection is found in a key scene within the novel, identified by Deaver as the genesis of the Rhyme character:

I wanted to write a book with this very simple concept: My hero is in a locked room at the end of the book, utterly helpless, no one coming to save him, the killer—the bad guy—is there. What does my hero do to get out of that?

22 Halley appears in five novels, beginning with *Odds Against* (1965). Trent appears in a series of novels beginning with *Triptych* (2006).

23 Metanarratives of disability are also discussed in Chapter 4. For a high-profile example of a text which reflects and reinforces the association of quadriplegia and assisted suicide, see Moyes's *Me Before You* (2012), and its film adaptation.

24 Cure is ruled out in *The Bone Collector*, though Rhyme does pursue treatment, and gains a slight increase in function, in later novels.

And I thought about, well, possibly having him tied up, or handcuffed or duct-taped or something like that—but that’s a cliché [*sic*]. I wanted to go to the extreme. [...] So I decided to make him—based on that very simple, rather calculated thriller premise, a quadriplegic—completely, permanently immobile. (Deaver, ‘The Thriller Man’)²⁵

Deaver’s intent to use disability to generate affect, a practice often viewed with suspicion by cultural disability studies scholars, is unambiguous here. Beyond this, the scenario described relies upon, and seems likely to reinforce, problematic associations between disability and incapacity. However, the actual scene is more complex in both its affects and its potential effects than the summary above suggests. The penultimate chapter of *The Bone Collector* reveals that the perpetrator, Stanton, wants revenge on Rhyme for a mistake which led to the death of his family. Stanton has inveigled his way into Rhyme’s life by posing as a doctor, but Rhyme’s desire for death made simply killing him unsatisfactory. The kidnappings and killings which took up the earlier parts of the novel were, in part, an elaborate scheme to seduce Rhyme into wanting to live again. Finally ready to exact his revenge, Stanton kills Rhyme’s police protection, setting up the locked room scenario.

In crime, the locked room scenario involves an unstable interplay of anxiety, assurance, and curiosity. As Deaver’s comments imply, the question in the reader’s mind is generally *what* the detective does to get out of the situation—not whether they will succeed in escaping. However, the more helpless the protagonist appears, the greater the degree of anxiety and curiosity evoked. In this context, Deaver depicts a quadriplegic investigator not only because the physical effects of quadriplegia generate curiosity about the logistics of the escape but also because quadriplegia’s connotations of inability, passivity, and vulnerability further intensify the reader’s feelings of anxiety and anticipation. Ultimately, though, the association of quadriplegia with vulnerability and helplessness is rejected, as Rhyme vanquishes his captor. Crucially, he does so in a way likely to be inaccessible to a nondisabled protagonist, and which utilises the very attributes the reader is likely to perceive as denying him agency.

Though Rhyme is generally healthy, he experiences bouts of autonomic dysreflexia, a life-threatening condition to which quadriplegics are susceptible and which results in high blood pressure with the

25 The power of this scenario is such that Deaver offers variants of it several times in the series. See, for example, *The Burning Wire* (2010) and *The Steel Kiss* (2016).

potential for stroke or heart attack. When the perpetrator approaches him with murderous intent, Rhyme fakes an attack. As a panicking Stanton tries to resuscitate him, Rhyme bites him in the neck. Though Stanton struggles to get away, Rhyme's grip is 'unbreakable' (446). Even when Stanton manages to stab Rhyme, it is to no avail, since 'pain was one thing to which Lincoln Rhyme was immune' (446–47). Thus, it is Rhyme's paralysis (which means he feels no pain) and its associated effects (which means he is able to convincingly fake an attack) that offer the means by which he triumphs. Here, Rhyme's quadriplegia functions as a source of power and agency rather than incapability, and Rhyme kills Stanton before help finally arrives. In this scene, quadriplegia serves to make Rhyme not vulnerable but invulnerable, and the assumption that Rhyme-as-quadruplegic is *necessarily* helpless is further discredited by its association with the villain.

Investigating Critical Practices: The Detective and the Supercrip

Deaver's deployment of disability and affect in the context of crime fiction encourages readerly reflection upon preconceptions of a quadriplegic life as a form of death and the association of disability with helplessness and vulnerability. I now consider an alternative, less optimistic, interpretation of Deaver's work in order to explore the ways in which different critical practices shape and limit how texts (and their effects) are understood. This has particular relevance for the critical examination of genre fiction, since '*how* we choose to read representations of disability also dictates what sort of cultural texts criticism can handle' (Mallett 9).

In their analysis of the Rhyme novels, Andrew Jakubowicz and Helen Meekosha identify Rhyme as a 'supercrip', commenting—in what is surely a reference to Rhyme's actions in the locked room episode discussed above—that 'those small parts of his physical body that still operate to the command of his mind, are pumped up to superhuman levels'. Although the authors do not expand on their analysis in depth, they do not need to: supercrip representations are widely assumed to be 'inherently regressive' (Schalk 75).²⁶ To label a representation as deploying this stereotype is 'the ultimate scholarly

26 All references to Schalk's work in this section are to the article 'Reevaluating the Supercrip'.

insult', a form of critical dismissal which decisively locates that text as unproductive from a disability studies perspective (Schalk 71).

As noted in Chapter 1, supercrip representations figure various forms of disabled achievement in terms of 'overcoming, heroism, inspiration, and the extraordinary'—regardless of whether the achievement justifies such hyperbole (Schalk 73). Such representations rely, as Eli Clare points out, upon the perception that disability and achievement are contradictory. By implicitly positioning even ordinary accomplishments by disabled people as extraordinary, the supercrip stereotype is generally viewed as reinforcing the perceived contradiction between disability and achievement. Supercrip representations also tend to be highly individualistic, downplaying or ignoring 'social stigma and discrimination' and situating the disabled individual's success or failure as a function of attitude or personality rather than wider institutional or social barriers (Longmore 139). In addition, supercrip narratives are criticised for setting unrealistic expectations for disabled people—what of the disabled person who has no desire to become a Paralympic athlete?—and for primarily functioning as a source of inspiration for nondisabled audiences.²⁷ Here, I draw upon Schalk's reconsideration of supercrip narratives to suggest that reading Rhyme as supercrip is not only unproductive but symptomatic of an interpretive practice that itself risks reinforcing disablist beliefs and values.

Schalk argues that it is vital to move from using supercrip as a label for a type of person to considering supercrip as a 'narrative form [...] constructed around a disabled person or character through specific mechanisms' (78). Rather than merely identifying supercrip characters—problematic since 'potentially any disabled person who accomplishes anything or has any notable skill is a supercrip'—critics should focus on identifying and analysing particular kinds of supercrip narrative (Schalk 78). A critical practice which labels any disabled achiever as a supercrip (and associated representations as problematic for the reasons outlined above) is at the very least 'complicit in the ableism that constructs [...] low expectations for people with disabilities' (Schalk 78). Such an approach leaves the disability studies scholar in a critical cul-de-sac.

27 Supercrip representations are therefore understood as being of little value to disabled audiences: viewed as potentially exploitative in that they represent disability only or primarily for nondisabled audiences, and problematic in that they present disabled people as inspirational. (See Chrisman for an argument for the recuperation of inspiration.)

Thus the question shifts from whether Rhyme 'is' a supercrip to whether the novel, in its framing of Rhyme's accomplishments, presents a supercrip narrative. Schalk identifies three types of supercrip narrative: those which present the *regular supercrip*, lauded for accomplishments that would be ordinary if achieved by a nondisabled person; those focusing on the *glorified supercrip*, who achieves notable feats through hard work and determination; and those presenting the *superpowered supercrip*, whose abilities 'operate in direct relationship with or contrast to their disability' (81). While Rhyme might be read in relation to all three narrative types, the scene where Rhyme kills Stanton suggests a depiction of compensatory ability associated with disability, in line with the superpowered supercrip narrative.²⁸ When Rhyme bites Stanton's neck, 'It was as if all the dead muscles throughout his body had risen into his jaw' (446). The strength of Rhyme's bite is presented in contrast to the (presumed) weakness of the rest of his muscles. However, the fit between the depiction of Rhyme and the supercrip narrative is not seamless, as it is clearly established earlier in the novel that Rhyme is well-muscled from daily physical therapy. More significant, though, is what the scene *does*: Clare argues that supercrip narratives 'pair helplessness with disability' but, as discussed above, the scene actually functions to disrupt the association between quadriplegia and helplessness by encouraging critical reflection (9). The Rhyme novels also seem an uncomfortable fit with the other types of supercrip narrative in Schalk's typology: though there are occasional gestures towards productive investigatory approaches arising from his paralysis, there is little suggestion that Rhyme is a *better* investigator after acquiring disability than he was previously, since he was always exceptionally talented. Rhyme's achievements are by no means ordinary, but neither are they extraordinary *for him*.

Schalk writes that the key question is not whether we *can* read particular representations as supercrip narratives but about the utility of such readings: is the supercrip narrative 'the only or best way to understand' a particular representation (84)? The problems of reading Rhyme as supercrip become particularly apparent when considered in relation to genre norms. In crime fiction, genre convention mandates the success of the investigator, meaning that the genre's detectives are always figures of achievement. In this context, a critical approach based in spotting supercrips or supercrip narratives potentially leads to the

28 For discussion of disabled detectives and compensatory characteristics, see Hafferty and Foster 192 and 199.

critical dismissal of *all* crime representations featuring disabled detectives. Thus Schalk's argument for assessing supercrip narratives 'within their medium and genre context' takes on particular force, since failing to do so results in the dismissal of an entire narrative tradition (82).

None of this is to deny that the figure of the disabled detective achieves part of its affective impact from 'the perception that disability and achievement contradict each other' (Clare 8). Certainly the enduring appeal of this figure for authors and readers should be considered with a critical eye. Nonetheless, crime fictions featuring disabled detectives consistently challenge the assumption that disability and achievement are incompatible—even where such narratives partake of aspects of the various supercrip narratives or reflect ableist biases in their creation.²⁹ By solving the most challenging cases, the disabled detective is positioned as a particularly productive contributor to society, and part of the value of disabled detective stories is that they repeatedly situate disabled people as contributors and achievers. In a context where media representations still frequently present disabled people as takers, charity chases, or parasites, such representations offer an important counter-discourse despite the grounds they offer for critique.³⁰

Unreflexive Representations: Peter Robinson's *Friend of the Devil*

So far, this chapter has used an affect-focused approach to develop new insights into the crime genre via Deaver's novels and to investigate critical approaches in cultural disability studies. Deaver's work offers reflexive representations of disability, challenging aspects of

29 A parallel argument can be made about the use of disabled detective figures as a means of evoking curiosity. Disabled detective narratives often evoke a particular type of curiosity, beyond the general curiosity about how the case will be solved: how can a blind, or deaf, or paralysed investigator manage the logistics of an investigation? Can such an investigator function successfully as a detective? Curiosity about whether and how a disabled detective will be able to solve the case may well be grounded in assumptions about disabled people's incapacity, but in disabled detective narratives such assumptions are always proved wrong.

30 Disabled detective narratives situate disabled people as productive contributors and achievers, but in doing so they generally operate within, rather than challenging, a neoliberal value system that assumes that the value of human lives *can* be assessed on these grounds.

the metanarrative of quadriplegia through its manipulation of affect. I understand such representations as consequential: as representations which do something or have effects. Reflexive representations affect the reader in ways that open up the potential for a shift in their feelings, and thus potentially in their actions and interactions, though this is by no means inevitable.³¹

This is not to suggest that either the critical analysis of genre fiction or an affect-focused critical method will inevitably identify reflexive representations of disability. The intersection of disability feelings, genre affects, and wider social perceptions produced by genre fiction's depictions of disability may be consequential in ways that are not necessarily positive from a disability studies perspective. Though genre fiction is particularly suited to producing reflexive representations, genre, affect, and disability can also come together to produce *unreflexive* representations: representations which militate *against* readerly reflection and/or use disability feelings to reinforce dominant discourses within a disabling society. To illustrate this, I turn to a text which juxtaposes productively with Deaver's *The Bone Collector*, Peter Robinson's *Friend of the Devil* (2007). Both novels are part of long-running and popular crime series, feature quadriplegic characters in key roles, and deploy disability to generate desired affects. However, they do so in ways likely to have quite different effects: something that is partly, though not wholly, a function of the different character roles occupied by their disabled characters.

In *Friend of the Devil*, the seventeenth novel in Robinson's Yorkshire-set series, police officers Alan Banks and Annie Cabbot serve as dual protagonists, investigating murder cases which turn out to be interconnected. Banks investigates the rape and murder of a teenage girl, while Cabbot's case is the murder of a disabled woman whose body is discovered by the edge of a cliff. Though the novel repeatedly presents female characters as passive and/or vulnerable, these properties are particularly strongly associated with the disabled victim. The long opening paragraph of the novel, which describes her dead body, repeatedly negates the possibility of action: she 'might have been staring out to sea', but isn't; her face is 'expressionless'; and even when a seagull lands on her, she does not move (1). The impression of passivity is further heightened by a description of the dynamic scene around her, in which seagulls swoop and squawk, a ship moves

31 As explored in greater depth in the Conclusion, I do not mean to situate the identification and analysis of reflexive representations as merely a variant of a simplistic approach based upon finding 'positive' representations of disability.

on the horizon, and the wind lifts her hair. The disabled woman is therefore located from the beginning as a person acted upon, rather than acting.³² Though the description of the nondisabled victim a few pages later likewise contributes to an impression of female vulnerability, the terms used to describe her are quite different, and include terminology suggesting past activity and agency rather than their absence.

The disabled woman's initial presentation in terms of vulnerability is continued as the story proceeds. The man who discovers her body immediately perceives her as vulnerable: seeing a figure in the distance, he moves closer 'to see if he could offer any assistance' (7). Recognising the figure as a woman in a wheelchair, he is immediately concerned about her 'precarious position' at the edge of the cliff (7). To be perceived as disabled, and particularly as a disabled woman, is automatically to be perceived as at risk. While both disabled and nondisabled victims are subject to disturbing post-mortem assaults, the assault on the disabled woman occupies a more prominent position and is narrated in ways that emphasise its duration. The long opening paragraph of the novel builds ominously to the mobbing of the disabled woman's body by seagulls, ending with one of the gulls 'plung[ing] its beak into her ear' (1). When the narrative returns to the disabled woman six pages later, the attack by the gulls is still ongoing and, even once discovered, she is not secure. The man who finds her body is reluctant to leave her unprotected, but has no choice but to do so. As soon as he leaves, the birds return. These factors combine to suggest an attack of extended duration and severity. As with some depictions of disabled victims in horror, the impression created is that of a 'natural' victim: a person so vulnerable that they cannot be protected from harm.

Robinson's novel both exploits and reinforces the association of disability with vulnerability. In crime fiction's affective system, the more vulnerable the victim, the more abhorrent the crime—and the stronger the anticipatory affects. In Cabbot's description of the victim as a 'defenceless old woman confined to a wheelchair' (45), the disabled woman is placed in multiple identity categories intended to connote helplessness. However, disability serves as the primary marker of vulnerability in the novel. Disability is almost universally assumed to

32 It might be argued that the framing of the disabled woman in terms of passivity and inaction in the opening paragraph is used to suggest she is dead, since this is only implied. However, the common convention of beginning with a dead body in crime renders this unnecessary.

equate to defencelessness, marking the crime as particularly heinous.³³ Comments to this effect recur several times, with the police surgeon describing the killer as a ‘very sick bastard’, as the victim ‘Probably couldn’t even lift a bloody finger to defend herself’ (43). The emphasis upon the disabled woman’s vulnerability functions to generate and intensify a sense of outrage or violation in both characters and reader, marking the killer as exceptionally deviant and enhancing the novel’s anticipatory effects.

Whereas Deaver’s *The Bone Collector* refuted assumptions about its quadriplegic character’s inability with some verve, Robinson’s novel both confirms and naturalises them, discouraging readerly reflection. In *Friend of the Devil*, disability equates to vulnerability and inability, and the assumptions the investigators make about the victim’s incapacity are only confirmed after they identify her as Karen Drew, a resident of a local care home. Based on Drew’s wheelchair and halo brace (a device which keeps the head and neck stable after spinal injury), the detectives assume that her paralysis is total—an assumption which is proved correct despite the fact that spinal injuries typically affect function only below the site of the injury. In a portrayal of disability as absolute and totalising, Drew is unable to move or communicate, and her voicelessness is portrayed as a natural consequence of quadriplegia. Though medically implausible, this portrayal has significant value in the affective system of the novel. Passive, voiceless, and entirely dependent on others, Drew is a kind of icon of helplessness. Her murder is therefore all the more effective at generating anticipatory affects.

Because they are locked into an understanding of disabled people as passive and pitiful, the investigating officers in *Friend of the Devil* struggle to come up with a motive for Drew’s murder. Their assumption is that such a person, because always acted upon rather than acting, cannot be a threat to anyone, and that a disabled person is incapable of rousing murderous emotions in others. At the care home where Drew lived, patients (including those who are non-verbal) can be taken out of the building by anyone who claims to know them, without supervision or any sort of identity check. Cabbot is frustrated that the resulting lack of information hampers her investigation, but perceives greater security as unnecessary: ‘Why on earth would anyone want to kill one of them?’ (81). Framing Drew and the other disabled residents in this way generates anticipation by positioning the case as particularly difficult to solve, but it also positions them as less than human. Other characters

33 A disabled victim is also used to increase the perceived horror of the criminal act in Karin Slaughter’s *Blindsighted* (2001).

perceive Drew as lacking in subjectivity or personality, something never challenged or called into question by the viewpoint characters. When Cabbot asks Drew's social worker what she thought of her, the social worker calls it a 'funny question': 'what impression can you have of someone who just sits and says nothing?' (107, 108).³⁴ The investigating officers assume that the motive for Drew's murder must lie in her pre-disability life, and this is confirmed as the case unfolds.

In the press, Drew's case is dubbed the 'Wheelchair Murder', the wheelchair standing for her entire existence (94). The investigators are concerned about the media sensationalising the case, but the metonymic framing of the disabled woman as object rather than subject passes without commentary. The absence of engagement from the central characters encourages these dehumanising discourses to pass unnoticed. For actual wheelchair users a wheelchair enables activity and agency, but in Robinson's novel this common symbol of disability is assumed to signify only inability and a subhuman status—reflecting the novel's investment in a set of deeply limiting assumptions about disability. While Deaver's *The Bone Collector* uses the metanarrative of quadriplegia as a springboard for the creation of a reflexive representation of disability,³⁵ Robinson's novel doubles down on the most problematic aspects of the metanarrative.³⁶ The agency that was a central feature of Rhyme's characterisation is entirely absent in the portrayal of Drew. Both of these novels exploit the affective potential of their quadriplegic characters, but with quite different end results.

Disabled Villains

Robinson's novel gains maximum affective impact by having its quadriplegic character occupy multiple roles. In a revelation that 'changes

34 In fact, the only character willing to grant the disabled woman any degree of subjectivity is her murderer. However, this view is not presented until the end of the novel, and is by definition a discredited perspective.

35 The crime genre's emphasis on reading and interpreting bodies means that it is ideally suited to the creation of such representations. See Cheyne, 'Disability in Genre Fiction', for more detailed discussion.

36 The novel shows occasional glimmers of awareness of wider cultural representations of disability—one of the investigating officers speculates that the disabled victim might have been 'doing an Andy', in reference to the *Little Britain* character who fakes his disability—but these have minimal impact overall (45).

everything', Cabbot discovers that Karen Drew was in fact Lucy Payne, one of the perpetrators from a previous novel in the series (130). In *Aftermath* (2001), Payne and her husband raped, tortured, and murdered a series of young women.³⁷ To evade arrest, Payne jumped from a window, ending up paralysed.

Though appearing in all kinds of narratives, the villainous disabled perpetrator is one of crime's disability icons, with the enduring cultural association between disability and villainy particularly frequently mobilised in the genre.³⁸ The authorial attribution of disability to criminal characters draws upon cultural framings of disability as fearful and sinister, enhancing the anxiety which crime fiction seeks to evoke. This narrative deployment of disability also draws upon the association of disability with chaos and disorder, under which the disabled body/mind is positioned as inherently unruly. In crime fiction, the disabled perpetrator both embodies and creates disorder, the deviant disabled body/mind mirroring the deviance from social rules and norms involved in criminal acts.

The bodyminds of disabled perpetrators enhance the crime narrative because disability itself is widely conceptualised as disorderly, unruly, and difficult to police. As Davis writes, 'If people with disabilities are considered anything, they are or have been considered creatures of disorder' (143).³⁹ Crime fiction is fundamentally concerned with the achievement or restoration of some sort of order, which in turn contributes to the creation of a sense of closure.⁴⁰ Where this comes through the containment of disabled characters—whether through death, incarceration, or (more rarely) reformation—it offers an additional level of satisfaction to the reader,

37 In *Aftermath*, Payne tells another character that she killed all of the victims. In *Friend of the Devil* Banks is uncertain who killed the victims, but knows from video evidence that Payne was at the very least a willing partner in torturing and sexually assaulting them.

38 Zola writes 'villainy is a major association in the cultural imagery of disability' (236), while Davis notes that 'more often than not villains tend to be physically abnormal: scarred, deformed, or mutilated' (41). In particular, crime narratives often implicitly or explicitly endorse a relationship between mental illness and criminality: either the perpetrator is positioned as a psychopath or 'crazy' by default, or mental illness is viewed as sufficient explanation for criminal behaviour.

39 See also Quayson, who writes that 'the impairment is often taken to be the physical manifestation of the exact opposite of order' (17).

40 Malmgren writes that 'the deity that presides over the motivated worlds of mystery' is 'the god of Order' (25).

since disabled bodyminds are perceived as particularly uncontrollable and uncontainable.⁴¹

Though Payne is nondisabled for the majority of *Aftermath*, the introduction of disability at the end of the novel functions to produce this sense of order and closure, in multiple ways. Payne's previous normal, even beautiful, appearance, was incongruous with her deviant mind, breaching the longstanding narrative convention under which 'Deformity of body symbolizes deformity of soul' (Longmore 133).⁴² Payne's acquisition of (visible) disability brings body and mind back into orderly alignment. Secondly, disability is portrayed as an appropriate punishment for her actions, with one character musing that she got 'no less than she deserved' (*Aftermath* 494). The metanarrative of quadriplegia encompasses interconnected notions of a quadriplegic life as a miserable life and of quadriplegia itself as a form of imprisonment. *Aftermath* ends before Payne is brought to trial, but these aspects of the metanarrative help produce a sense of closure, with Payne's paralysis functioning as an affective substitute for the punishment not yet meted out by the justice system. The pre-existing association of quadriplegia with incarceration functions to contain and render safe Payne's deviant mind, producing a feeling of resolution.

Friend of the Devil likewise situates disability as punishment. Cabbot views Payne's paralysis as 'Karma', and is glad she didn't succeed in killing herself, because 'Death would have been too easy for her. That way she suffered more' (151). While Deaver's *The Bone Collector* demands the reader perceive a quadriplegic life as a life worth living, Robinson's books rule out any perception of disability as positive or even neutral, since it would undermine the affective work disability does in the novels. Instead, a disabled life is presented as necessarily a life of suffering. In *Friend of the Devil*, characters repeatedly emphasise the misery of Payne's life. Her solicitor viewed her as barely alive and, though Payne was in her twenties, she appeared middle-aged or older, betrayed 'cruelly' by her body (95). The officers speculate that

41 For Scaggs, 'Crime fiction is characterised by a hope, or an idea, of controlling crime, and this control depends, ultimately, on the containment of the criminal other' (75).

42 The idea that bodily features can be interpreted or 'read' in order to identify deviant minds harks back to theories of physiognomy, the pseudoscience of interpreting bodily features. It also evokes eugenic beliefs associating criminality with bodies that differ from the norm (see Davis 35). Burke notes the 'imaginative centrality of eugenic thinking to the development of crime fiction' (201); for further discussion of eugenics and crime fiction see Walton.

her murder may have been a mercy killing, and Cabbot imagines that Payne might have felt relief when she was dying. Even the criminal justice system appears to endorse the idea of quadriplegia as the ultimate punishment. *Friend of the Devil* indicates that Payne was never sent to prison, for reasons which remain unclear.⁴³ However, the families of the victims believe that ‘the justice system let them down but God didn’t’ (299). In positioning life with quadriplegia as an appropriate punishment for Payne’s misdeeds, the novel reifies perceptions of a disabled life as a fate worse than death.

Ambiguous Identities and Fantasies of Identification

In Robinson’s novel the anxieties produced by disorderly or unstable identities, particularly in relation to disability and (normative notions of) gender, are conflated with anxieties produced by instability in terms of genre roles. The depiction of Karen Drew/Lucy Payne in *Friend of the Devil* is part of a wider exploration of the instability of identity, centred around a triad of female characters. The novel’s representation—and specifically its resolution—of these unstable female identities serves to (re)situate both disability and ‘improper’ versions of femininity as deviant and dangerous, in ways that discourage readily reflection.

In *Friend of the Devil* Lucy Payne, Annie Cabbot, and Payne’s killer Kirsten Farrow nominally occupy the three essential character roles for a crime narrative: victim, investigator, and perpetrator. However, all three are figures of ambiguous identity, occupying unstable or multiple roles. Payne is victim and villain, while Farrow is perpetrator, victim, and investigator, an unsustainable multiplicity that ultimately leads to her death. Farrow initially appears in the novel as part of Banks’ investigatory team, carrying out the autopsy on the teenage victim in her role as police pathologist Elizabeth Wallace. Having survived an attack by a serial killer years earlier, she was left badly scarred and turned vigilante. Though Annie Cabbot’s primary role is

43 Payne’s lawyer states that ‘there wasn’t enough evidence against her to prove that she killed anyone’ (*Friend of the Devil* 135–36), but her claim that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute Payne for her other crimes seems inconsistent with information in *Aftermath*. Payne’s lawyer does acknowledge that disability may have been a factor in the decision not to prosecute, since ‘prisons have limited facilities for dealing with quadriplegics’ (*Friend of the Devil* 135).

that of detective, in *Friend of the Devil* she grapples with the temptations of the role of perpetrator, at least partly in response to being raped several years previously.

As the novel progresses, it is not just the individual identities of these three female characters that become unstable but the boundaries between them, as they are repeatedly framed in ways that encourage the reader to link them together. Farrow and Cabbot are the same age, and both are survivors of rape. Having learned that Farrow probably killed the man who attacked her, Cabbot feels 'a strange connection' with the other woman: '[Farrow] had gone there; Annie had only stood at the edge of the world and stared into the abyss. But it was enough' (375). Yet, if Cabbot is Farrow's double, so too is Payne, and both women are described as existing in 'a kind of living death' (151, 375). Both Farrow and Payne take assumed names and are victims of crime who end up killing innocents.⁴⁴ The relationship between the three women is not just one of doubling but tripling: Cabbot thinks that Drew/Payne was 'My age' after the police surgeon estimates the dead woman's age as forty, and gazes out at the horizon that was Payne's last view (46). The seagulls associated with Payne at the novel's beginning are also linked with Cabbot, who was swarmed by gulls as an infant, and as the novel progresses the sight and sound of gulls becomes a counterpoint to Cabbot's self-destructive acts. The sense of passivity and vulnerability which attaches to Payne (as disabled woman and as victim) also adheres to Cabbot as she is drawn into a toxic and career-threatening relationship, despite ostensibly occupying the active role of detective.

For all three women the coast is a liminal space where identity categories may be challenged or destabilised. Farrow first turned vigilante in the seaside town of Whitby, killing two men and attacking another. Payne's death, which finally and fully transmutes her from villain to victim, happens on a seaside cliff. Waking to the sound of seagulls after a drink and drug-fuelled hookup, Cabbot doesn't know 'where, or even who, she was' (20). Later, Cabbot looks out to sea, thinking first of Farrow, then of Payne, and feels 'the overwhelming sensation that she was at an important crossroads in her life' (375). As Cabbot becomes more and more uncertain of her own identity, she wonders 'was she who she thought she was?' and feels the pull of the only crime genre role she has yet to inhabit, that of perpetrator (280).

44 *Aftermath* describes the abuse Lucy Payne experienced as a child. Farrow killed an innocent man, believing he was her attacker, and in *Friend of the Devil* she kills a policeman, believing him to be a murderer.

Cabbot's identity crisis becomes increasingly central as the novel progresses, her task not only to solve the case but to resolve her own ontological uncertainty.

Cabbot's identity crisis is decisively resolved by the end of the novel, along with the two central murder cases, several additional murders, and the threat posed by her deviant doubles. These multiple resolutions produce a strong and satisfying sense of closure. While the novel's exploration of ambiguous identities might be viewed as a meditation on the complexity of identity or a challenge to conceptions of crime character roles as clear-cut, its primary function is the affective one of generating additional closural force. Thus, although *Friend of the Devil* explores the 'instability of identity' in relation to genre roles—and to identity categories, as discussed below—it does so only in order to produce 'an absolute and fulfilling resolution' (Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 79). As such, the novel can be understood as both a manifestation of and a response to what Ellen Samuels terms *fantasies of identification*. Emerging in response to the 'crisis of identification' which began in the mid-nineteenth century,⁴⁵ fantasies of identification ease the anxieties provoked by unstable identities (Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 1). All fantasies of identification are predicated upon the master fantasy that bodies can be definitively identified and individuals placed into clear-cut categories (whether of race, gender, ability, or some other aspect of identity).

In cultural texts reflecting the fantasy, as well as their counterparts in legal, medical, and policy discourses, 'portrayals of ambiguous identification are tolerable only if contained and ultimately resolvable' (Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 79). Samuels notes, but does not pursue, the parallel historical emergence of detective fiction and the 'consolidation of medical authority' crucial to fantasies of identification (*Fantasies of Identification* 217 n.25). Crime fiction itself is of course predicated on a specific fantasy of identification, that the guilty (i.e. perpetrators or villains) can be definitively identified. There are clear similarities between the anxieties that fantasies of identification aim to resolve and those which manifest in crime fiction. In asking 'Whodunit?' crime fictions aim to identify *what* a person is and to fix their identity accordingly. Both crime fiction and fantasies of identification are centrally concerned with identificatory processes and driven

45 Samuels identifies a number of contributing factors, including class mobility, urbanisation, colonialism, and 'challenges to racial and gendered hierarchies' (*Fantasies of Identification* 1).

by the anxiety generated by individuals who might not be what they appear to be.⁴⁶

In *Friend of the Devil*, Farrow's hybrid identity is portrayed as unsustainable, and the novel consistently presents the attempt to inhabit multiple character roles as damaging or impossible. Several characters police those who appear to occupy multiple categories, with the goal of reducing their identities to the singular. Interviewing one of those affected by Payne's crimes, Cabbot comments of Payne:

'she couldn't harm anyone ever again. She was in an institution, a place where they take care of people like her.'

'Murderers?'

'Quadriplegics.' (284)

The differing ways these two women categorise Payne is less important than the fact that both resolve her as singular: under the fantasy of identification that governs the novel, Payne can be understood as either a murderer or a quadriplegic (i.e., a villain or a victim), but never as both. Indeed, the only character who seems capable of conceiving of Payne as occupying multiple character roles is Farrow, who imagines the quadriplegic Payne revelling in her memories of torture and killing. However, Farrow's perspective is by definition a discredited one. By killing Payne (and herself) she can also be understood as policing those whose identities are ambiguous.

The depiction of these three ambiguously identified female characters, then, functions to assert fantasies of identification. Inhabiting multiple identities, and particularly the conflicting roles of detective and villain, is shown to be unsustainable. After killing the man who attacked her, as well as killing an innocent man in error, Farrow found herself 'different [...] cut off by what I'd done' (509). Cabbot empathises with Farrow's actions and states that she 'wanted to kill' her rapists (510). However, Cabbot's assertion that she and Farrow are 'not that different' is undercut in the final confrontation between the two women, as Farrow's response makes clear: 'Oh, but we are [different]. I actually *did* it' (510). Cabbot affirms her role as the investigator, not perpetrator, of crimes. Farrow's response, 'It's not the same' (510), is both a rejection of the detective role and an affirmation that she and

46 Samuels's *Fantasies of Identification* discusses the disability con in relation to fantasies of identification. All crime fictions involve a similar performance or masquerade on the part of the perpetrator, who is not who s/he professes to be.

Cabbot are different, and she slashes her own throat despite Cabbot's efforts to prevent it. Cabbot's deviant doubles serve as object (and object) lessons; this purpose fulfilled, their removal from the narrative creates a sense of reassurance, closure, and stability. The threat posed by the disorderly identities of Farrow and Payne is nullified by death, and Cabbot's singular nature is asserted.

Robinson's portrayal of this triad of women is highly effective at producing the crime affects of anxiety and closure. However, it also serves to position particular kinds of person (unstable, female, disabled) as deviant and threatening.⁴⁷ As Thomas writes, 'the forms and impacts of disablism are invariably refracted in some way through the prism of gendered locations and gender relations' (*Female Forms* 85). Thinking of Farrow's crimes, Cabbot reflects that 'Some kinds of damage take you far beyond normal rules and systems of ethics and morality—beyond this point be monsters, as the ancients used to say' (375). The novel situates Farrow as multiply monstrous, not only because of her vigilante acts and her transgression of gender and genre norms, but also because of her embodiment. Farrow is portrayed as embodying a monstrous femininity that is inseparable from her status as a disabled victim. Attacked by a serial killer as a young woman, Farrow's breasts and genitals were left badly scarred, and she is consequently unable to enjoy (heteronormative) sex or have children. A silent witness character who had a failed sexual encounter with Farrow, and who she later attacked in case he placed her at the scene of a murder, cannot remember her face, but has dreams of 'a monster, with a dog's head, or a wolf's [...] her chest [...] all criss-crossed with red lines where her breasts and other nipple should be' (390).⁴⁸

Samuels notes 'the material as well as symbolic power invested in the fantasy of bodily marks which can prove guilt or innocence as well as identity' (85), and Farrow's particular embodiment is crucial to solving the case. Cabbot rejects Banks's suggestion that Farrow's mutilation will help their investigation, since they 'can hardly ask every woman connected with the case to strip to the waist' (407). Though Cabbot

47 The portrayal of Cabbot's one-night stand with the much younger Eric, and its aftermath, is one of several examples of troubling gender politics in the novel.

48 The contrast between Farrow's and Cabbot's responses to this character further emphasise the differences between the two women; while Farrow is incapable of a 'normal' female sexual response, Cabbot develops a mild flirtation with him. The attraction between the two also serves to re-establish Cabbot as a potential participant in heteronormative relationships after her disastrous one-night stand with Eric and attempt to seduce Banks.

refuses this method of investigation (and identification), it seems that the novel ultimately endorses it. Cabbot's knowledge of Farrow's injuries proves crucial to decoding the testimony of the silent witness character, and both Payne's murder and Cabbot's identity crisis are resolved in a final disability encounter. Farrow simultaneously reveals her body and her true identity to Cabbot in a melodramatic display: 'She opened the front of her smock, and Annie recoiled at the jagged criss-cross of red lines, the displaced nipple, the parody of a breast' (513). Despite being aware of and even able to empathise with Farrow's actions, Cabbot recoils from the sight of Farrow's marked body.

The reader is invited to gaze upon a disabled bodymind and to understand it as monstrous and deviant. As Samuels writes, 'fantasies of identification are driven by a desire for incontrovertible physical identification so intense that it produces its own realization at the same time that it interprets that realization as natural and inevitable' (3). Farrow's body is not only presented as monstrous but as if that is the only way it can possibly be understood; her final claim that she and Cabbot are 'kindred spirits underneath it all' is undercut by the visible evidence of her difference (513). By cutting her throat with a scalpel—the same death she dealt Payne—Farrow locates herself on the side of the criminals, deviants, and victims, and her troubling presence is removed from the narrative.

In a system invested both in a notion of identity as singular and in dominant ideologies of disability and of gender, Farrow is a troubling figure: she fails to adhere to gender conventions and attempts to occupy the category of detective despite occupying the mutually exclusive role of murderer. The element of masquerade, too, generates further anxiety: Farrow appears to be a 'normal' woman and a dedicated investigator, but is in fact presented as neither, unmasking herself in the final scene. Samuels writes that fantasies of identification are 'haunted by disability', since 'disability functions as the trope and embodiment of true physical difference' (3). In *Friend of the Devil* disability connotes deviance, serving as a marker of characters' 'true' nature. Disability explicitly attaches to Payne and to Farrow, and threatens to adhere to Cabbot by association. The novel's continual positioning of disability as deviance and disability as threat functions to increase anxiety about Cabbot's fate. Ultimately, though, disability is the means by which Cabbot is established as different from the other two women and secured for her ongoing role in the series.

In this final scene disability identity proves crucial to crime genre processes of identification. Disability aligns Farrow not with Cabbot, on the side of truth and justice, but with the criminals and deviants, an

association cemented when Farrow cuts her own throat. The troubling ambiguities of Farrow's identity (her combined roles of victim, villain, and detective; her vigilante acts; her improper femininity) are collapsed into the singular. To reclaim her role as ongoing (albeit secondary) detective protagonist in the series, Cabbot must be decisively differentiated from the other two characters, her identity affirmed as singular and secure—and as nondisabled. It is no coincidence that Cabbot is the only one of the three women whose body remains unmarked. Cabbot's deviant doubles are removed from the narrative, establishing Cabbot as singular even as she is firmly repositioned in the (single) role of detective. The threat to her identity is resolved, apparently permanently: in the next book in the series, Cabbot says that the 'Difficult times' are 'All behind' her (*All the Colours of Darkness* 71).

Samuels suggests that fantasies of identification become increasingly institutionalised in arenas such as policy and law in the twenty-first century, meaning that fewer examples are found in literary texts. Instead, 'creative works [...] increasingly become sites of counterdiscursive and resistant refigurings of the fantasy and its claim to power' (Samuels 118). In contrast, *Friend of the Devil* persistently works to shore up various fantasies of identification, just as it works to shore up the metanarrative of quadriplegia. Payne's state of absolute paralysis and voicelessness, however implausible medically, adheres fully to a worldview in which the boundary between disabled and nondisabled is absolute and disability is totalising. By resolving her identity crisis and solving the case Cabbot reclaims her role as agent of the law, as well as functioning as an agent of genre—which, in Robinson's novel, means reinforcing the fantasy of absolute, singular identities and character roles, incidentally shoring up perceptions of disability as deviant and threatening and reinforcing dominant ideologies of disability and of gender.

Conclusion: Disability and the Altar of Closure

Closure, in Robinson's novel, depends upon the restoration of an ordered world where the detectives are clearly separated from the villains and victims. In Robinson's novel, disability is presented as radically other, used to enhance the crime narrative without itself ever being investigated, whereas Deaver's *The Bone Collector* repeatedly encourages the reader to reflect upon assumptions about disability and disabled people via its mediations of the metanarrative of quadriplegia. Both of these novels draw upon the affective power of disability

to create compelling crime narratives, but with quite different consequences: one shoring up perceptions of disability as deviant and disabled lives as miserable and lacking; the other deploying the figure of the disabled detective as a means of (re)asserting disabled activity and agency. These two novels are indicative of broader trends in the genre, in the sense that the frameworks provided by the three essential crime character roles facilitate or encourage particular kinds of disability depiction, as well as enabling or inhibiting the creation of reflexive representations of disability.

Though the examples I have focused upon here might suggest a division where texts featuring disabled detectives offer reflexive representations and texts featuring disabled victims or villains militate against readerly reflection, crime's depictions of disability cannot be so neatly categorised. The influence of particular crime character roles upon crime's depictions of disability should be viewed as influencing, rather than determining, disability representations. The iconic roles of villainous disabled perpetrator and vulnerable disabled victim may also generate productive misfits, for example by foregrounding or problematising the expectation of a 'natural' fit between disabled characters and these character roles.⁴⁹

However, while the depiction of disabled villains, in particular, offers the possibility of agentic depictions of disability, it is undeniable that such characters are almost always sacrificed on the altar of closure, erased from the narrative in order to produce genre affects. Crime fictions featuring disabled victims typically erase the disabled character through death, while narratives featuring disabled villains remove the disabled character from the narrative world through death, incarceration, or institutionalisation.⁵⁰ In contrast, disabled detectives, especially those in series novels, are far less likely to be erased or contained. The disabled detective *endures*, in some cases literally enduring pain or suffering,⁵¹ but always very much present at the

49 See, for example, Dexter's *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn* (1977), Padgett's *Strawgirl* (1994), and Slaughter's *Broken* (2010).

50 As Garland-Thomson writes, in literature 'disabled characters with power virtually always represent a dangerous force unleashed on the social order' and, as such, 'the narrative resolution is almost always to contain that threat by killing or disempowering the disabled character' (*Extraordinary Bodies* 36). For discussion of narrative's general tendency to resolve or correct deviance, see Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*, 53–54.

51 Dick Francis's Sid Halley, for example, is repeatedly beaten and injured, losing what remains of his injured hand after being attacked by the villain of *Odds Against*.

end of the text. Unlike disabled people in other character roles, disabled detectives are not sacrificed on the altar of closure; instead, it is through their agency that closure is produced. The disabled detective is an affective agent, and it is through their actions that disorder is transmuted into order, ignorance into knowledge, and anxiety into reassurance.

Crime's exceptional detectives, whether they are disabled or not, frequently evoke admiration, fascination, or wonder. Frequently enigmatic—Segal notes that the detective is often 'a sort of mystery' (177)—the disabled detective tends to be a fascinating figure. Murray suggests that depictions of disability in detective fiction function in terms of 'a non-disabled *desire* on the part of a reader or viewer to give in to the impulse to view disability as a wonder' and that disabled detective or witness figures can 'invite sympathy, pity or amazement' in problematic ways ('Neurotecs' 180). The disabled detective may indeed be a source of wonder, but the next chapter explores ways in which the often-problematized association of disability and wonder might be rehabilitated. Chapter 3 probes the relationship between disability, wonder, and representation in and beyond the genre of science fiction.

CHAPTER THREE

Wondrous Texts: Science Fiction

Neil Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992), a science fiction novel crammed with techno-marvels, offers a striking image of cyborg existence.¹ Burned by aircraft fuel in Vietnam, security consultant Ng has tried prosthetics, but, as he tells protagonist Y.T., 'nothing is as good as a motorized wheelchair' (211). Disappointed with underpowered wheelchairs 'that strain to go up a little teeny ramp' (211), Ng has converted an airport fire truck:

It is enormous [...] welded together out of the type of flat, dimpled steel plate usually used to make manhole lids and stair treads. The tires are huge, like tractor tires with a more subtle tread, and there are six of them [...] The engine is so big that, like an evil spaceship in a movie, Y.T. feels its rumbling in her ribs before she can see it [...] The grille alone probably weighs more than a small car. (210)

Inside, Ng is suspended in a pouch of electroconductive gel, only the top of his head visible. The rest of his body is 'encased in an enormous goggle/mask/headphone/feeding-tube unit', with wires, fibre optics, and tubes joining his organic body to the machine (210).

Many aspects of Stephenson's novel reward a disability-focused analysis,² but the primary function of this scene is an affective one: it

1 Reeve discusses the divided opinions about cyborgs and cyborg theory within disability studies ('Cyborgs, Cripples and iCrip'); for a detailed overview see chapter 5 of Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip*.

2 For example, the novel's foregrounding of the ways in which enabling technologies may be contingent on specific environmental conditions. Ng's cyborg

aims to evoke wondrous affects, and disability is crucial to achieving this. As a van Ng's truck is impressive, but as a wheelchair it is a wonder. The discontinuity between the reader's expectations of what a wheelchair should be like (mundane, low-tech, underpowered) and what Ng's van actually is (massive, imposing, armed with destructive weaponry) is key to the affective impact of the scene. While the complexities of this particular cyborg depiction are analysed in more detail below, the conjunction of disability and technology in this scene simultaneously evokes wondrous affects and encourages readerly reflection about disability.

Historically, wonder was seen as a key, even defining, aspect of science fiction, but it has fallen out of favour in contemporary scholarship.³ In contrast, I relocate wonder at the heart of science fiction and offer a new framework for discussing the genre's wondrous affects. Meanwhile, disability studies scholars have been ambivalent about wonder as a response to the disabled bodymind, and generally critical of representational forms that use disability to produce wonder. Here, I offer a new examination of wonder in the context of disability and disability studies, identifying factors which have contributed to wonder's ambivalent position.

Disability and Wonder

Though wonder is frequently referred to in disability studies scholarship, it has rarely received detailed critical attention. This state of affairs is partly a function of the wider neglect of disability affects discussed in the Introduction and partly a result of wonder's specific associations. In the wider critical and philosophical tradition⁴ wonder has often been constructed positively, as a potentially non-hierarchical way of relating to the other. Marguerite La Caze, for example, views wonder as a form of 'openness to otherness' and connects it with intelligence (7, 3). Drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray, La Caze argues that wonder should be 'cultivated and extended' as a response to a

existence is only possible because in America you can get 'anything you want' at a drive-through (211).

3 For an overview of early critical work, see Wolfe, *The Known and the Unknown*. For more recent scholarship in which wonder remains central see Sawyer and Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.

4 See La Caze, Nandrea, and Greenblatt for discussion of scholarly work on wonder.

range of human differences (15). However, though wonder has been reified as ‘a special, respectable form of aesthetic experience’ (Nandrea 340), it has also been accompanied by ambiguity and ambivalence. Iris Marion Young suggests that wonder is potentially dangerous, as it can lead to exoticisation, distancing, or ‘prurient curiosity’ (56). In such cases, openness is transformed into a ‘dominative desire to know and master the other person’ (Young 56).

These concerns—about being exoticised or perceived as other, about being situated as an object of curiosity, and about being disempowered—underpin a suspicion of wonder that endures within disability studies. In Chapter 1 I framed the relationship between disability studies and the genre of horror as one of (mutual) *critical avoidance*. The lack of close engagement with wonder in disability studies, despite wonder’s status as one of the feelings ‘seen to be inherently produced by the disabled subject’, likewise suggests a degree of avoidance (Murray, *Representing Autism*, 79). However, the field’s attitude towards wonder is more accurately characterised as one of *critical ambivalence*, with those disability studies scholars who do consider wonder falling into three distinct categories: those who locate wonder as an unambiguously ‘negative’ or unproductive disability emotion; those who are optimistic about wonder’s possibilities; and those whose work itself manifests mixed feelings.

For some scholars, any association between wonder and disability is automatically problematic. Nick Watson, for example, begins an overview of research in disability studies by explicitly distancing the field from wonder.⁵ The use of disability to evoke wonder is assumed to be problematic in Bolt’s work on advertising,⁶ and wonder is a cornerstone of the ‘ableist advertising aesthetic’ he develops (‘An Advertising Aesthetic’ 28). Murray associates wonder with the ‘positioning of the disabled as objects for consumption’ (*Representing Autism* 91).⁷ Representations of autism, and particularly of the autistic savant, provide a ‘space for wonder and awe’, but such representations push autism ‘into the world of fantasy’, making it easier to avoid consideration of real social issues such as access to employment and education (Murray, *Representing Autism*, 99).

5 Watson states that disability studies was founded not ‘in wonder or out of curiosity’, but out of the anger of disabled people (93).

6 See ‘An Advertising Aesthetic’ and chapter 8 of *Cultural Disability Studies in Education*.

7 See also Murray’s ‘Neurotecs’, in which he problematises the desire of detective fiction readers to ‘give in to the impulse to view disability as a wonder’ (180).

These scholars, however, are relatively unusual in articulating a critical position. More often, suspicion of wonder (and of related feelings, including amazement and fascination) is implicit or assumed in disability studies works,⁸ or wonder is not considered at all. The neglect of wonder within disability studies is partly a function of the disengagement with disability affects discussed in the Introduction, but it also reflects the particular associations of wonder. As with horror, the resonance between wonder and specific aspects of disabled people's oppression leads to a conception of the feeling itself as risky or dangerous, and thus to avoidance or dismissal. When coupled with disability, wonder carries with it a series of potentially troubling associations: in particular, with placing disabled bodies on display (particularly in the historical freak show and its contemporary variants); with inspirational and/or supercrip narratives; and with curiosity (itself frequently situated as a negative or ambivalent emotion in relation to disability).⁹

Garland-Thomson situates wonder as a byproduct of the (Western) history of disabled people, a history 'of being on display [...] visually conspicuous while politically and socially erased' ('The Politics of Staring' 56). Wonder is associated with the positioning of disabled people as 'objects for consumption' (Murray, *Representing Autism*, 91), and especially the display of disabled bodies for visual consumption. Wonder is frequently invoked in disability studies discussions of the historical freak show and of the broader concept of freakery, in which non-normative bodies are subjected 'to the ableist gaze as entertaining spectacle' (Church, 'Freakery, Cult Films, and the Problem of Ambivalence', 3). Recent work has sought to claim a more empowering history for the freak show,¹⁰ or at least to problematise the figuration of the freak show as unambiguously oppressive.¹¹ Eli

8 See, for example, Baker on 'exoticized' representations of autism, and Loftis.

9 On the association of wonder and curiosity, see Garland-Thomson's *Staring* (64), and Nandrea. Nandrea identifies a 'persistent association' between curiosity and 'the vulgar or uncivil' (339, 338); the example she gives is of children gaping at disabled people. A number of works have problematised the way in which disability generates curiosity by demanding 'a story' or explanation (Bérubé, 'Disability and Narrative', 570).

10 See Chemers.

11 This critical move has generated a further set of counter-responses, most notably from Mitchell and Snyder, who argue that 'Even Disability Studies rolls across the stage of the freak show at its own risk' ('Exploitations of Embodiment').

Clare, for example, notes the freak show's 'complicated collective history of exploitation and subversion' (111). However, whatever possibilities the freak show and its variants might offer for empowerment or agency, key concerns remain. The emotions associated with the freak show's creation of disability as spectacle—which include 'shock, horror, wonder, and pity'—therefore continue to be perceived as deeply suspicious (Church, 'Freakery, Cult Films, and the Problem of Ambivalence', 3).

Wonder is also repeatedly associated with the inspirational figure of the supercrip.¹² Both the enfreakment of the disabled person and the elevation of the disabled person in supercrip narratives are understood as generating distance, between disabled people and nondisabled observers/perceivers whose putative normality is shored up through the act of observing/perceiving. In other words, a conception of wonder as distancing underpins negative assumptions about disability wonder.¹³ Wonder is understood as creating and reinforcing a separation between the disabled person and other people: 'the wondrous estranges viewer from viewed' (Garland-Thomson, 'Seeing the Disabled', 341). Often, wonder is understood not as a response to the strange or unknown but as a response *of* exoticisation: to wonder at disability is to other the disabled person.

Although Garland-Thomson's work can be deployed to problematise wonder, a closer examination reveals a recognition of wonder's possibilities and a critical ambivalence.¹⁴ In modernity, the wondrous invokes 'the extraordinariness of the disabled body in order to secure the ordinariness of the viewer', but also elevates the disabled person, encouraging admiration (Garland-Thomson, 'Seeing the Disabled', 341). Garland-Thomson identifies the wondrous as one of four primary 'visual rhetorics' of disability which constitute 'part of the context into which all representations of disabled people enter' ('Seeing the Disabled' 339). She intends the framework of visual rhetorics to complicate reductive conceptions of images as either 'positive' and 'negative', although wonder is implicitly positioned as problematic by

12 See Church, 'Fantastic Films, Fantastic Bodies', n2. The supercrip is discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

13 For discussion of distancing and spatial metaphors in relation to disability representation, see Garland-Thomson's 'Seeing the Disabled'.

14 Garland-Thomson has discussed disability wonder in a series of reviews, articles, book chapters, and books published over the last two decades, albeit always in relation to some other primary focus (e.g. photography, staring, or the freak show).

the observation that none of the four modes 'is in the service of actual disabled people' ('Seeing the Disabled' 372, 340).¹⁵ Elsewhere, though, Garland-Thomson positions disability wonder in opposition to an oppressive curiosity: instead of experiencing wonder, modern audiences have been trained to 'manifest curiosity' in problematic ways (Review of *Monsters*). She asserts that rationality has replaced wonder in modernity and that rationality 'seeks to master', whereas 'wonder seeks to inflame' (Review of *Monsters*). Elsewhere, Garland-Thomson writes approvingly that artwork by Riva Lehrer and others evokes 'wonder rather than distress' ('Foreword' xvii). The implication is that wonder is preferable to these other, more obviously oppressive, alternatives.¹⁶

A similar strategy is adopted in an earlier (and lesser-known) work by Sandra Gilbert (in Blau et al.). Responding to Leslie Fiedler's positioning of pity and fear as 'inevitable' responses to disability, Gilbert argues that disability also evokes wonder.¹⁷ For Gilbert, some literary representations of disability and some interpersonal encounters may produce a 'pure surprise or awe untouched by pity or fear' (Blau et al. 80). Passing through this 'process of awe' helps (nondisabled) people to 'demythologize' the difference they perceive in disabled people (Blau et al. 80). The end result is 'an acquiescence in the sameness, the ordinariness even' of disabled people, and an acceptance of them as 'essentially *like* ourselves' (Blau et al. 80–81, 81).

The productive possibilities of wonder and of wondering are most fully developed by Tanya Titchkosky, for whom wonder 'is a political act' (133). In *The Question of Access*, Titchkosky wonders about access in the university and other social spaces, in ways that denaturalise 'what seems to be "natural" exclusion' (6). For Titchkosky, wonder involves a pause for thought, but, far from being a stultifying emotion, wonder is the start of an investigative or reflective process; a 'politics of wonder' is simultaneously a critical method and the end or goal of critical work (x).

Titchkosky, Gilbert, and Garland-Thomson begin to explore how wonder might operate 'in the service of actual disabled people'

15 She also identifies the realistic mode as 'most likely to encourage the cultural work the Disability Rights movement began' ('Seeing the Disabled' 372).

16 Chemers likewise situates wonder as a more positive alternative to feelings of disgust and prurience.

17 Neither Fiedler nor Gilbert are typically labelled disability studies or cultural disability studies scholars, though both have produced works which have been taken up within disability studies. However, the specific works referenced here embody a (proto-) disability studies sensibility.

(Garland-Thomson, 'Seeing the Disabled', 340). I suggest that the critical analysis of science fiction's wondrous affects further develops this project. Embracing wonder, and other affects dismissed by disability studies, allows for a deeper understanding not just of the interplay between disability and genre but of feelings and meanings at stake in all kinds of disability encounter. Because of its flexibility and capaciousness, wonder is a particularly generative concept in this context.

Science Fiction and Wonder

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. argues that 'The so-called *sense of wonder* has been considered one of the primary attributes of sf at least since the pulp era' ('On the Grotesque in Science Fiction' 71). Wonder is central to the affective experience of reading science fiction and, while responses to specific textual encounters inevitably vary, I suggest that readers go to science fiction in search of—or at least open to—wonder. In Chapter 1 I used fear as an umbrella term for the cluster of feelings horror texts aim to evoke. Wonder operates similarly for science fiction, designating multiple affects rather than a singular emotion. David Hartwell writes that science fiction 'ranges free through the infinite spaces and times, finding and focusing on the nodes that inspire wonder—catastrophes, big events, the supernal beauties of cosmic vistas, endless opportunities for new and strange experiences that astound and illuminate' (47). Implicit in Hartwell's comment is the idea that there are different types of, and catalysts for, wonder. I suggest that works of science fiction attempt to evoke one or more of five related varieties of wonder, which I term awe, admiration, freakish wonder, curiosity, and transformative wonder.¹⁸

The first, and the one that has been most frequently recognised in science fiction scholarship, is *awe*: at the vastness of space, or at the superhuman scale of a particular techno-construct, or at an object, environment, or entity beyond human comprehension. Hartwell notes 'the importance of scale in science fiction, of great distances and spans of time, huge objects and vast importances' (54). Texts which elicit

18 This schema shares some features with Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.'s discussion of the sublime and the grotesque as fundamental categories of 'science fictionality', but there are important differences in how I parse science fiction's wondrous affects. For discussion of science fiction and the sublime, see Robu; on disability and the sublime see Quayson 22–24.

this wondrous affect produce a sense of amazement, astonishment, or even stupefaction. They confound by giving a sense of something beyond the bounds of human understanding, like the ‘soul-searing splendor’ (44) of the thirty thousand stars newly visible at the end of Isaac Asimov’s ‘Nightfall’ (1941). Often, this type of wonder is associated with moments of spiritual or quasi-religious transcendence, as in John Varley’s ‘The Persistence of Vision’ (1978), in which members of a deafblind community move to another realm of existence after developing a transformative tactile language.¹⁹

The second form of wonder, *admiration*, is invoked by that which is awesome in the contemporary colloquial sense of the word. Science fiction is a genre of cool stuff, and it frequently trades in depictions of the appealing and exciting, presenting items or entities which evoke admiration or appreciation. Often, these are technoscientific artefacts: Ng’s van in *Snow Crash* falls into this category, for example. However, the admirable entity might equally be a concept, social organisation, or skill, as in Amy Thomson’s *The Color of Distance* (1995), where the alien Tendu have the ability to manipulate material on the cellular level.

In Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), the central character notes that the human encounter with aliens involves an inevitable ‘Freak Reaction, the flinching away from what is human but does not quite look so’ (98). *Freakish wonder* is a key science-fictional affect, and involves a visceral reaction to the anomalous. I deploy this terminology with full awareness of the unsettling nature of the term ‘freak’,²⁰ in part to highlight the kinship between this affect and the feelings evoked by the freak show²¹ but also in recognition of the way in which it is inherently mixed or variegated. The freak ‘is not an object of *simple* admiration or pity, but is a being who is considered simultaneously and compulsively fascinating and repulsive, enticing and sickening’ (Grosz 56). Just as the historical freak show was a context in which power, desire, agency, and constraint were manifested in complex and contradictory ways,²² so too with encounters that produce freakish wonder.

Freakish wonder shares some features with the grotesque: it is the response to a ‘resisting object’ (or subject) which ‘forces the

19 See chapter 3 of Hartwell for discussion of science fiction, wonder, and religion. On Varley’s ‘The Persistence of Vision’, see 20–22 of Davis.

20 See Clare 110.

21 For a fuller examination of the freak show, see Garland-Thomson’s *Freakery*.

22 See Clare 111.

observing consciousness to recoil and reorganize its concepts and its horizons of possibility' (Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., 'On the Grotesque in Science Fiction', 80). However, freakish wonder entails an intensity of feeling not necessarily created by the grotesque; it involves a shock or jolt that may be expressed in an actual flinch or frisson. Not surprisingly, disability is a primary source of freakish wonder in science fiction. In Michael Moorcock's *Behold the Man* (1969), the time-travelling protagonist undertakes a literal search for Jesus in the Nazareth of AD 29. Discovering a carpenter named Joseph and his family, he thinks his quest is at an end—only to discover that Jesus is a 'congenital imbecile', a hunchback whose only utterance is his own name (87).²³ In Moorcock's novel the revelation of disability and the contrast between the disabled Jesus and the protagonist's (and reader's) expectations evoke a mixture of fascination, aversion, and curiosity.

Items or entities that evoke any of these responses may also generate a further form of wonder: *curiosity*, the desire to understand how they work or how they came to be. The eponymous sheep of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) is a marvellous creation in itself, as are the other electronic animals that appear in the novel. As well as generating admiration, they elicit a series of questions: in what sort of a society are animals so rare and valued that even an electronic pet is a status symbol? How does such a society come to be? As Sawyer notes, one meaning of 'wonder' as a verb is to 'be desirous to know or learn' (90). Often, the things science fiction texts make readers desire to learn are directly relevant to their conceptualisation of disability. What has changed to create a future society where paranoia is peddled on street corners? What sort of a world removes limbs as punishment for criminal behaviour, restoring them once the sentence is served?²⁴ Writing about race in fantastic fiction, Elisabeth Anne Leonard notes that science fiction texts can depict societies with different conditions, allowing the reader to ask, 'What if my world were like that?' (4). Science fiction not only allows but actively encourages a process of wondering that is the first step towards a critical reflection on conditions in the reader's own context.

23 In Nicola Griffith's *Slow River* (1995) a milder form of the same affect is produced by the protagonist's discovery of her colleague's 'beautifully folded' clothes, his limbs piled 'neatly' next to them (186).

24 These examples are from Pat Cadigan's *Mindplayers* (1987) and John Varley's 'Tango Charlie and Foxtrot Romeo' (1986).

Finally, science fiction frequently generates a *transformative wonder*: the wonder that arises as a result of a conceptual breakthrough or cognitive shift, where the reader is enabled to perceive something in a new or different way.²⁵ Such cognitive-affective transformations are one of the key pleasures of the genre. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985), for example, generates a transformative wonder by depicting a future society in ways that enable the reader to re-envision the relationship between humans and animals in non-hierarchical ways. Varley's 'The Persistence of Vision' encourages a transformed understanding of disability through its depiction of the deafblind community's self-sufficiency and eventual transcendence, but also by the final choice by those members of the community who can see and hear to renounce those senses for 'the lovely quiet and dark' (270). In this case, the conceptual breakthrough involves perceiving disability anew.

In science fiction disability is both subject and source of wonder, deployed to generate wondrous affects but reconstitutable through a productive wondering. Disability wonder can be both the result of and the catalyst for readerly reflection. The wondrous affects evoked by science fiction are porous and interlinked: objects or entities which produce awe, admiration, or freakish wonder may also produce curiosity, and transformative wonder might be bound up with any or all of these other feelings. Thus, although curiosity and transformative wonder can most readily be linked to Titchkosky's politics of wonder,²⁶ all of these wondrous affects might contribute towards a productive wondering about disability.

Stephenson's *Snow Crash* illustrates how science fiction texts may evoke a range of intertwined wondrous affects. As discussed above, disability is crucial to the production of transformative wonder in

25 See Sawyer 89–90 and Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.'s *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 146. Though critical discussions rarely frame this property of the genre explicitly in terms of wonder, the idea of science fiction as a genre with significant potentials to make readers see things in new ways is commonplace in scholarship and key to the genre's idiosyncratic critical status. Like the other popular genres discussed in this book, science fiction is consistently devalued in comparison with literary fiction. However, science fiction differs from those genres in that it has been valorised as a particularly important site for social extrapolation, cultural speculation, and counter-hegemonic exploration.

26 For example, wondering 'about the current set-up of daily life involves a kind of transformation of consciousness regarding access and disabled people' (Titchkosky 10).

the depiction of Ng's van/wheelchair. The van itself is an impressive technoscientific achievement, evoking admiration as well as curiosity as to how it works. Terms indicating scale or excess pile up in the description of the van—from the 'huge bundle' of wires and tubes to its description as 'festooned with every type of high-powered light known to science' (210). Although the van is ultimately framed on a human rather than a supra-human scale, these terms gesture towards awe, even as the description of the tubes and wires running into the organic parts of Ng's cyborg body may produce the frisson of freakish wonder.

While this depiction carries the risk of techno-fetishisation, I suggest that its invocation of wonder ultimately offers a challenge to preconceptions about disability and assistive technology. Ng's description of the van as an 'extension' of his body suggests that he and the van constitute a single cyborg organism; the boundary between the van and its creator/user is blurred, just as his comment that motorised wheelchairs are 'pathetic' reflects assumptions about both disabled people and wheelchairs (211). Confounding the reader's assumptions about what a wheelchair is like therefore also confounds perceptions of Ng (and arguably all disabled people, given the status of the wheelchair as a symbol for disability). Ng himself argues that surgical alteration and cyborg transformation may be liberating and enabling, telling Y.T. that her mistake is thinking that 'all mechanically assisted organisms—like me—are pathetic cripples', when in fact 'we are better than we were before' (231). The reader is thus invited to reflect on the status of the disabled person using 'assistive' technology, and Y.T. acts as a surrogate for the reader as she struggles to 'get her mind around' the notion of cyborg transformation as liberating (231). The relationship between disability and affect in this scene is not one of exploitation but one of mutual (re)generation. Disability is used to generate wonder, but wonder simultaneously reconstitutes disability, encouraging the reader to perceive disability anew—in turn generating further wondrous affects.

Given disability's efficacy at generating wonder, it is not surprising that science fiction has a particularly rich history of disability representations, encompassing genre precursors such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and H.G. Wells's 'The Country of the Blind' (1904), classic midcentury works such as John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* (1955) and Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon* (1966), and the prostheticised bodyminds of cyberpunk and posthuman science fiction. Michael Bérubé suggests that 'the genre of science fiction is as obsessed with disability as it is with space travel and alien contact'

(‘Disability and Narrative’ 568); despite this, scholarly work on disability in science fiction has only recently begun to emerge.²⁷

While many of the classic tropes of the genre, such as the alien encounter, reward a disability-focused reading, science fiction has particular disability icons which function to generate wondrous affects. Ng in *Snow Crash* is an example of the wondrous disabled cyborg,²⁸ and a related icon is the superhuman disabled person, possessed of marvellous or uncanny abilities, as in Theodore Sturgeon’s *More Than Human* (1953) or Judith Merrill’s ‘That Only a Mother’ (1948).²⁹ Another icon is the ‘alien’ disabled person: in Mary Doria Russell’s *Children of God* (1998) the protagonist’s autistic son Isaac functions to demonstrate to the reader that the aliens aren’t so very alien after all, as it is not the extraterrestrials but Isaac who demonstrates ‘a truly alien intelligence’ (255).³⁰ In the work of Dick, for example, such figures serve to establish the alienness of the worlds those characters live in.³¹

However, one of disability’s key roles in the genre is predicated not on its presence but its absence or erasure.³² Barbara Korte observes that in fictional utopias ‘the widespread absence of illness and pain [...] is a mark of the “better” place they depict’ (295). In science fiction, the absence of disability is frequently used as a straightforward indicator of a more advanced society, one where the ‘problem’ of disability (conceived in biomedical terms) has been solved by techno-scientific progress. As Kafer writes, though not with specific reference to science fiction, ‘the very *absence* of disability’ signals a ‘better future’ (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 2). While it may simply be part of the backdrop of the fictional world, the cure or eradication of disability can also be a means of generating wonder: Orson Scott Card’s *Xenocide* (1991) depicts the quasi-miraculous cure of one character’s brain damage,

27 The most substantive contribution to date, Allan’s edited collection *Disability in Science Fiction*, was published in 2013. On disability in science fiction literature, see also Nickianne Moody, Melzer, Stemp, Waltz 148–50, Reeve’s ‘Cyborgs, Cripples and iCrip’, Schalk’s *Bodyminds Reimagined*, and my own “‘She Was Born a Thing’”. On disability in science fiction film and television, see Kanar and Wälivaara.

28 For additional examples see McCaffrey’s *The Ship Who Sang* and its sequels.

29 See Duyvis on the ‘mystical disability trope’.

30 See Murray’s ‘Autism and the Contemporary Sentimental’ for discussion of autism as ‘the *personification* of difference and otherness’ (25).

31 For discussion of disability in Dick’s work, see chapter 4 of Waltz and chapter 2 of Bérubé’s *The Secret Life of Stories*.

32 For a more extensive discussion, see the introduction to Allan’s book.

as well as showing the obsessive–compulsive population of an entire planet being cured at one fell swoop.³³

Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan Saga

Miles Vorkosigan, the hero of Lois McMaster Bujold's long-running series,³⁴ has brittle bones, a hunchback, and is of short stature. Miles has an exceptional mind as well as an extraordinary body: his boundless mental energy, brilliance, and creativity lead to adventures such as an undercover mission in a prisoner-of-war camp, the acquisition of a mercenary space fleet, and eventually an official role as a diplomat-cum-spy for his home planet. While the significance of Bujold's choice to depict a physically disabled hero should not be understated, my analysis focuses on a set of later novels in the series in which the previous focus on the disabled body is expanded by an exploration of the disabled mind, and which generate wonder by offering a transformative reframing of mental illness.³⁵

Miles's extraordinary mind is one of the primary wonders of the series, his brilliance evoking both admiration and fascination. In Miles, genius and impulsivity combine to make a highly appealing hero, his schemes leading him not only into extraordinary achievements and adventures but regularly into danger. In early works in the series the effects of disability's adherence to Miles's body are repeatedly examined and foregrounded. Though Miles's mind is clearly very different from the norm, that difference is rendered not in terms of disability but as positive exceptionality. However, in *Mirror Dance* (1994)—and to a lesser extent *Brothers in Arms* (1989), the novel which precedes

33 Such narratives of cure might be assumed to be straightforwardly problematic in terms of their disability politics, but this is not necessarily the case (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). Cure-centred texts such as Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*, in which a cognitively disabled man receives a treatment that temporarily gives him a genius-level IQ, and Moon's *The Speed of Dark* (2002), in which the protagonist ultimately accepts a cure for autism, insist upon their protagonists' humanness whatever their disability status.

34 Miles is the protagonist of over a dozen novels and novellas, from *The Warrior's Apprentice* (1986) to *Cyroburn* (2010), and appears as a minor character in more recent novels by Bujold.

35 For a discussion of terminology see Price, who uses the term 'mental disability' to encompass madness, 'cognitive and intellectual dis/abilities of various kinds', and "'physical" illnesses accompanied by mental effects' (*Mad at School* 19). I use 'mental illness' here, but suggest that Bujold's work is significant for perceptions of mental disability more broadly.

it—Bujold reframes Miles's cognitive exceptionalism as mental illness in ways that disturb the feelings associated with this most stigmatised type of disability.

In *Brothers in Arms*, Miles is killed. Though his body is preserved for cryogenic revival, it is misplaced, meaning that his perspective is absent for much of *Mirror Dance*. In previous novels in the series Miles was the primary focaliser; though some texts featured other viewpoint characters, his was always the dominant perspective. One result of this is that the reader is intimately immersed in Miles's world and perceptions. Because the narrative is filtered through Miles's consciousness, 'his difference becomes normalised' (Murray, 'Neurotecs', 183). This normalising filter is absent in *Mirror Dance*, creating a space in which the reader's perceptions of Miles can be transformed.

In a key scene, Miles's mother Cordelia describes him as a 'lunatic', stating that 'A rational government wouldn't allow him possession of a pocket-knife, let alone a space fleet' (*Mirror Dance* 473). When Miles's father protests, Cordelia responds:

we are discussing a young man upon whom [the planet] Barrayar laid so much unbearable stress, so much pain, he created an entire other personality to escape into. He then persuaded several thousand galactic mercenaries to support his psychosis, and on top of that conned the Barrayaran Imperium into paying for it all. [...] I grant you he's a genius, but don't you dare try to tell me he's sane. (*Mirror Dance* 473)

Cordelia's comments reposition Miles as mentally ill, even as they affirm his brilliance.³⁶ His extraordinary mind is resituated, and the reader presented with the discomfiting fact that the same qualities that make Miles an outstandingly interesting and appealing protagonist are precisely those that, in other contexts, carry the stigma of schizophrenia or psychosis. The result is a misfit between the positive emotions the reader feels for Miles and the spectrum of negative emotions they are likely to associate with mental illness. The result, however, is not the stigmatisation of Miles but the creation of a productive wondering about mental illness that carries potentials for destigmatisation. Much disability studies scholarship has sought to reframe (stigmatised) disability as (neutral or positive) difference, as in Garland-Thomson's work on 'extraordinary bodies' or Murray's use of

36 Cordelia's comments might be viewed as reinforcing 'the common stereotype that aligns "genius" with mental disorders' (Loftis 41). However, other depictions of mental illness in the series problematise this interpretation.

the term ‘cognitive exceptionalism’.³⁷ *Mirror Dance* performs the opposite operation, repositioning cognitive exceptionalism as disability. By labelling Miles as mentally ill Bujold disrupts perceptions of mental illness. The result is the transformative wonder that comes from perceiving something afresh, and the destabilising of received assumptions and associations.

Cordelia’s comments in *Mirror Dance* attribute new significance to encounters and incidents from earlier works, making disability perceptible in new ways across the series. For example, in the first novel with Miles as protagonist, one character is horrified to find that Miles’s friends see little difference between his behaviour under the influence of a powerful stimulant and the way he usually is: “‘My God,’ he said hollowly, “you mean he’s like that *all the time?*”” (*The Warrior’s Apprentice* 119). In *Brothers in Arms*, Miles’s cousin Ivan becomes suspicious when Mark, a clone, imitates Miles, because Mark lacks Miles’s distinctively heightened affect: ‘I’ve seen you manic. And I’ve seen you depressive. But I’ve never seen you—well—*neutral*’ (222).

In recovery from a dangerous and traumatic mission, Miles himself begins to worry about ‘incipient psychosis’ and, in particular, the psychological effects of his dual life as Miles Vorkosigan and Admiral Naismith (69). Catching a fleeting glimpse of his clone Mark dressed as Miles Vorkosigan while he himself wears Naismith’s uniform, Miles fears an internal fracturing: ‘Was his subconscious trying to tell him something? Well, he didn’t suppose he was in real trouble until a brain scan taken of him in his two different uniforms produced two different patterns’ (121). On reflection, though, ‘the idea was suddenly not funny’ (121). While Miles rejects the label of ‘schizoid’ a few pages later, he does acknowledge that he is ‘A little manic-depressive’ (132). In *Mirror Dance*, Miles’s alternate identity is reconceived not as an adventure or convenience but as a way of surviving and thriving in a world where he is consistently oppressed on the basis of his bodily difference.³⁸ Miles’s lover Eli Quinn, one of the few people to know him in both roles, comments on how different his two personalities are, while Cordelia understands Naismith as both symptom and ‘safety valve’ (*Mirror Dance* 473).

37 Garland-Thomson’s formulation serves a number of purposes, but one of them is to provide a non-stigmatising way of referring to bodies to which disability adheres. Murray uses ‘cognitive exceptionalism’ in *Representing Autism*.

38 As a result of nuclear attacks, the population of Barrayar retains a horror of mutation expressed in abuse and violence towards those whose bodies appear abnormal.

The idea of mental illness as a strategy for survival is further developed through the depiction of Miles's clone, Mark. Created from a stolen tissue sample as part of a nefarious scheme to usurp the emperor of Barrayar, Mark was abused and tortured all his life, suffering extreme pain as his body was altered to match Miles's down to the last detail.³⁹ As a result, Mark is obsessed with Miles, and remains so even after he is rescued. Miles's absence in *Mirror Dance* provides a space for Mark to develop a sense of self and start to recover from the trauma he has experienced. Visiting Barrayar, Mark begins to forge his own identity, becoming 'Lord Mark'. The title is Mark's inheritance from his biological family, but it also signals his increasing understanding of himself as a separate individual: the modifier changes the meaning of 'mark' from version (of Miles) to a proper noun.

Just as he is beginning to assert his own identity, Mark is kidnapped by one of Miles's enemies, who believes him to be Miles. Unable to persuade his captor of his identity, Mark is tortured for days, including force feeding, sexual assault, and the chemical removal of parts of his skin. This new trauma provokes a new identity crisis: 'He could feel Lord Mark slipping from him, racked apart, buried alive' (655). Mark's personality fragments into what he terms the 'black gang': Gorge, who comes out when Mark is force-fed; Grunt, who handles sexual abuse; the masochistic Howl, who deals with pain; and an Other, whose role is unknown.

Although these personalities develop because of Mark's history of trauma and torture, they are not framed as a sign of mental disintegration. Instead, they are positioned as a source of strength, as 'psychic mercenaries' who enable Mark to survive:

Gorge and Grunt and Howl and the Other had sent Lord Mark deep inside, to sleep through it all. Poor, fragile Lord Mark, barely twelve weeks old.

Ryoval could not even see Lord Mark down in there. Could not reach him. Could not touch him. Gorge and Grunt and Howl and the Other were all very careful not to wake the baby. Tender and protective, they defended him. They were *equipped* to. (665)

His captors realise that Mark's response is 'abnormally abnormal', but while they devise new tortures for him Mark realises that he can just

39 Because Miles's impairments are not genetic, Mark's body was progressively shaped and injured to precisely match Miles's physiology, including breaking his bones every time Miles broke one of his.

'make a new recruit' to deal with any new torture: 'He could make a thousand of them, at need. He was an army, flowing round obstacles, impossible to destroy with any one cut' (678, 680). Mark's multiple personalities allow him to survive, and the Other is eventually revealed as Killer, as Mark kills his captors and escapes—just before the resurrected Miles arrives to rescue him.

Rather than being a symptom of psychological disintegration, Mark's multiple personalities allow him to survive and eventually to escape. Whereas for Miles cognitive exceptionalism was reframed as disability, for Mark the process is inverted, disability reformulated as cognitive exceptionalism. In doing so, Bujold disrupts the conceptualisation of mental illness as always and only negative: as Mark explains, 'Sometimes, insanity is not a tragedy. Sometimes, it's a strategy for survival. Sometimes ... it's a triumph' (*Mirror Dance* 720). Back on Barrayar, Mark recognises that he will need therapy to recover and that his multiple personalities may be a barrier to forming relationships with others. But he concludes 'I don't regret knowing myself [...] I don't even regret ... *being myself*' (737). Mark plans to try and live with, rather than destroy, his multiples, as 'they all ran together, he and the black gang, on the deepest level. No part could be excised without butchering the whole' (740). Mark understands his multiple personalities not as a problem to be solved but as an integral part of his identity; rather than trying to eradicate them, he proposes instead to '*look after*' them (740).

In *Mirror Dance*, then, Bujold uses the characters of Miles and Mark to produce both transformative wonder and a productive wondering about mental illness.⁴⁰ The title of the novel refers to Mark's attempts to become more than just a mirror of Miles, but it also refers to a literal dance, where characters mirror the movements of their partner—until the call of 'mirror dance' cues them to switch roles. Bujold's mirror dance might be understood as a metaphor for the relationship between representations and the world; a relationship that is two-way rather than unidirectional, where representations do more than passively reflect. Bujold's novel uses disability to evoke wonder, but also situates disability as subject to wonder, not natural and immutable but contingent and reconstitutable. By wondering about disability, disability might be conceived of and felt in new ways.

40 This is part of a larger challenge to the notion of normality as desirable in the series, developed in the depiction of Miles and a number of doubles with exceptional bodyminds. For example, in 'Labyrinth' (1989) Miles advises genetically engineered super-soldier Taura to 'Wish to be yourself' and 'Wish to be great!' rather than wishing to be normal (551).

Affective Uncertainty: Peter Watts's Rifters Trilogy

Bujold's depictions of disability produce wonder by destabilising assumptions about mental illness. In contrast, Watts's 'Rifters' trilogy—*Starfish* (1999), *Maelstrom* (2001), and *Behemoth* (2004)—takes wonder itself as a central thematic concern, in ways that ultimately challenge the idea of knowing, understanding, or feeling *anything* with any degree of certainty.⁴¹ *Starfish* begins with a literal search for wonder, as a group of wealthy tourists on a 'Seabed Safari' visit a fault on the floor of the Pacific. This location—a key setting for the remainder of the novel—is a setting where the sublimely awesome and the grotesquely anomalous come together:

Sunlight hasn't touched these waters for a million years. Atmospheres accumulate by the hundreds here, the trenches could swallow a dozen Everests without burping. They say life itself got started in the deep sea [...] It can't have been an easy birth, judging by the life that remains—monstrous things, twisted into nightmare shapes by lightless pressures and sheer chronic starvation. (9)

Watts's opening chapter works to evoke wondrous affects, producing both a quasi-religious awe through its invocation of scale and freakish wonder through its depiction of the monstrous deep-sea creatures. Yet, even as the text stimulates feeling, the novel indicates the potential failure of wonder in its opening sentence: although the awesome environment of the abyss 'should shut you up', the tourists continue 'babbling' and 'don't seem to give a shit' (9).

From the very beginning, then, wondrous affects are positioned as uncertain and unreliable. Watts's trilogy probes the nature of wonder in ways that undermine binaries between 'natural' and 'artificial' feelings, but also in a metafictional exploration of the ways in which science fiction texts generate wonder. En route to the rift, the tourists are presented with an audiovisual programme of krakens and sea monsters, 'carefully designed' to generate a precisely calibrated wondrous response (9). The tourists, however, are unmoved, and the ship's pilot Joel dismisses the programme as 'ninety percent [...] bullshit' (11). Yet,

41 Watts wrote the books as a trilogy, but the final volume was split into two books, *Behemoth: β-Max* and *Behemoth: Seppuku*, when it was originally published. *Starfish*, *Maelstrom*, and the unified version of *Behemoth* are freely available on Watts's website.

even as the programme is dismissed, and its use of stock footage and dramatic pauses highlighted, the embedded narrative, with its 'litany of deepwater nasties', works upon the reader's feelings to build a sense of anticipation and excitement (11). The means by which the text creates affect is highlighted, in a commentary on *Starfish*-as-novel but also on the genre of science fiction more generally: the reader, like the tourists, is in search of wonder. The prelude simultaneously generates feelings and encourages self-consciousness about feeling, reminding us of the ways our affective responses—including affective responses to disability—are manipulated, shaped, and mediated.

The climax of the underwater tour is the appearance of 'monsters', gigantic fish that live at the rift (12). This display of abnormal bodies finally produces the desired sense of wonder for the tourists. However, *Starfish* raises ethical concerns about the manipulation and display of anomalous bodies to generate wonder, producing a self-consciousness about feeling and encouraging a shift from affect to meta-affect. Joel summons the gigantic fish using sound waves which trick them into perceiving the craft as food. When the tour guide comments that the fish are in a 'feeding frenzy', Joel comments that the same could be said of the tourists, who are gorging themselves on spectacle (12). This scene renders as problematic the desire to gaze upon the anomalous or freakish, but it also encourages the discomfiting recognition that the reader themselves is 'feeding' on a similar display. By foregrounding the ethical issues involved in displaying and gazing upon monstrous bodies, the text encourages the reader to reflect on their own participation and complicity in such dubious processes of spectatorship.⁴²

Starfish blurs the lines between the 'normal' and the monstrous and between human and nonhuman. The audiovisual programme which teases the appearance of the gigantic fish displays not only sea creatures but disabled human bodies, including photographs of 'human legs, puckered with fist-sized conical wounds' from attacks by giant squid (11). The opening chapter of *Starfish* evokes the freak show and deliberately conflates the watching spectators and spectacular freaks: Joel perceives one of the tourists' 'golden tan of cultured xanthophylls', from a body modification which allows photosynthesis, as 'freakish' (10). The line between spectator and spectacle is blurred; the freaks and monsters are inside looking out, as well as outside looking in.

42 As Gerber notes, almost all disabled people experience the 'feeling of being display'; he writes that it is 'a singular form of oppression—the oppression of unwanted attention—that disabled people share with few others' (44).

From the very beginning, then, the rift is depicted as a place of ambiguous monsters and monstrous ambiguity. The tour passes over the construction site for a geothermal power station, and Joel and tour guide Preteela discuss the plan to have people live and work there. Preteela's comment, 'They say people are going to be *living* down there?' is partly an expression of scepticism at the idea of humans living on the ocean floor (16). However, it also calls into question the humanness of any person capable of living in such an environment: the question is not how people can live at the rift, but whether anyone capable of doing so should count as 'people' at all. When Preteela asks Joel about the station inhabitants, he responds:

'Haven't you seen the PR threads? Only the best and the brightest. Holding back the everlasting night to stoke the fires of civilization.'
 'Seriously, Joel. Who?'
 He shrugs. 'Fucked if I know.' (16)

The implied question is 'What kind of person *could* live at the rift?' The rest of the trilogy can be understood as wondering about that question.

Like the monstrous fish and the wealthy tourists, the technologically enhanced 'Rifters' who eventually inhabit the geothermal power station are subject to processes of enfreakment and in turn evoke freakish wonder. As information about the Rifter selection process is gradually revealed, it transpires that, rather than identifying the 'best and brightest', the Grid Authority selects Rifters on the basis of a particular, exceptional psychology, a 'generalized post-traumatic addition to hostile environments' found in veterans, addicts, former hostages, and abuse victims (*Starfish* 179). Such people are viewed as having been '*preconditioned*' by traumatic experience for work in the stressful undersea environment (*Maelstrom* 58). Once selected, the recruits are surgically, chemically, and genetically altered to allow them to function under the immense pressures—literal and metaphorical—of their operating environment. As well as mechanical implants that collapse their lungs and allow them to draw oxygen from water, the Rifters use assistive technology in the form of diveskins and eyecaps which insulate them against heat and cold.⁴³

43 Considering the utility of cyborg theory for disability studies, as well as the material aspects of a cyborg existence, Reeve identifies a range of concerns, including the ways in which access to technology is predicated on existing social hierarchies, cyborg embodiment as involving pain or dependency,

The central character, Lenie Clarke, and her colleagues are ‘prototypes, field tests, and final product all rolled into one’ (*Behemoth: β -Max* location 2750). The bodyminds of the Rifters are simultaneously devalued and valuable, expendable and vital. Though the Rifter selection process might encourage a perception of them as vulnerable, exploited, or victims, such an interpretation becomes increasingly untenable as the trilogy progresses. The Rifters respond to the pressure-filled environment of the deep ocean station in ways not anticipated by their employers; they do not just survive but ‘thrive’ there, and have no desire to return to dry land (*Behemoth: β -Max* location 626). When Scanlon, one of the doctors who recruited and modified the Rifters, visits the station, he expects to feel pity for them, but those expectations are confounded: ‘how can you pity someone who’s somehow better off than you are? How can you pity someone who, in some sick way, seems to be happy?’ (*Starfish* 207).

Though the Rifters include abusers and murderers, the key ingredient is trauma. As Lenie comments: ‘It’s not how much shit you’ve raised that suits you for the rift. It’s how much you’ve survived’ (*Starfish* 116). As in Bujold’s novels, trauma becomes a source of strength, allowing the Rifters to thrive where ordinary humans cannot.⁴⁴ The initial corporate modification of the Rifters’ bodies confers the ability to endure extreme temperatures and the crushing pressure of the ocean floor, and to survive underwater for days without supplementary oxygen. However, the Rifters also learn to hack their new cyborg bodies. By tweaking their settings they develop a superhuman affective perception, which allows them to sense the feelings of others in close proximity as long as they are under the extreme pressures of the deep ocean. As a result, the Rifters form a kind of affective gestalt, their new perceptions blurring the boundaries between individuals and allowing them to work as a seamless unit. Though enabled by the original engineering of their bodies, these alterations are done without corporate knowledge or sanction; the Rifters are the agents of their own transformation.

In Watts’s trilogy the Rifters are repeatedly depicted in ways that produce conflicting feelings and a discomfoting affective

and issues around surveillance, privacy, and control (‘Cyborgs, Cripples and iCrip’ 107). Watts’s novels engage with these issues directly in ways that work against the fetishisation of the cyborg bodymind, by, for example, foregrounding the pain and discomfort involved in the Rifters’ cyborg existence.

44 One of the first Rifters, Ballard, does not have a history of trauma; he cracks under the pressure and washes out of the programme.

disorientation, leaving the reader wondering about what to feel.⁴⁵ In particular, the trilogy explores the mixed feelings generated by disability. When the selection process for the Rifiers becomes public knowledge, they are ‘pitied and feared’, and there is brief outrage: ‘everything from *how dare you exploit society’s victims for the sake of a few megawatts* to *how dare you turn the power grid over to a bunch of psychos and post-trauma head cases*’ (*Maelstrom* 179, 58). For the reader, too, disability is a source of conflicting affects. This affective confusion is concentrated in the figure of Lenie. In *Starfish*, β ehemoth, an ancient microbe surviving only at the rifts on the ocean floor, is released into the wider world. The ‘beta’ marks the microbe’s incompatibility with all existing, ‘alpha’ life, which will slowly be killed if β ehemoth spreads. The Rifiers are among the first to be infected, although their genetic alterations slow the effects, and the undersea station is targeted by nuclear weapons as part of the containment strategy. Lenie survives the nuclear strike and heads for dry land to seek revenge on humanity. Transformed from ‘career victim’ to ‘avenging angel’, Lenie intentionally spreads β ehemoth and is thus at least partly responsible for the apocalyptic future that ensues—the result partly of β ehemoth and partly of the increasingly destructive efforts to contain it (*Maelstrom* 82). By the start of the second book millions of lives and much of North America have been sacrificed; the reader is left in the uneasy position of simultaneously desiring Lenie’s continued survival and success in her quest to return home while being aware that she is at least partly to blame for millions of deaths. By the start of the final novel there have been ‘a billion deaths or more’, but Lenie is transformed into an ambiguous saviour, as she and one of the other Rifiers work to save what is left of the world (*β ehemoth: β -Max* location 4201).

The constellation of emotions evoked by Lenie is diversified and enriched by the multitude of labels applied to her: in the first two novels Lenie is labelled (or labels herself) vampire, victim, monster, tool, icon, survivor, god, and ‘vector for global apocalypse’ (*Maelstrom* 336). Lenie is multiple, and efforts to pinpoint what she is and how to feel about her are futile, confounded by a surfeit of possible interpretations. The proliferating conceptions of her are echoed by (or perhaps echo) the development of a ‘Lenie Clarke’ meme within *Maelstrom*,

45 For example, Gerry Fischer is a paedophile who was offered the choice between the Rifiers programme and jail, but he genuinely believes that sexual assault is ‘*what you do when you really love someone*’, and his actions and motivations are bound up with a troubled history in which he was both abused and abuser (*Starfish* 79).

the turbulent and dangerous mid-twenty-first-century version of cyberspace. Lenie Clarke is 'in the Net' and electronic Lenies evolve and replicate themselves tirelessly, making their own contribution to global meltdown by attacking firewalls and infecting electronic systems in an endless process of productive destruction (*Maelstrom* 138).

The novels encourage wonder by obsessively returning to the questions 'Who is Lenie Clarke?' and 'What is Lenie Clarke?', but the movement from ignorance to knowledge conventional in science fiction is never completed (*Maelstrom* 138).⁴⁶ What answers the novel offers are soon revealed as partial, incorrect, or incomplete. To the extent that Lenie is knowable, it is in negative outline, by all the things she is not, or at least not straightforwardly—which includes victim and villain. Eventually, it transpires that Lenie Clarke is unknowable even to Lenie Clarke, her own history an invention or construct (in more than the sense in which this holds for all fictional characters). After the trauma of her narrow escape from the nuclear attack, Lenie starts to have disturbing visions, hallucinations of a happy childhood that jar with her memories of assault and sexual abuse. Using a medical scanner, Lenie discovers thousands of tiny lesions on the area of her brain that deals with long-term memory, and realises that her memories were tampered with.⁴⁷ Lenie's ability to survive and thrive in the hostile environment of the Rift was generated not by experiences of abuse but by giving her *memories* of being abused, creating a 'cascade effect' where the brain 'rewires itself' (*Maelstrom* 335). The foundations of her personality and identity are radically destabilised: 'Everything she did, everything she felt, was the result of surgical and biochemical lies placed within her for the service of others' (*Maelstrom* 336). Once more, the reader perceives Lenie anew, this storyline continuing the undermining of certainty developed in the rest of the trilogy.

Lenie's confused feelings mirror the affective confusion of the reader, even as Lenie herself is a primary source of that affective disorientation. In Watts's trilogy, confusion about what to feel is

46 Some texts gain their impact precisely by resisting this expected trajectory, such as Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), or Jeff VanderMeer's 'Southern Reach' trilogy (2014).

47 The idea that one or more of the Rifters may have 'Induced False Memory Syndrome' is introduced in *Starfish* (182). Scanlon realises that Rifters can be created in a different way: instead of taking 'someone who's fucked in the head' and training them, you can take someone already trained, and 'fuck them in the head' (182). Scanlon identifies Lenie as one possible candidate, but is unable to confirm his suspicions, and the issue rests until *Maelstrom*.

prominent throughout. The novels repeatedly offer unanswered questions and transformative revelations, problematising how and why we feel. The result is a profound sense of disorientation and uncertainty. Watts's trilogy is at least partly about affect: the books constantly foreground feelings or their absence, present intensely affecting images and scenarios, and highlight the means by which feelings are generated and manipulated. Reviewing *Starfish*, Paul J. McAuley writes that the novel has a 'relentless melodramatic pitch, and far too much synthetic angst—its characters find it hard to get through a door without suffering a nervous breakdown'.⁴⁸ What McAuley perceives as a weakness is precisely the point: the books explore the ways in which feelings may be 'synthetic', untrustworthy, or subject to manipulation. The challenge to the idea of 'real' feelings in the prelude to *Starfish* is developed throughout the trilogy. Feelings are constantly manipulated and constrained: chemical and technological mood-manipulators are commonplace, while those employed to make life or death decisions are chemically constrained by 'Guilt Trip', a 'neurochemical censor' that uses the subject's gut reactions to constrain them to always and only do what they feel to be right (*Maelstrom* 121).

Affective and interpretive uncertainty is further enhanced by a series of resistant symbols, images which generate a powerful response even as they confound understanding. The first of these iconic images appears in the prelude to *Starfish*. After the display of the monstrous fish, Joel takes the tourist craft over the construction site for the geothermal station where the Rifters are later based. There, they glimpse 'something dark and fleshy', an anglerfish bashing 'herself repeatedly against the floodlight' (14, 15). Both crew and tourists are arrested by the sight. The description generates a series of unanswered questions: Is the fish trying to destroy itself, or the light, or the station? Is it significant that it is 'oblivious' to the craft (15)? Is the fish acting with purpose, or simply 'mindless' (15)? These questions are never answered, frustrating attempts at interpretation.

The fish is the first of a number of images that act as nodal points for affect while simultaneously frustrating the reader's drive to comprehend. The reader is left in a state of uncertainty, constantly wondering as they try to make sense of limited and ambiguous information. It seems that the fish should mean *something*, but if it is a symbol it is a resistant and confusing one. The same is true of the next image, another anglerfish, dragged into the station in *Starfish*:

48 Watts quotes this extract from McAuley's review on his website ('Blurbs and Pull Quotes').

He's brought a monster inside with him. It's an anglerfish, almost two meters long, a jellylike bag of flesh with teeth half the length of Clarke's forearm. It lies quivering on the deck [...] Dozens of miniature tails, twitching feebly, sprout everywhere from its body'. (127)

What Lenie initially perceives as tails are in fact other fish: grotesquely, 'a whole school of tiny anglers are boring into this big one', some 'as far as their jaws', others 'buried right down to the tail' (127). Acton, who brought the fish into the station, identifies the smaller fish as parasites, and intends it as an object lesson, explaining that the Rifters are the large fish, and the smaller fish 'everyone else' (128). The implication is clear: the Rifters are allowing themselves to be exploited, the rest of humanity parasites upon them.

Clarke initially perceives the smaller fish as boring into the big one, but moments later conceives of the relationship differently: as the big fish '*engulfing* the little ones across its body wall' (127). Though she finds both images 'revolting', Lenie's interpretation is diametrically opposed to that suggested by Acton (127). For the reader, interpretation is complicated by multiple possible readings, creating uncertainty about what to feel other than freakish wonder. Watts withholds further information that might bring interpretive certainty or confidence,⁴⁹ and Acton's interpretation is explicitly problematised by a sarcastic comment from one of the other Rifters: 'A metaphor. How clever' (128). Labelling Acton's interpretation this way undermines it, as well as making processes of interpretation and meaning-making obtrusive, reminding the reader of the status of the text as fiction. The novel simultaneously invites the reader to perceive the fish as a metaphor, as something that has a deeper meaning or significance, and short-circuits its ability to function metaphorically by denaturalising the process by which metaphors make meaning.

The starfish which appear repeatedly in the series are presented no less ambiguously, though they are always associated with Lenie. For example, Acton asks Lenie to look at the starfish in a particular spot more closely, then rips one of the starfish in half. As he explains, he hasn't killed the starfish, but '*bred*' it, since starfish regenerate (*Starfish* 120). Acton's comment, 'Tear them into pieces, they come back stronger' is clearly meant as a commentary on or about Lenie (*Starfish* 120). Later, Lenie begins patching together injured starfish, producing creations Scanlon perceives as 'hideous' and 'disgusting': 'Starfish are

49 The image of the parasitic anglerfish is invoked again in the final novel, but not in a way that aids comprehension.

supposed to be all on one plane [...] Not this one. Clarke has grafted bits and pieces together at all angles and produced a crawling Gordian knot, some pieces red, some purple, some white' (*Starfish* 195). Lenie's perception is that she is fixing the starfish and helping them survive, but Scanlon's interpretation is quite different, and he sees her creations as monstrous and pathetic. In the patched-together starfish Lenie sees beauty and survival, but they make Scanlon feel 'sick' (*Starfish* 195). He writes in his report that she 'has developed a mutilation neurosis [...] Her fascination with an animal which can be easily "fixed" when broken has fairly obvious roots, notwithstanding a number of horribly botched attempts at "repair"' (*Starfish* 196). Because Scanlon interprets Lenie through the prism of disability and deviance he can only understand her work with the starfish as a symptom, evidence of an abnormal psychology. Again, though, this interpretation is undercut. In part this is achieved by making it explicit, as with the earlier depiction of the anglerfish, but Scanlon also misunderstands other Rifter behaviours, positioning him an unreliable interpreter. Later in the novel the reader is presented with one of the patchwork starfish as seen from Lenie's point of view: 'a multicolored starfish, beautifully twisted, stitched together from leftovers. It lies folded back against itself, two arms facing upward: a few remaining tube feet wave feebly in the current. Cottony fungus thrives in a jagged patchwork of seams' (*Starfish* 286). Where Scanlon saw only grotesque injury, abnormality, and parasitism, Lenie sees beauty and new forms of life.

In *Maelstrom* Lenie comments that she 'was never that big on metaphors', a moment before she states that she 'still can't get used to being a starfish' (289). The association between Lenie and the starfish is clear, but how it should be understood remains intentionally ambiguous. Seen through different eyes, the starfish are both symptom of mental illness and beautiful artistic creation, benevolent intervention and cruel perversion of nature, repulsive and sublime. In refusing to definitively adjudicate between these conflicting perspectives and their affects, Watts undermines the idea of a single way to know or feel and asserts the possibility of conflicting feelings and understandings; it is possible for the starfish to be 'monstrously beautiful', like the rift itself (*Behemoth: β -Max* location 136).

Like the starfish, Watts's cognitively exceptional Rifiers frustrate interpretation even as they invite it. In a trilogy in which both affect and the sense of wonder are central thematic concerns, extraordinary bodies and minds are framed in multiple and conflicting ways, denying the reader certainty (about what 'really happened') as well as confidence about affective response. Through its resistant symbols,

constant invocations of affect, and continuous challenges to what seemed to be certain, Watts's novels produce a deep uncertainty about what to feel that generates a productive wondering. As Titchkosky writes, 'a politics of wonder arises from the activity of making uncertainty out of what is certain', and this is precisely what the *Rifters* trilogy does (132). Disability is used to generate feeling, but Watts also foregrounds and problematises affective responses to disability; the intense but shifting feelings generated by the *Rifters*, and the use of resistant symbols, leave the reader in a state of confusion in which disability, like the starfish, might be regenerated.

Conclusion

Using science fiction to re-examine the relationship between disability and wonder reveals that wonder can function as an important catalyst for reader reflection and hence a crucial component of reflexive representations of disability. Bujold and Watts produce wonder through their depictions of disability, but their novels also generate a productive wondering within which disability might be perceived and felt anew. The prelude to *Starfish* might be read as a commentary on the genre of science fiction itself, the tourists signifying the (stereotypically older and male) reader of science fiction, in search of wonder but so jaded that it is difficult to attain. In this context, the audiovisual programme, with its conventional devices and recycling of material, might signal genre exhaustion. Yet, as Watts's novels demonstrate, contemporary science fiction still generates multiple forms of wonder. Inso doing, the genre depicts extraordinary bodyminds, alternative normative systems, and alternative *affective* systems—worlds in which disability is known and felt in ways that diverge from, and sometimes challenge, the reader's habitual ways of knowing and feeling disability.

Like science fiction, fantasy is a genre of wonders and alternate worlds, and both genres have the potential to depict societies where disability is conceptualised and felt differently. The dominant form of contemporary fantasy fiction, the quest-based narrative, is based around narratives of affirmation and achievement—in ways that sometimes marginalise disability. The next chapter examines fantasy novels in which disability is central, arguing that the feelings of affirmation and enchantment that texts in the genre aim to evoke can encourage reflection on conventional narratives of disability as well as genre norms.

CHAPTER FOUR

Fantasy: Affirmation and Enchantment

At the start of Lois McMaster Bujold's fantasy novel *The Curse of Chalion* (2001), protagonist Cazaril is homeless, penniless, and alone. His physical and mental health ruined by injury and torture, he is desperately trying to reach the place that was once his home. In the novel, Cazaril strives to achieve a series of goals: reaching his former home; educating and protecting his aristocratic charge amidst plots and dangers; preventing her marriage to a villain; and securing her marriage to a foreign prince, in order to protect her from the curse which afflicts her family. When marriage fails to protect her, Cazaril's larger quest—to break the curse—becomes apparent. By the end of the novel, and with the aid of the gods, Cazaril has succeeded, and he is rewarded with marriage to the woman he loves and a healing of the wounds he acquired along the way.

Bujold's novel, then, is a novel of affirmation: a character who struggles, strives, and risks his life for a worthy cause achieves his goals and is rewarded accordingly. This is a conventional pattern in fantasy fiction.¹ Scholarship on fantasy has often focused on its

1 Rather than the larger category of 'the fantastic', this chapter focuses on fantasy as 'a genre within the fantastic', comparable to science fiction or horror (Canavan). In particular, it focuses on the tradition of what James terms 'Tolkien-inspired quest fantasies' (77). James traces the current popularity of fantasy fiction to the cult status Tolkien's works achieved in the 1960s, while Attebery, in *Strategies of Fantasy*, positions *The Lord of the Rings* as the prototypical text around which the genre clusters. Such texts do not constitute the entirety of contemporary fantasy fiction, but they are the predominant popular form.

imaginary settings, or the centrality of the impossible,² and fantasy reading is driven, at least in part, by the desire to encounter wonders or marvels, such as magic, gods, or mythical creatures.³ While the desire to experience wondrous affects is part of what draws readers to fantasy, I suggest that the primary affective appeal of contemporary quest-driven fantasy fiction comes from its creation of a hopeful sense of *affirmation*, and an immersive *enchantment* related to, but distinct from, the wondrous affects evoked by science fiction texts.

As Brian Attebery writes, fantasy is a genre of ‘structural completeness’: ‘the problem initially posed’ is solved by the end of the narrative, ‘the task successfully completed’ (*Strategies of Fantasy* 15). Fantasy is a genre of overcoming obstacles and achieving goals. Fantasy narratives are structured around quests or tasks, some resolved in the space of a few pages, others spanning multiple volumes, the final resolution long deferred.⁴ In some works an overarching goal is clear from the beginning, while in others, such as Bujold’s novel, the nature of the macro-quest does not become clear until later. In either case, characters are continually engaged in a series of micro-quests or smaller struggles that are subsidiary to, and may advance or distract from, the macro-quest. Fantasy heroes, of whatever gender, are continually striving for something, regardless of whether that goal is lofty, mundane, or merely the survival of some immediate peril.

Fantasy does not guarantee straightforwardly happy endings, although it sometimes provides them.⁵ Instead, it promises resolution—the satisfaction of the problem solved or quest completed—and affirmation. This affirmation takes a variety of forms. As in crime fiction or romance, the fantasy author’s job is to make the reader believe that the successful completion of the quest, and/or the hero’s survival, is all but impossible—even as the reader anticipates the *eucatastrophe* or ‘good catastrophe’, the ‘sudden joyous “turn”’ which enables success, and produces ‘a fleeting glimpse of Joy’ (Tolkien, ‘On

2 On the impossible in fantasy, see chapter 2 of Wolfe’s *Evaporating Genres*.

3 Tolkien writes that ‘the primal desire at the heart of Faërie’ is ‘the realisation, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder’ (116).

4 Jordan’s massive ‘Wheel of Time’ series, which was completed by another author after Jordan died while working on the twelfth volume, is the classic example of this.

5 Attebery writes that ‘the fantasist often seems to start with [...] resolution and then to qualify it, finding every hidden cost in the victory’ (*Strategies of Fantasy* 15).

Fairy-Stories', 153).⁶ Attebery writes that fantasy offers 'affirming' narratives: while 'Death, despair, horror, and betrayal may enter', 'they must not be the final word' (*Strategies of Fantasy* 16, 25).⁷ Fantasy asserts that hope is justified, no matter how grim the situation may seem. Usually, good triumphs over evil, and villains or threats are vanquished. Though the frequent appearance of notions of prophecy or destiny can complicate agency, fantasy affirms the possibility of achievement, the value of hard work, and the potential for recognition. While the successful completion of the fantasy quest may come at a cost (such as the death of comrades or loved ones), the fantasy novel affirms that the sacrifice was worthwhile.

Like romance, fantasy generates a sense of hope and optimism, and these affirmative feelings are a key part of the genre's appeal.⁸ Also crucial is the way in which fantasy texts generate enchantment. Mendlesohn writes that fantasy fiction is often 'immersive', 'set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world' (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* 59). Fantasy is also immersive in the sense that it produces the 'total absorption' of enchantment (Felski 54). Enchantment, as conceptualised by Rita Felski, is 'characterized by a state of intense involvement, a sense of being so entirely caught up in an aesthetic object that nothing else seems to matter' (54). Though enchantment can be a feature of all kinds of fictional texts, the terms in which Felski describes it suggest a privileged relationship with the genre of fantasy,⁹ and I suggest that enchantment is one of the genre's characteristic affects (Felski 70). While Felski's discussion of enchantment assumes readers are resistant to it, fantasy readers actively seek out the aesthetic and affective experience of enchantment. Some readers will be more easily enchanted than others, and different

6 Tolkien's 'Joy' is a specifically religious affect, allowing 'a sudden glimpse of underlying reality or truth' (155). Attebery draws upon Tolkien's work, suggesting that the fantasy eucatastrophe produces a particular 'effect in the reader' which is more than a 'simple emotional payoff' (*Strategies of Fantasy* 15).

7 Le Guin writes that fantasy is 'reassuring [...] because it offers a world large enough to contain alternatives and therefore offers hope' (*Cheek by Jowl* 41).

8 The genre's implicit promise that striving will lead to success and that obstacles can be overcome by hard work also chimes with neoliberal, individualist ideologies.

9 Felski writes that novels can pull the reader 'into an imagined world as inexorably and absolutely as any work of fantasy', endowing the things they describe with 'an often exorbitant salience as harbingers of events or totemic objects' (70).

readers will find different textual features particularly enchanting, but the reader's response to the enchantment mediated by the fantasy text is less a resistant surrender than a welcoming embrace.

Fantasy texts encourage enchantment in a number of different ways. The adventure-narrative pattern of task–struggle–success¹⁰ repeatedly staged in fantasy texts stimulates empathy, encouraging readers to feel with and for the protagonists. Readers of fantasy expect to be able to invest in the central characters, to triumph when they triumph and despair when they despair. Rather than framing this relationship in terms of identification—which, as Felski points out, is a concept typically used in unhelpfully imprecise ways¹¹—the relationship between reader and protagonist is better understood in terms of particular forms of affective engagement. The reader is encouraged to immerse themselves in the emotions and experiences of the characters, feeling with and for them. Emotional involvement is also stimulated by the fact that fantasy novels are often coming-of-age stories: alongside or through completing their quests, youthful protagonists grow up, achieving maturity, wisdom, and self-knowledge.¹²

Fantasy texts enchant by engaging the reader affectively with the quests and struggles of the central characters, but they also mediate enchantment by encouraging an affective connection with the fictional world.¹³ This is part of the reason why world-building is crucial in fantasy; the meticulous realisation of an often-wondrous fictional world encourages and enables the reader to immerse themselves in the text.¹⁴ Affective investment in the goals and desires of the central

10 As Cawelti writes, the 'central fantasy of the adventure story is that of the hero [...] overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission' (39).

11 Cawelti assumes 'ties of identification' between readers and the heroes of adventure narrative (40). As discussed in Chapter 5, Felski parses identification into distinct processes of *alignment* with a character, and *allegiance*, a 'felt sense of affinity or attachment' (34).

12 For older protagonists, their quest often involves finding a new place for themselves in the world, as in Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion* or its sequel *Paladin of Souls*.

13 Miéville writes that the 'sometimes obsessive focus on the secondary world [...] typical of post-1960s fantasy [...] is a very powerful way for effecting the particularly strong kind of suspension of disbelief that fantasy involves'.

14 Greenblatt writes about 'enchanted' looking in the context of museum display, noting that such enchanted looking may involve a 'moment of wonder' (28). Though fantastic enchantment may also involve moments of wonder, it tends to be of extended duration, involving an intimate immersion not required for science-fictional wonder. In other words, wondrous admiration and curiosity

characters and affective investment in the fictional world are often bound together: typically it is not just the fate of the individual but the fate of the entire realm that rests on the outcome of the fantasy quest. The epic scale of much contemporary popular fantasy is both catalyst and consequence of enchantment: if a key part of the pleasure of fantasy reading is immersion in an imaginary world and/or the adventures of the central characters, then more characters, more adventures, and more detail about the fictional world should (in theory) generate more enchantment.

Disability in Fantasy

While some fantasy novels depict temporarily disabled heroes,¹⁵ permanently disabled protagonists are few and far between. This might partly be explained by the fact that the fantasy quest typically involves literal as well as metaphorical journeys, which are facilitated by a nondisabled body.¹⁶ More germane, though, is the relationship between fantasy affects and disability affects, the relative rarity of disabled protagonists in fantasy a consequence of the genre's drive to evoke affirmative and optimistic feelings. Fantasy narratives generally affirm that the protagonists or viewpoint characters, at least, will get what they deserve. Disability disrupts the genre's affective trajectory because the feelings of loss and grief associated with disability in the western cultural imagination undercut the affirmative sense of hope and optimism fantasy aims to evoke. In fantasy, disability serves as a reminder of the frailty and vulnerability of human bodyminds; it is evidence that things might not turn out well in the end.¹⁷

(as defined in the previous chapter's discussion of science fiction) may be generated in the process of creating enchantment, but they are not essential aspects of it.

- 15 I use this term not to refer injuries which may temporarily impair function, such as a broken limb, but to describe conditions which appear to be permanent but are in fact cured or resolved. In Dart-Thornton's *The Ill-Made Mute* (2001), the protagonist is mute, amnesiac, and disfigured, but her magically created disability is cured by the second novel of the trilogy. In Arden's *The Harlequin's Dance* (1997), protagonist Jem cannot walk, but is cured before his quest moves onto its next stage at the end of the novel. In such cases, temporary disability is merely a stage of the heroic journey.
- 16 Monette's *Mélusine* and King's 'Dark Tower' series both include characters who are unable to walk unassisted, and illustrate the ways in which this makes the fantasy quest more challenging.
- 17 Church discusses disability in fantastic (including fantasy) film, as well as

Disability's associations with dependency, inability, and passivity also threaten to undermine the aspirational, heroic, and achieving ethos of fantasy, misfitting with the genre's affective imperatives. For this reason, disabled protagonists who stay disabled tend to appear only in works that write back to or disrupt fantasy's conventions, such as the grimdark novels discussed later in this chapter, or Stephen Donaldson's deeply problematic 'Thomas Covenant' trilogy (1977), in which the leper protagonist stubbornly refuses to act heroically. The misfit between disability affects and genre affects enhances attempts to disturb genre conventions, but it can also enable the creation of reflexive representations of disability.

Even as disability disrupts affirmation—explaining the relative lack of disabled protagonists in the genre—it can generate and enhance enchantment. Church suggests that fantasy films 'use strange or non-normative bodies to "flesh out" the extent of their fantasy worlds' ('Fantastic Films, Fantastic Bodies'). The same is true of fantasy literature and, while disabled protagonists are relatively unusual, disabled people appear much more frequently in secondary or minor roles, as part of world-building. Such figures are often used to generate atmosphere and thus to enhance enchantment. Though fantasy's disability icons are less prominent than in the other genres examined in this book, there are some iconic figures, such as the blind wizard, wise man, or seer, an icon that gains its force from the assumed contradiction between blindness and knowledge or insight.¹⁸

'Mad' characters with mystical or uncanny abilities also have iconic status in fantasy.¹⁹ More broadly, disability is frequently linked with magic in the genre: either disabled people have privileged access to magic, or disability is cured or created by magical means.²⁰ Though

the reasons for the neglect of this type of film by disability studies scholars ('Fantastic Films, Fantastic Bodies'). The very limited amount of scholarly work on disability in fantasy is partly a function of a lack of critical work on fantasy more broadly (see Le Guin's *Cheek by Jowl* and Canavan). On disability in fantasy literature see Stemp.

18 For example, the evil wizard Cob in Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* (1973) is blind, whilst wise Maester Aemon in Martin's *Game of Thrones* (1996) 'sees things no one else sees' (636). Such figures of knowledge are almost always male, reflecting the conservative approach to gender taken in much fantasy fiction.

19 See, for example, Bujold's *Paladin of Souls* or Sarah Monette's *Mélusine* (2005).

20 In Monette's 'Mélusine' quartet, magically created disability serves to demonstrate the power and danger of magic. Felix, a wizard, is intentionally rendered mad by his abusive former master, while his half-brother Mildmay is lamed by a curse. For discussion of cure in fantasy see Stemp.

there are some conventional icons and storylines, such as narratives of magical healing, fantasy's representations of disability tend towards the idiosyncratic. In David Farland's *Runelords* series (beginning with *The Sum of All Men*, 1998), for example, characters can take or be gifted the abilities of others via magic, but to keep those abilities they must preserve the lives of those who have given them, meaning that battling warlords are depicted providing for hundreds of blind, deaf, immobile, or weakened characters.

Metanarratives and the Mega-Novel: George R.R. Martin's 'A Song of Ice and Fire'

The rest of this chapter examines the intersection of disability, genre, and affect in two recent and highly influential sets of fantasy novels, George R.R. Martin's 'A Song of Ice and Fire' series (1996–) and Joe Abercrombie's 'First Law' trilogy (2006–08). Both sets of books depict disabled characters in ways that disrupt conventional narratives and/or narrative conventions. Abercrombie uses disability to develop a metafictional reflection on fantasy itself, while Martin's novels engage self-consciously with disability metanarratives.

Boosted by the success of the hugely popular television adaptation, Martin's 'A Song of Ice and Fire' series is one of the phenomenons of contemporary genre publishing.²¹ Martin's as-yet-unfinished series—*A Game of Thrones* (1996),²² *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), and *A Dance with Dragons* (2011)—is epic in both subject and scale. The five novels published to date total over 4500 pages in seven paperback volumes, while the cast list appended to the most recent novel itself spans sixty pages. The series depicts the struggle for power in the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros, which is bound up with a larger struggle to defend humanity from the threat of the inhuman 'Others'. Individual chapters are focalised through a large and rotating cast of viewpoint characters, who either strive for power themselves or become caught up in the 'game of thrones'. Though I follow accepted convention in referring to Martin's novels as a series, like other large-scale fantasy works it is better understood as a 'mega-novel' or serial (Flint),²³ a single massive text

21 For analysis of the television adaptation, see Ellis and Donnelly.

22 References in this chapter are to a later edition published as *Game of Thrones*.

23 Flint uses the term mega-novel in the context of fantasy in a blog post. For a more detailed discussion see Walter.

split into multiple volumes for publication.²⁴ Such works encourage enchantment by allowing for an immersion in the lives and experiences of the characters that exceeds, at least in duration, that enabled by most other types of fiction. The mega-novel enchants by absorbing readers in a meticulously constructed and developed fictional world for an extended period.

Martin's series is notable in contemporary popular fantasy for the sheer number of disabled characters—there is barely a chapter that does not feature one or more characters to whom disability adheres—and the range of disability narratives included.²⁵ Disabled viewpoint characters include Tyrion Lannister, a dwarf, and Davos Seaworth, whose fingers were shortened as a punishment for smuggling. As the series progresses, other viewpoint characters acquire disability: seven-year-old Bran Stark is thrown from a tower and left paralysed in *A Game of Thrones*; knight Jaime Lannister has his sword hand amputated in *A Storm of Swords*; the flaying and removal of Theon Greyjoy's fingers and toes is described in *A Dance with Dragons*; while Arya Stark has her sight temporarily removed as part of her initiation into a mystical organisation in *A Feast for Crows*. Through the depiction of these disabled viewpoint characters, the series encourages an immersive affective engagement with disability experience, something that can itself encourage reflection upon disability through the creation of moments of recognition or affective connection between reader and character.²⁶

Pascal J. Massie and Lauryn S. Mayer argue that Martin's series dismantles 'the clichés of disability' and that it is concerned with 'the damage ableist discourses and narratives inflict' (58, 45). However, Martin's depictions of disability, while compelling, often follow narrative structures which are both familiar and conventional.²⁷

24 Flint suggests Tolkien's trilogy is the classic example of the mega-novel, but I use the term with specific reference to narratives which exceed the traditional trilogy format.

25 See also Massie and Meyer 51.

26 The relationship between disability, reflection, and recognition is explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

27 Sometimes these disability narratives are compelling precisely *because* they follow well-worn narrative patterns. Jaime's character transformation after losing his sword hand keys him to a narrative of redemption, while Bran's story follows a familiar trajectory of loss and subsequent compensation: he temporarily regains the ability to walk by inhabiting the bodies of others, an ability which manifests only after his paralysis. (For an intriguing alternative reading of Bran as abusive see Massie and Mayer 54).

Instead, I suggest that the series is notable for the ways in which it works with disability metanarratives, variously denaturalising them, demonstrating their harmful effects, and suggesting possibilities for subverting or short-circuiting them. By reworking disability metanarratives, the novels position disabled people not as passively subject to their potentially oppressive effects but as active agents who might manipulate or exploit their cultural power.

Bolt defines the metanarrative of blindness as ‘the story in relation to which those of us who have visual impairments often find ourselves defined, an overriding narrative that seems to displace agency’ (*The Metanarrative of Blindness* 10).²⁸ Like a mathematical set, the metanarrative of disability is both singular and plural, comprised of the network of expectations, narratives, and assumptions cued by an encounter with disability. Specific disabilities have their own metanarratives, which overlap with the metanarrative of disability more broadly but may also include elements which are not part of that metanarrative (as explored in Chapter 2). For example, the metanarrative of blindness includes the ‘independence–dependence, usefulness–uselessness, needed–needy, helper–helped’ binaries which Bolt identifies as part of the wider metanarrative of disability, but it also includes the equation of visual perception with knowledge, the expectation of extraordinary senses, and specific stock figures such as the blind beggar (‘Social Encounters, Cultural Representation and Critical Avoidance’ 295).

Metanarratives are situated and context-specific, changing over time and from place to place. The metanarrative of disability in contemporary western culture includes ideas of loss and lack, stock narratives of overcoming and redemption, and stereotypes such as the bitter cripple, as well as a wide range of other narratives and images. Metanarratives are both shaped by and ‘given currency in’ sites of cultural representation such as literary texts (Bolt, ‘Social Encounters, Cultural Representation and Critical Avoidance’, 293). Disability encounters may be shaped by both the general metanarrative of disability and the metanarrative of any specific disabilities perceptible in the encounter.

In Tyrion, a viewpoint character prominent throughout the series, Martin presents a character who is highly aware of, and consciously

28 The idea of the metanarrative of disability is most fully developed in Bolt’s ‘Social Encounters, Cultural Representation and Critical Avoidance’ and *The Metanarrative of Blindness*. For alternative conceptualisations see Thomas’s ‘Narrative Identity and the Disabled Self’ and Corker and Shakespeare.

engages with, the disability metanarratives that shape his life. In the metanarrative of dwarfism operant in the world of the text, the birth of a dwarf is perceived as an event of supernatural significance. Tyrion is keyed to a narrative in which his anomalous body is widely understood as a sign, symbol, or portent. After his birth into a noble family, ‘all the city talked of was [...] what such an omen might foretell for the realm’ (*A Storm of Swords* 1 555). Told the story by Oberyn, a visitor to his city, Tyrion provides the answer: ‘Famine, plague, and war, no doubt [...] It’s always famine, plague, and war’ (*A Storm of Swords* 1 555). Tyrion’s response signals both awareness of and weariness with the narrative of dwarf-as-omen. However, it is also a conscious attempt to work with the metanarrative, bringing the story to its inevitable conclusion in order to regain control of the conversation.

In this case, Tyrion’s efforts are unsuccessful, and Oberyn describes how Tyrion’s dwarfism was interpreted as divine punishment for his prideful father. Tyrion’s response, ‘I love a good tale’, is both an ironic rejoinder to the story and a commentary on the ways in which he is constantly situated within in a narrative that operates independently of his actions and aspirations (*A Storm of Swords* 1 556). Oberyn, who was a teenager when Tyrion was born, describes the rumours that positioned the infant Tyrion as deviant in every conceivable way, said to have a tail, a ‘monstrous huge’ head, a beard, an ‘evil eye’, and both male and female genitalia (*A Storm of Swords* 1 556). As an infant, Tyrion was keyed to a narrative of freakish excess, but when the teenage Oberyn actually saw him he was disappointed to find only an ‘infant with stunted legs’ (*A Storm of Swords* 1 557). The novel highlights the gap between disability story and reality, and the ways in which Tyrion’s bodymind is a misfit with the narratives in which it is situated.

In the novels, Tyrion is constantly judged and interpreted not on the basis of his actions or intentions but in accordance with a metanarrative in which his physiology inevitably signifies villainy. The younger brother of the queen, Tyrion is one of only a few characters in the series not ruled by self-interest and the desire for power. However, when he is given the elevated position of Hand of the King, the people are suspicious of him, suspecting him of intending to steal the throne from his young nephew. Despite consistently acting for the greater good—and certainly far more so than other members of his powerful but unpopular family—he is hated ‘most of all’ (*A Clash of Kings* 440). Tyrion’s response foregrounds the disabling effects of the metanarrative: ‘Yes, and I am a monster besides, hideous and misshapen, never

forget that' (*A Clash of Kings* 441). Tyrion is never allowed to forget how his body is narrated.

In the eyes of the people Tyrion is an 'evil counselor' and 'twisted little monkey demon', and even within his own family he is constantly misjudged and misrecognised (*A Clash of Kings* 474). His father sees him as 'an ill-made, devious, disobedient, spiteful little creature full of envy, lust, and low cunning' (*A Storm of Swords* 1 70). His sister genuinely believes that Tyrion would kill his own nephew, and when he asks her what sort of a man she takes him for, she responds 'A small and twisted one' (*A Clash of Kings* 568). Martin's novels foreground both the ways in which Tyrion's body is read and interpreted by others and the disabling effects of these processes.

In the first three novels Tyrion is twice arrested and put on trial for crimes of which he is innocent. The repeated presumptions of Tyrion's guilt foreground the associations between disability and criminality explored in Chapter 2, and the ways in which people with bodyminds outwith the norm automatically become objects of suspicion. As one character asks, 'Why would the gods give a man such a shape but to mark him as a monster?' (*A Dance with Dragons* 1 147). When his nephew Joffrey is poisoned Tyrion's guilt is immediately assumed. Perceiving that his innocence is irrelevant to the outcome of his trial, Tyrion declares his wish to confess:

'You admit you poisoned the king?'

'Nothing of the sort,' said Tyrion. 'Of Joffrey's death I am innocent. I am guilty of a more monstrous crime. [...] I am guilty of being a dwarf, I confess it.'

His father, who is cross-examining him, points out that Tyrion is not on trial for being a dwarf, but Tyrion responds: 'I have been on trial for being a dwarf my entire life' (*A Storm of Swords* 2 407).

Tyrion's trial and confession serve a number of functions. They further problematise the association of disability with criminal deviance, since the reader knows Tyrion played no part in his nephew's death. They highlight the disabling effects of disability metanarratives: Tyrion is 'sick unto death of laughter', and during the trial is mocked to the extent that he wishes he was 'the monster you would have me be' (*A Storm of Swords* 2 415, 407). Tyrion is 'guilty' only of being a dwarf, but under the metanarrative of dwarfism operant in his culture to be a dwarf is necessarily to be guilty.

Tyrion's confession demonstrates his awareness and understanding of the narratives which shape his life, an understanding which itself

involves a kind of power, creating possibilities for subversion or transgression.²⁹ Bolt writes that disabled people are commonly ‘keyed to a metanarrative’ by others, but I suggest that they may also key themselves to the metanarrative: consciously or unconsciously framing their own actions, utterances, or self-narratives in relation to it, or invoking it in interpersonal encounters (*The Metanarrative of Blindness* 11).³⁰ Tyrion frequently makes reference to his size, in comments such as ‘As you may have noticed, I’m small’ (*Game of Thrones* 115). These invocations might be read as merely a defensive strategy, in line with the counsel Tyrion offers another character: ‘Never forget what you are [...] Armor yourself in it, and it can never be used to hurt you’ (*Game of Thrones* 54). Yet Tyrion’s invocations of dwarfism go beyond armouring himself, involving both a claiming of disability³¹ and a reclaiming of the metanarrative. In terms of the battle metaphor, Tyrion’s invocations of his dwarfism are not armour but weapon.

For Tyrion, the metanarrative of disability becomes a tool for working upon the thoughts and feelings of others, which he consciously exploits. Rather than being passively subject to the metanarrative, Tyrion invokes it as part of a strategy of affective management in interpersonal encounters, encouraging others to perceive him as harmless, monstrous, or insignificant—whichever best suits his purpose. When his city is under attack by enemy forces and the leader of the city’s troops has fled, Tyrion uses the assumptions of inability and incapacity attached to the metanarrative of dwarfism to rally the soldiers. Preparing to lead the charge, he says, ‘They say I’m half a man [...] What does that make the lot of you?’ (*A Clash of Kings* 616). The men are ‘shamed’ into following him, since otherwise ‘*they are less than dwarfs*’ (*A Clash of Kings* 616).

Tyrion’s body generates particular emotions in those he encounters, but, like the disabled detectives discussed in Chapter 2, Tyrion is an affective agent, with particular abilities to manipulate and shape feeling. More than any other character in the series, Tyrion is an expert

29 For example, when Tyrion learns that a passerby has rubbed his head because dwarfs are believed to be lucky in the country he is visiting, he immediately responds that ‘it is even better luck to suck on a dwarf’s cock’ (*A Dance with Dragons* 1 331). Later, as a prisoner, he attempts to exploit this superstition in his efforts to escape.

30 Penny and her brother, minor characters who are also dwarfs, are examples of characters who have internalised disabling aspects of the metanarrative of dwarfism: Tyrion reflects ‘*Groat and Penny. The smallest coins, worth the least, and what’s worse, they chose the names themselves*’ (*A Dance with Dragons* 1 509).

31 See Linton.

at affective management. He is adept at perceiving the feelings and motivations of others, managing the display of his own emotions, and acting in ways that encourage others to feel in ways beneficial to him. Threatened with physical violence in one encounter (he is challenged to ‘make your japes with steel in your hand’), Tyrion deftly shifts the allegiance of the audience:

‘Why, I *have* steel in my hand, Ser Alliser, although it appears to be a crab fork. Shall we duel?’ He hopped up on his chair and began poking at Thorne’s chest with the tiny fork. Roars of laughter filled the tower room. (*Game of Thrones* 197, 198)

Tyrion’s understanding of the metanarrative of dwarfism and his ability to put it into service allow him to turn the situation around. Tyrion calls upon the stock image of dwarf as fool or entertainer to vanquish his opponent and defuse the threat of violence. He is expert in using humour to manipulate social interactions as well as to subvert mockery. At Joffrey’s wedding his nephew tries to humiliate him by including in the entertainment an act where two dwarfs joust, mounted on a pig and a dog. The act invokes an array of disabling stereotypes that are part of the metanarrative of dwarfism, including the dwarf as comic relief, the dwarf as incompetent, and the dwarf as sexually voracious or deviant. After the jousting, Tyrion’s nephew calls on him to take on the champion, and ‘laughter crashed over him like a wave. The hall was a torchlit blur of leering faces’ (*A Storm of Swords* 2 266). Yet, as in the crab fork duel, Tyrion turns the mockery around:

‘Your Grace,’ he called. ‘I’ll ride the pig ... but only if you ride the dog!’ Joff scowled, confused. ‘Me? I’m no dwarf. Why me?’

Stepped right into the cut, Joff. ‘Why, you’re the only man in the hall that I’m certain of defeating!’

He could not have said which was sweeter; the instant of shocked silence, the gale of laughter that followed, or the look of blind rage on his nephew’s face. (*A Storm of Swords* 2 266)

Tyrion’s abilities at affective manipulation allow him to redirect the intended insult. The result is a (temporary) inversion of the hierarchy of power, a scenario repeated several times in the series.³²

32 After Tyrion manages to free himself from imprisonment and clear himself of murder charges in the first novel, another character thinks that he played his captor ‘like a set of pipes’ (*Game of Thrones* 417).

Tyrion is not the only character who exploits the assumptions or expectations of others or who displays skills in affective management—the teenage queen Daenerys, for example, describes herself as an ignorant or inexperienced girl in order to shape others' perceptions of her and bend them to her will. However, it is clear that Tyrion has particular strengths in the closely interrelated skills of manipulating the metanarrative and shaping affect, and that these skills are directly related to disability. Tyrion's awareness of the feelings produced by his appearance, and his willingness to exploit them, is made explicit: knowing that his mismatched eyes make people 'squirm', he makes 'good use of them' (*A Clash of Kings* 194). Garland-Thomson links skills in affective management to disability, writing that 'To be granted fully human status [...] disabled people must use charm, intimidation, ardor, deference, humor, or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort' (*Extraordinary Bodies* 13). In critical work on disability and emotion, such emotional labour on the part of disabled people is generally framed negatively: Reeve frames it as a necessary strategy to pre-empt or counteract oppressive behaviours in social interactions ('Towards a Psychology of Disability'), while Liddiard argues that the obligation for her participants to perform emotion work in their intimate lives constitutes 'a form of psycho-emotional disablism' (125). Martin's novels suggest an alternative way of viewing such emotional labour: Tyrion's undeniable abilities at anticipating, directing, and shaping the feelings of others can be viewed as a form of disability gain. Rather than only evoking feeling, disability is positioned as a potential source of affective agency.

At the same time, the novels highlight the emotional cost of living in a world designed for those with normal bodies and the felt impact of inaccessibility and prejudice. One of the few times where Tyrion's skills in affective management fail him is at the end of a physically demanding journey where he has had to be carried part of the way, as his short legs are unable to manage the climb. Angry and frustrated, he responds sarcastically when he is once again accused of a crime of which he is innocent: 'I wonder when I found the time to do all this slaying and murdering' (*Game of Thrones* 399). As a result, he ends up imprisoned.

In his depiction of Tyrion and other disabled characters, Martin foregrounds the emotional toll of living in a world hostile to disabled bodyminds. After he becomes paralysed Bran becomes accustomed to drawing stares and has to learn to ignore them. Like Tyrion, he develops skills at managing affect. Carried in a harness on a servant's back, he hears 'someone guffaw', but refuses to be upset: '*Let them*

mock [...] No one mocked him in his bedchamber, but he would not live his life in bed' (*Game of Thrones* 552). Bran's choice is between a restricted life and one in where the metanarrative of disability creates a constant affective burden. He overhears people saying that they would rather die than live like him, and that he must be too cowardly to kill himself. The effects of disabling attitudes are made vividly clear as Bran struggles to adjust to the ways disability transforms his interactions with others: speaking to one man, 'Bran saw pity in his blue eyes, mingled perhaps with a little gladness that the cripple was, after all, not *his* son. For a moment he hated the man' (*A Clash of Kings* 190).

Martin's series engages the reader with the effects of prejudice, but it also suggests ways of understanding disability that diverge from dominant narratives. Learning that Bran will never walk again, Tyrion's brother Jaime asserts that to kill Bran would be 'a mercy'—and that he himself would prefer 'a good clean death' to life as a 'cripple' (*Game of Thrones* 87). However, later events in the series reject the ideology of better dead than disabled: as Tyrion comments, 'Death is so terribly final, but life is full of possibilities' (*Game of Thrones* 87). Later, Jaime himself chooses life as a 'cripple' over death, building a new life after his hand is amputated. Martin's series asserts the possibility of seeing (and feeling) disability differently, in ways that encourage readers to reflect on their own beliefs. When Tyrion's father puts him in the vanguard for a battle, despite his limited fighting skills, Tyrion concludes that his father has finally decided to have him killed. Yet one of Tyrion's comrades immediately presents an alternative interpretation, asserting that he would place Tyrion in the vanguard for a quite different reason: a 'small man with a big shield' will 'give the archers fits' (*Game of Thrones* 657).

Margaret R. Somers writes that 'people construct identities [...] by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories' (614). In other words, narratives 'are not representations of identity [...] they constitute identity' (Fluck 50). Martin's novels make perceivable both the narrative construction of identity and its potentially disabling effects. They assert the influence, and the incapability, of disability metanarratives. However, the series also suggests that disabled people might key themselves to particular narratives in ways that reclaim agency, rather than only being constituted by them. Through the example of Tyrion, Martin explores possibilities for working with, reclaiming, or subverting aspects of disability metanarratives: transforming the cultural power of the metanarrative into a potential asset, rather than a disempowering force.

Grimdark and Disability: Joe Abercrombie's 'The First Law'

Martin's series is often associated with a recent turn in fantasy fiction to what is sometimes termed 'noir fantasy' but more frequently referred to as 'grimdark fantasy', or simply 'grimdark'.³³ Grimdark writes back to a simplistic construct of fantasy as involving epic struggles between clearly demarcated forces of good and evil, in which good always triumphs.³⁴ Grimdark texts typically feature morally dubious or ambiguous characters, unheroic protagonists, and ambivalent outcomes.³⁵ Like quest fantasy, grimdark evokes enchantment through the creation of an absorbing fictional world and struggling protagonists, but it rejects or problematises the affirmative feelings typically evoked by fantasy texts. In grimdark quests may not be completed, good may not triumph, and characters are vulnerable to illness, injury, and death. Whereas quest fantasy is usually optimistic, grimdark fantasy is pessimistic and sometimes nihilistic.

Grimdark texts gain their affective impact from the ways in which they differ from conventional quest fantasy. While all fantasy (and indeed all genre fiction) is to some degree metafictional, grimdark is particularly so. Grimdark texts problematise the beliefs that fantasy normally cherishes: that struggle and sacrifice will lead to success; that striving in the service of a greater goal is worthwhile; that suffering is noble; that resolution will be achieved; that justice will be done and good will out. Grimdark is fantasy without eucatastrophe—if it seems unlikely that a situation will turn out well, it probably won't. Characters in grimdark may struggle, strive, and aspire to great things, but their efforts are usually in vain. Often, grimdark muddies issues of motivation and aspiration: characters may refuse or be unable to do the right thing, or be unable to tell what the right thing is—and the reader is generally similarly uncertain. Noble aspirations are

33 There is an ongoing debate in the fantasy community as to how grimdark should be defined, and whether or not the term is pejorative. For discussion of grimdark see Polack; in light of the paucity of academic work published on grimdark to date, my discussion also draws upon commentaries from fantasy authors, readers, and reviewers.

34 Attebery writes that 'Fantasy is often criticized for being too obvious in its oppositions. Light versus dark, good versus evil: such pairings seem glaringly evident, even simple-minded' ('Structuralism' 86–87).

35 Submission guidelines for *Grimdark Magazine*, for example, call for stories with 'dark settings, grey characters of both sexes, morally ambiguous decisions, and plenty of grit' (emphasis in original).

repeatedly thwarted, and there is no guarantee of either resolution or emotional justice for the protagonists.³⁶

All grimdark texts are therefore misfits in that they diverge from conventional quest fantasy patterns. Grimdark's problematisation of eucatastrophe, achievement, and affirmation is effective (and affective) precisely because these features are expected in the fantasy genre.³⁷ Thus, while grimdark is sometimes presented as breaking with the fantasy tradition, it functions in relation to existing genre conventions. Many of grimdark's key features are becoming mainstream in fantasy, partly as a result of the success of Martin's series. While it is premature to label 'A Song of Ice and Fire' as grimdark, given that the series is not yet complete, Martin's novels undoubtedly display a grimdark sensibility. The first book of the series, *A Game of Thrones*, features a—perhaps *the*—paradigmatic grimdark moment, in the death of Ned Stark, a good man caught up in the struggle for the crown of Westeros. Ned's reward for an act of mercy is to be attacked, imprisoned, accused of treason, and eventually sentenced to death. The reader anticipates a reprieve right up until the final moment: viewpoint characters in fantasy traditionally do not die, however great their peril, and Ned's consistently honourable actions mean that his death would be profoundly unjust. However, there is no last-minute reversal, and he is beheaded as his daughters watch in horror.³⁸ This scene sets the tone for the series.

The prominence of disability in grimdark also supports a reading of Martin's work in this context. While quest fantasy is sometimes a world in which bodily matters are neglected or ignored in favour of noble causes, grimdark texts deploy a gritty pseudo-realism. They emphasise the grimy, sweaty, leaky business of living, variously foregrounding sex, urination and defecation, illness, disability, and pain. In contrast with conventional quest fantasy, scarred and disabled characters abound in grimdark: indeed, a focus on injured or disabled bodies is arguably one of grimdark's characteristic features. The perception of the disabled body as peculiarly or excessively corporeal—a body that is somehow more bodily than nondisabled bodies—makes disability a

36 I borrow the term 'emotional justice' from Romance Writers of America's definition of the romance novel ('About the Romance Genre'). See Chapter 5 for further discussion.

37 In the longer term, the grimdark turn may result in a shift in expectations and reading protocols.

38 The later revelation that there was indeed a plan to save his life, which was thwarted at the last second, only confirms the failure of eucatastrophe.

natural pairing for grimdark, as does its tendency to disrupt fantasy's affirmative affects. Grimdark therefore deploys disability as part of its self-positioning as the affective antithesis of typical quest fantasy.

Grimdark authors exploit disability's affects, but grimdark, in the prominence it gives to disabled characters and its metafictional engagement with genre conventions, also offers opportunities for the creation of reflexive representations of disability. Through its reworking of quest fantasy tropes and narratives, grimdark texts can encourage readers to reflect on disability's role in narrative and the ways in which narratives shape the lives of disabled people. This is the case in Joe Abercrombie's 'First Law' trilogy (*The Blade Itself*, 2006; *Before They Are Hanged*, 2007; and *Last Argument of Kings*, 2008), a work generally identified as a key grimdark text.³⁹ In Abercrombie's trilogy all six of the viewpoint characters are or become scarred, disabled, or sick. Sand dan Glokta is disabled after torture; soldiers Logen 'Ninefingers' and the Dogman are scarred; Jezal dan Luther ends up scarred and disfigured; former slave Ferro cuts her own face to reduce her value to her owner; and Collem West ultimately dies of a magically induced illness. Secondary and incidental disabled characters abound, from Glokta's albino assistant Practical Frost to the patrons of a disreputable tavern where 'To be crippled was the norm' (*Last Argument of Kings* 204). Even the king is a 'senile joke' (*The Blade Itself* 64). Characters' bodyminds are marked by war, torture, and slavery, and there is no guarantee that the protagonists will survive unharmed.

Through the characters of Logen, Jezal, and Glokta, Abercrombie explores the intersection of disability with identity and with narrative. Disability adheres to Logen's bodymind in multiple ways: he is badly battle-scarred⁴⁰ and missing a finger, and has berserk episodes where he is essentially a killing machine, attacking friend and foe alike. When Logen fights, the berserker 'Bloody-Nine' often takes over, whether Logen wills it or not. Logen's visible physical difference initially serves as a means of identification: in *The Blade Itself* his missing finger is used to confirm that he is who he says three times in the space of thirty pages. Eventually, though, Logen's absent finger comes to serve as a marker of identity in a different sense: both a sign of his nature and a sign that particular kinds of narrative are inaccessible to him. While Logen's berserk episodes began before his finger was amputated, one of the worst, and the one that earned him the

39 Polack writes that Abercrombie is the 'writer most associated with' grimdark.

40 Logen's face looks 'like a shield hard used in battle – chopped, gouged, torn, dented' (*The Blade Itself* 365).

name Bloody-Nine, was just afterwards. Logen identifies this as the point that he *became* the Bloody-Nine, and losing his finger is bound up with this change in identity.

At the start of the first novel Logen survives a near-drowning and the loss of his friends. After this symbolic rebirth he tries to make changes in his life, hoping to atone for some of his past deeds and leave the Bloody-Nine behind. Logen's resolution to be a better man keys him to a narrative of redemption, and at first it seems change is possible. Logen risks his life and almost dies saving a sick man he barely knows. After the pair arrive safely at their destination, Logen 'felt a different man' and wonders 'how this new Logen might turn out' (*The Blade Itself* 113). Yet even as he hopes for redemption, he perceives his missing finger as evidence of the impossibility of transformation: 'That could never heal. He was Ninefingers still, the Bloody-Nine, and always would be' (*The Blade Itself* 113).

Logen's overarching quest in the trilogy is to forge a new identity. In the first two novels he largely avoids berserk episodes and, when they do happen, is prevented from slaying friends or allies. During the quest for a magical object that takes up much of the second novel Logen becomes the leader of an ill-matched band, holding the group together and ensuring their survival. It seems that his redemption narrative will be further enabled by a romance narrative, as he forms a relationship with Ferro, one of the other viewpoint characters. However, the redemptive arc is never completed. It transpires that the man Logen selflessly risked his life to save was key to a plot by one of the novel's major villains and that, by saving his life, Logen contributed to the death of many others. After the quest is over Logen and Ferro part, and Logen joins military forces on the way to war. One battle leads to another, injury leads to the reappearance of the Bloody-Nine, and Logen slaughters an innocent child, as well as one of his friends and several of those fighting on his side. Afterwards, Logen concludes that 'He was the Bloody-Nine. That was the fact, and however he [...] wished to be someone else, there was no escaping it' (*Last Argument of Kings* 318).

Logen's acts in the third novel, and the revelation of further details about his past, disrupt the affiliation generated by earlier episodes in the narrative. One of Logen's sub-quests is to defeat Bethod, a brutal Northern king who is one of the trilogy's major antagonists, but as the novel progresses Bethod's violent acts are repositioned as at least partly Logen's fault: 'Who was it would never let me stop? [...] Who else but the Bloody-Nine?' (*Last Argument of Kings* 341). After Logen almost kills his closest friend, he looks down at his hands and, as in

the first novel, sees his missing finger, concluding ‘He was Ninefingers still. The Bloody-Nine. A man made of death’ (*Last Argument of Kings* 569). The repetition indicates that Logen has made little progress on his redemptive quest.

Logen understands—or perhaps chooses to understand—disability as the marker of an inescapably deviant identity, an insurmountable barrier to redemption: he can no more atone for his past acts or change who he is than he can grow back his missing finger.⁴¹ He looks at himself and sees ‘a man made of murder’, his hands ‘killer’s hands’ (*Last Argument of Kings* 616). At the end of the novel Logen is attacked and jumps from a high window into a river—ending up back precisely where he started. After all that has happened, Logen has not completed his quest for self-transformation, instead appearing to be caught up in an endless narrative loop.

Logen’s story invites the reader to reflect on the ways in which identity is written on the body, and the extent to which it is possible to reclaim agency over one’s self-narrative. Writing back to the clearly defined oppositions assumed to be characteristic of fantasy, grimdark asserts that ‘It ain’t ever as simple [...] as a man is just good or bad’ (*Last Argument of Kings* 268). The reader is left unsure of how to perceive Logen: one of the other viewpoint characters describes him as ‘The best man I know’, while a former friend labels him a ‘villain who thinks he’s a hero’ (*Last Argument of Kings* 575, 667). Such a man is ‘worse than a villain’, because ‘there’s nothing he won’t do, and he’ll always find himself the excuse’ (*Last Argument of Kings* 667).

While Logen is portrayed from the beginning as an unconventional hero for quest fantasy, Jezal dan Luther consciously casts himself in the role of fantasy hero. He even has a suitable goal: in *The Blade Itself* he is in training for the ‘Contest’, a high-profile fencing competition whose winners often go on to ‘great things’ (*The Blade Itself* 51). A young, handsome military officer from an aristocratic family, Jezal possesses many of the qualities expected of such a character, and he knows it: admiring himself in the mirror, Jezal muses, ‘Had there ever been a jaw like it? Perhaps some king, or hero of legend, once had one almost as fine’ (*The Blade Itself* 246). Jezal is immature, vain, and

41 Questions remain about how much Logen really wants to change. Logen has several opportunities to walk away from further fighting, but fails to take them up. This choice is highlighted in the final pages of the third novel by the appearance of a character who does walk away. Shivers is part of a plot to murder Logen, but throws down his knife and walks away instead, saying ‘I’m better’n you, Bloody-Nine’ (*Last Argument of Kings* 665).

self-absorbed, but this is entirely within the parameters of the heroic fantasy narrative: the youthful hero must often come of age during the fantasy quest. As Tolkien writes, 'it is one of the lessons of fairy-stories [...] that on callow, lumpish, and selfish youth peril, sorrow, and the shadow of death can bestow dignity, and sometimes even wisdom' ('On Fairy-Stories' 137). This conventional narrative, though, is foregrounded and undercut by Jezal's conscious casting of himself in the role of youthful fantasy hero. Towards the end of the perilous quest he goes on with Logen and others, he congratulates himself 'on how much he had learned. Tolerance and understanding, courage and self-sacrifice [...] he had grown as a man' (*Before They are Hanged* 490–91). Jezal *has* matured, but by keying himself to the narrative of the youthful hero coming of age, he calls both his newfound wisdom and the power of this typical fantasy narrative into question.

Jezal's congratulatory reflections are also disturbed by the sight of his face in a mirror for the first time since he was injured during the quest: his jaw and chin are scarred and distorted, his handsome face 'a ruin' (491). Jezal accepts the loss of his beauty philosophically, something that does suggest a genuine change in his character: 'Perhaps he was an uglier man, but he was a better man too' (*Before They are Hanged* 491). As Somers writes, 'people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate those happenings within one or more narratives' (614). Jezal is able to accept his 'broken face' with a degree of equanimity because he can incorporate it into the narrative of the youthful hero coming of age (*Before They Were Hanged* 341). For the wizard Bayaz, who is masterminding a plot to make Jezal into a puppet king, Jezal's new maturity is irrelevant, but his newly scarred face is an asset:

what you lose in boyish charm you will gain, I have no doubt, in a certain danger, a flair, a rugged mystery. People respect a man who has seen action, and your appearance will be very far from ruined. [...] I think it will serve. (*Before They Are Hanged* 306)

Jezal's scarring serves both Bayaz's plot and the heroic narrative, as a visible marker of combat experience, and of ennobling suffering. Here, as throughout the trilogy, appearances (including visible disability) cue particular kinds of narrative, and what matters is the narrative rather than the truth behind it.

Jezal's larger story arc illustrates how a person can become subject to or disempowered by conventional narratives, and the ways in which too great a willingness to embrace particular narratives can cloud a

person's perceptions. Facing a superior fighter in the final of the Contest, Jezal is one touch from defeat when he is suddenly transformed: faster, stronger, his tiredness and pain gone. Even though he 'had never dreamed he could be *this* good', Jezal readily accepts his sudden increase in skill as a just reward for his work in training, since victory is the inevitable next step in his heroic narrative (*The Blade Itself* 319). It never occurs to him to be suspicious. Jezal's commitment to the narrative means that he is unable to perceive the truth, which is that Bayaz is aiding him through magical means.

Later, Jezal unquestioningly accepts Bayaz's story that he is the bastard child of the recently deceased king, and thus a potential heir to the throne. The missing heir is a staple of heroic fantasy,⁴² but the story is eventually revealed as 'slop' for 'idiots'; Jezal is the son of a prostitute, not the son of a king (*Last Argument of Kings* 629). Jezal's willingness to frame his life in terms of heroic narrative means that he loses—or never gained—the ability to engage critically with narratives, and this leads him to an unhappy fate. Abercrombie uses Jezal's narrative arc to demonstrate what heroic narratives may leave out, or the ways in which they may not be what they seem. By the third novel Jezal has become king, achieving his vaguely conceptualised but much desired ambition of being someone 'big and important' and having people 'fawn and smile around him and hang on his every word' (*The Blade Itself* 99). Yet, rather than making 'big decisions', Jezal is a puppet king, bound to Bayaz's will on threat of torture or death, his real status indicated in a scene where he is 'draped with swatches of glittering cloth as though he were a tailor's dummy' (*The Blade Itself* 99, *Last Argument of Kings* 183–84). Becoming king, the affirmative conclusion in so many fantasy narratives, is in Abercrombie's world a nightmare, not a dream come true. In a further irony, by the final novel Jezal has matured into a man who could, it seems, be a good king—he risks his life for his subjects and wants to make the government more democratic—but his situation means that he is powerless to follow his better impulses.

Abercrombie's trilogy, then, is a fantasy narrative that undermines the narratives beloved of fantasy: Logen's redemptive arc is left ambiguous and incomplete, and Jezal's story subverts the heroic narrative of achievement in multiple ways. Abercrombie also undercuts the narrative of achievement through the depiction of Glokta, who serves as an illustration of the point that achievement is not always rewarded. A

42 See Diana Wynne Jones's parodic *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, 137.

previous winner of the Contest, Glokta 'chose glory and success', but found that 'The box did not contain what was written on the lid' (*Last Argument of Kings* 420). Captured in battle, Glokta was tortured for two years, suffering severe injuries. As a result, Glokta is always in discomfort, if not pain. Half of his teeth were removed, meaning he cannot eat anything that requires chewing; some of his toes were amputated; and he suffers painful spasms and is sometimes incontinent.

Glokta might be read metaphorically, his ruined body signifying the ruined society in which the novels are set. Glokta's life narrative is indeed a testament to the failure of noble aspirations. However, Glokta, like Tyrion in Martin's novels, is also portrayed as a person who has particular insight into narratives and the ways in which they shape human lives. As a result of his torture and subsequent disability Glokta has a deep understanding of the ways in which particular narratives might be damaging or misleading, and does not easily fall under their spell. While the rest of the audience for Jezal's Contest final see only 'what they want to see', cheering Jezal's magically assisted victory, Glokta immediately perceives that there is something not right about it (*The Blade Itself* 318). Glokta shows awareness of and keys himself to various narratives: while he could have retired from public life after his injuries, he joined the Inquisition, the government's torturers, consciously choosing the role of 'black-hearted villain' over that of tragic victim (*Before They Are Hanged* 96). As an Inquisitor, Glokta's job is to torture confessions out of those suspected of plotting against the Union, regardless of their guilt or innocence, and he carries out his duties skilfully and with enthusiasm.

Glokta's internal monologues offering a biting commentary on the disjunct between his current existence and the narrative of heroic achievement that he signed up for. Waking up in pain, barely able to walk, and having soiled himself, he thinks, '*the greatest swordsman the Union has ever seen, [...] carried to my bath by an old man so that I can wash my own shit off. They must be laughing loud now, all those fools I beat*' (*The Blade Itself* 61). Descending a flight of stairs, in agonising pain and at risk of falling, Glokta reflects that '*For most people stairs are a mundane affair. For me, an adventure!*' (*The Blade Itself* 11). The sixteen steps become '*Sixteen enemies*' to be conquered (*The Blade Itself* 10). The framing of descending stairs as an epic battle functions partly to trivialise conventional narratives of heroic achievement, but also serves to raise questions about the nature of achievement itself, inviting reflection on why particular types of achievement are valorised and others not. In Glokta's story, disability disrupts the narrative of achievement, but it also creates the possibility for the recognition of other kinds of

achievement excluded by the heroic narrative. Indeed, though Glokta is remembered for winning the Contest and his heroic acts in battle, from another perspective his survival of two years of torture is his greatest achievement. As his superior in the Inquisition comments, ‘Some fool wins the Contest every year, and wars produce many promising soldiers’, but Glokta’s achievement in surviving is ‘unique’ (*The Blade Itself* 20).

Abercrombie’s novels also subvert the quest narrative, where individuals overcome dangers and hardships to achieve a worthy goal. Often, the quest is to retrieve a particular object, usually magical, and *Before They Were Hanged* features a paradigmatic fantasy quest: a journey to the edge of the known world, through many dangers, to find a powerful magical weapon. After an epic journey, Jezal, Logen, Ferro, and the rest of their band reach their destination, only to find that the object they have sought is not there. The quest is ‘an utter failure’ (*Before They Are Hanged* 563). Relating the story to his friends, Logen realises that ‘It all sounded more than a bit mad’:

I went south, and I fell in with this wizard. I went a sort of journey with him, across the sea and far away, to find some kind of a thing, which when we got there ... weren’t there. (*Last Argument of Kings* 89)

Logen’s friends look at each other ‘as if they never heard such a damn-fool story’, and it is not just this specific unsuccessful quest but the idea of the quest itself that is problematised in the trilogy (*Last Argument of Kings* 89).

Abercrombie undercuts the apparatus of conventional quest fantasy in multiple ways. In *The Blade Itself* West’s sister Ardee reads a book that conforms to our expectations of heroic fantasy, containing ‘wise Magi, stern knights with mighty swords and ladies with magnificent bosoms. Magic, violence and romance, in equal measure’ (*The Blade Itself* 146). Ardee’s dismissal of the book as ‘Utter shit’ is a reminder of just how formulaic many such genre texts are—although the fact that she continues to read is also an implicit acknowledgement of the power of these genre tropes (*The Blade Itself* 146). Ardee’s book is the first in a trilogy, and while Glokta failed to finish the first volume, Ardee has reached the third by the final novel in Abercrombie’s trilogy. She offers a series of criticisms: ‘Too many damn wizards. I get them mixed up one with another. It’s all battles and endless bloody journeys, here to there and back again. If I so much as glimpse another map I swear I’ll kill myself’ (*Last Argument of Kings* 475). Abercrombie combines knowing criticism of his own books (similar

wizard characters proliferate in 'The First Law'), of the apparatus of conventional fantasy (maps, battles, journeys), and of a classic fantasy work ('There and Back Again' is the subtitle of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*). Abercrombie's trilogy thus draws attention to the limitations, failures, and improbabilities of conventional fantasy narratives.

Conclusion

Abercrombie's trilogy explores the power of narratives to shape human lives, closing down some options and opening up others, but it also highlights the ways in which the narratives that structure our lives—such as narratives of achievement or redemption—are themselves flawed or exclusionary. Fantastic metafiction, as Attebery claims, 'tends to open up the text, inviting us to see the degree to which reality itself is structured like a story—or indeed, because much of the reality we live in is of human making, is constructed through the act of storytelling' ('Structuralism' 88). By exploring the intersections of disability, narrative, and achievement, Abercrombie's trilogy highlights the limitations of both conventional fantasy narratives and conventional disability narratives: the stories and narrative frames through which identity is constructed. In the trilogy, suffering is not ennobling, achievement is not always possible and is largely unrelated to effort, and it is not always possible to overcome obstacles. The trilogy also suggests that some narratives, like the heroic narrative of achievement, are problematic or inaccessible, and depicts a world where narratives fail, go awry, or turn out in unexpected ways.

Like fantasy, romance offers affirmative narratives of achievement or overcoming, as the central couple strive to secure their happily ever after. Indeed, while the example of grimdark shows that the fantasy genre can encompass texts that disrupt affirmation, the affirmative ending that evokes a sense of hope or joy is romance's defining feature; a text without a happily-ever-after ending is by definition not-romance, though such texts might feature romance tropes. Disability's disruption of the affirmative affects of quest fantasy might suggest, then, a similar lack of disabled protagonists in romance, but disabled heroes and heroines appear frequently in the genre, although they are sometimes situated in narratives of cure. The next chapter explores the affective contributions of disability and cure to romance, as well as the ways in which romance might reframe disability through the mobilisation of affect.

CHAPTER FIVE

Desirable Futures: Romance

In *Reading the Romance*, Janice A. Radway's classic ethnographic study of romance and its readers, Radway presents reader comments on what makes for a *bad* romance novel.¹ One reader, Joy, states that "while "perfection's not the main thing," she still hates to see an author "dwelling on handicaps or disfigurements." "I find that distasteful and depressing" (98). Disability makes Joy feel in a way that is fundamentally at odds with the affective experience she wants and expects from a romance novel: in short, disability makes it hard for Joy to feel joyful.² Writers and readers of romance understand it as a particularly emotive genre whose texts—and particularly their endings—aim to generate feelings of happiness, joyfulness, and hope for the future.³ Romance Writers of America, for example, indicates that a romance requires not only 'a central love story' but an 'emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending' ('About the Romance Genre'), while readers in one study 'repeatedly described a desire to feel their way through romance novels, to empathize, to identify, to be emotionally invested in and carried away by texts' (Stephanie Moody 105).⁴

In a romance novel the protagonists triumph over obstacles to their

- 1 *Reading the Romance* was first published in 1984, and is based upon data gathered in 1980 and 1981. References in this chapter are to the 1991 edition.
- 2 The joyful affects evoked by romance distinguish the romance novel from other genres which utilise romance tropes, such as the 'teen sick-lit' novels discussed by Elman.
- 3 However, affect has rarely been a focus in scholarly work on romance. For exceptions see Stephanie Moody and Roach.
- 4 Stephanie Moody's research draws upon ethnographic work with romance readers carried out in 2010.

relationship, eventually securing a happily-ever-after ending (HEA, in romance parlance), which guarantees that they will be together, for the rest of their lives, in a state of enduring love.⁵ Often, the HEA involves marriage and the production of children, positioning the protagonists as part of a new family unit.⁶ Although Andrea Wood and Jonathan A. Allan note a ‘growing demand’ and ‘proliferation’ of venues for LGBTQ romance, popular romance ‘largely remains a discourse held in thrall to the demands of compulsory heterosexuality’, a state of affairs reflected in scholarship on the genre (Baldys 129).⁷ While stories featuring cisgender, heterosexual couples who end up in a monogamous relationship remain dominant, an increasing number of misfit texts are slowly widening the parameters of the genre.⁸

While romance has points of similarity with all of the other genres examined in this book,⁹ its affective trajectory is most readily comparable to that of the crime and fantasy genres. Like crime fictions, romance novels are directed towards a particular anticipated outcome—the union of the central couple, the solving of the crime—and the narrative focuses on the means by which that outcome is secured. Unlike crime, though, romance encourages a particularly intimate and immersive reading process. The success of the romance novel at generating the anticipated affective experience is dependent on the extent to which the reader feels for and with the central characters. As in fantasy, the depiction of the central characters striving towards a worthy goal stimulates emotional investment and involvement, an enchantment under which the reader is ‘sucked in, swept up, spirited away [...] enfolded in a blissful embrace’ (Felski 55). Romance is also similar to fantasy in that it presents affirmative narratives of achievement in which the obstacles to a desired goal are overcome.

5 For alternative definitions of romance see Regis and Roach.

6 As Elman notes, such investments in the figure of the child (and the associated ideal of the family unit) ‘further entrench heteronormativity’ (6).

7 For discussion of the ‘lack of diversity’ in popular romance and romance studies, see Burge and Gratzke. Schalk analyses romances with black disabled protagonists, noting that the ‘structures of the romance genre [...] rely upon white, middle-class, able-bodied, and heterosexual norms of social mobility and citizenship through the marriage union’; I echo Schalk’s call for further research on ‘multiply marginalized’ romance protagonists (‘Happily Ever After for Whom?’ 1244, 1257). See Baldys for discussion of heteronormativity in romance.

8 For LGBTQ+ romances featuring disabled characters, see the entries for works by Cullinan and Albert in the Annotated Bibliography.

9 Like horror, romance is culturally positioned as an overtly affective genre, and it shares with science fiction a focus on the future.

Even more than fantasy, however, romance offers readers the assurance of 'emotional justice', promising that characters will get what they deserve (Romance Writers of America, 'About the Romance Genre').¹⁰ The feelings of joy and satisfaction evoked by a romance novel's conclusion are generated not only by the assurance that love can conquer all obstacles, but by the reader's certainty that the protagonists are worthy of the desirable future they have secured.

Joy's comments might suggest that the feelings evoked by disability are straightforwardly antithetical to those romance aims to create. However, the sheer number of romance novels with disabled protagonists is evidence of a more complex relationship between disability feelings and romance affects.¹¹ Blind, scarred, limping, and wheelchair-using heroes abound in romance novels of all subgenres, in both category romances (shorter books published by companies such as Harlequin as part of a particular line), and single title novels (longer books not part of a numbered series).¹² Disabled heroines are slightly less common, but texts featuring them are still readily available.

Although romances, particularly category romances, tend to maintain an intense focus on the central couple,¹³ disabled characters also appear in a range of secondary or minor roles. The genre's primary disability icons are the wounded hero and the plucky heroine, but another iconic figure is the needy disabled child, who enhances romance affects in multiple ways. Typically, the protagonists meet, or have to spend time together, when the heroine becomes therapist, care-giver or nurse to the disabled child; the HEA is even happier since, in addition to the protagonists finding love, the child gains a

10 In romance, 'the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love' (Romance Writers of America, 'About the Romance Genre'). While this definition is carefully worded to allow the possibility of a romance where the central couple do not end up together, in practice the protagonists are always united by the end of the novel.

11 Less optimistically, Baldys suggests that 'the proliferation of disabled characters' in romance 'functions largely as an adaptive strategy to contain the threat that disabled sexuality represents' (127).

12 The texts considered in this chapter span a range of romance subgenres (including historical, contemporary, and romantic suspense) and include both category and single title novels. For an overview of romance subgenres see Romance Writers of America, 'Romance Subgenres'.

13 Flesch writes that aspiring romance writers are 'instructed in virtually all material' to 'maintain an unwavering focus on the relationship between hero and heroine' (178).

loving parent.¹⁴ The disabled child typically also functions in a ‘yardstick’ role, marking characters out as deserving or undeserving.¹⁵ Indeed, disabled yardstick characters abound in romance, although in some cases ‘characters’ is an exaggeration of their role. Teaching or working with disabled people, providing care for a disabled person, or, in some cases, merely acknowledging that disabled people are human is absolute proof of a character’s innate goodness and worthiness of love: a convention that romance novels (and romance scholarship) have rarely interrogated.¹⁶

Existing critical work on disability in romance has, however, explored some of the ways that romance’s disabled characters might offer a challenge to received assumptions about disability.¹⁷ Depictions of disability in romance novels are created and consumed in a society still dominated by tragedy-model perspectives, and thus ambivalent about whether disabled people are worthy or desiring of love: Sara Hosey notes ‘the enduring stereotype that disabled women [...] are incapable of initiating or maintaining mutually fulfilling romantic relationships’ (40), while Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, citing Harlan Hahn, write that in television portrayals of disabled characters ‘the

14 I use gendered language intentionally since the care-giver/therapist role is usually taken by the female partner. See, for example, Gordon’s *For the Sake of His Child* (2000), where the heroine, who is deaf but has a cochlear implant, agrees to help the hero’s deaf son learn to communicate. This trope is a variant of a common romance plot where the hero engages the heroine to help care for his children.

15 Puccinelli defines the ‘yardstick quality’ as ‘the capacity to act as or provide a measure against which other characters in the narrative are assessed’ (15). In romance, characters who treat disabled people well are marked out as worthy of love; those who demonstrate prejudice are marked out as unworthy or villainous. For further discussion see Cheyne, ‘Disability Studies Reads the Romance’.

16 This applies particularly to characters who have care-giver roles, but also to characters who ‘care’ for disabled people in the wider sense of valuing them or loving them. For example, the prologue to the first volume of Balogh’s ‘Huxtable’ quintet (*First Comes Marriage*, 2009) shows a secondary character mourning the death of his younger brother, who had Down syndrome. Constantine’s love for his brother assures the reader that he is worthy of the HEA he secures in the final book of the series.

17 See in particular my ‘Disability Studies Reads the Romance’, which explores ideas developed more fully in this chapter. For disability studies analyses of romance or romance tropes, see Baldys, Schwab, chapter 3 of Elman, chapter 4 of Wilde, and Schalk’s ‘Happily Ever After for Whom?’ For engagements with disability from within popular romance studies, see Miller, chapter 2 of Kamblé, and chapter 2 of Vivanco.

“good parts” of ordinary lives—love, romance and sex—are largely absent or not stressed’ (94). In romance novels, though, these ‘good parts’ of life, and how the protagonists secure them, are the focus of the narrative. Romance novels with disabled heroes or heroines require the reader to enter into an imaginative engagement with a world in which disabled people are not only worthy and desiring of love, but succeed in securing it.

Undesirable Futures

Romance is a fundamentally future-orientated genre.¹⁸ The HEA is a promise to the reader that the union of the central couple, and the joy they feel as a result, will be life-long. Rather than showing those futures, romance relies on readers imagining them. The focus is on how the barriers to the relationship are overcome, and the HEA is promised rather than depicted in detail.¹⁹ Romance novels pledge that the future the central characters have secured is one that is desirable in at least three senses: it is the future that the protagonists want; it is one that the reader views as desirable for those characters; and it is a future where desire itself is central, since romance novels almost always position a sexual relationship that is mutually satisfying (at a bare minimum) as an essential part of the HEA.

In *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer explores the ways in which disability triggers a series of assumptions, expectations, and narratives about the future, and how disability is perceived and constructed as part of an undesirable future. The things we feel and know about disability mean that disabled people are not ‘permitted to exist as part of

18 As Kafer writes, science fiction is also ‘full of “imagined futures”’ (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 20). Obourne applies Edelman’s work on futurity to disability in science fiction, and chapter 3 of Kafer’s book analyses Piercy’s science fiction classic *Woman on the Edge of Time*. However, Kafer’s focus on *imagining* futures is particularly well-suited for thinking about romance. In science fiction, readers engage imaginatively with a future (or otherwise alternate) world depicted by the author, but romance readers have to imagine the genre’s futures for themselves.

19 Sometimes, the final chapter of a romance offers a snapshot of the future, showing the couple on their wedding day or at the birth of a child. Novels which are part of interlinked series often feature previous protagonists in secondary or minor roles. While these glimpses of the HEA affirm the couple’s enduring love, they are reliant on the reader fleshing them out by imagining the details which are not included.

a desired present or a desirable future'; indeed, a future with disability is often seen as the opposite of any desirable future (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 43). This belief is reflected not only in the horror many nondisabled people feel at the thought of becoming disabled but also in the rejection of disabled people as romantic partners²⁰ and in suspicion of disabled parents.

Some romances embody this perception of disability, positioning a future with disability as antithetical to the joyful future promised by the genre. In Julia Quinn's historical romance *It's in His Kiss* (2005), a prologue shows the hero's villainous father arranging his marriage to a childhood friend, a match that would restore the family fortune. However, the intended bride, Mary, is 'Simple' and Gareth, the hero, recoils from the betrothal:

But he couldn't marry her. She was like a child. It had to be a sin. And even if it wasn't, he could never stomach it. How could she possibly understand what was meant to transpire between them as man and wife?

He could never bed her. Never. (location 129, location 132)

Gareth's vehement refusal of the idea of sex with Mary reflects an inability to conceive of her as a person who might desire a sexual relationship. It is also a rejection of the children that might result from their union. In romance, as elsewhere, the child is a key symbol of the future—hence the ubiquity of the 'babylogue' in which the central couple either have, or are expecting, a child. Gareth's rejection of the children he might have had with Mary is a symbolic rejection of a future with disability, one which reflects and supports the ideology that a future to which disability adheres 'must be rejected at all costs' (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 31).

Of course, the reader may, as I have done, take issue with this depiction, challenging the assumptions that underpin it. Stephanie Moody's romance reader participants experienced moments of 'critical engagement' in their reading, 'especially when identifications with romantic characters fall short, disappoint, or change' (121). Roach writes that she thinks about romance novels 'analytically—critically

20 A 2014 UK survey found that '44% of Britons would not consider having sex with someone who had a physical disability' (Mann), while UK data gathered in 2009 suggested that people were less comfortable 'with the idea of someone close to them marrying a disabled person' than they were with the idea of having a disabled person as a neighbour (Staniland 41).

but sympathetically—as do many readers’ (29). Yet it is important to note that there is nothing in the text which specifically encourages the reader to engage critically with this passage, or which might make a reflexive engagement with disability more likely. Quinn might have shown Gareth later meeting a cognitively disabled person who is happily married, or feeling uncomfortable with his instinctive dismissal of Mary as a partner. Alternatively, Gareth might have known that Mary loves someone else, or Quinn could have made clear that the problem is not Mary’s disability but the fact that they do not love each other. None of these things happen, though, and there is never any suggestion that the reader should be at all uncomfortable with Gareth’s instinctive rejection of Mary or the reasons behind it. Like the crime novels by Robinson discussed in Chapter 2, *It’s in His Kiss* offers an unreflexive representation of disability, discouraging critical reflection on disability and its representation.

Mary is presented not as a viable romantic partner but as an impediment or barrier to a desirable future, both in the prologue and ten years later, when Gareth’s father attempts once more to force him to marry her—something only possible because ‘poor little Mary Winthrop’ is still unmarried (location 3917). Mary’s status as object rather than subject is further cemented by her function as a yardstick character. Gareth may find the idea of marriage to Mary repugnant, but he does not *dislike* her. In fact, he is entirely comfortable with a role as her protector: he rebukes his father for calling her an ‘idiot’ and has ‘bloodied more than one bully who had thought to call her names or take advantage of her sweet and unassuming nature’ (location 147, 135). Gareth’s defence of Mary and his description of her in ostensibly positive (though infantilising) terms are presented as points in his favour, positive attributes that signal he is worthy of a happy ending. As such, they further discourage readerly reflection upon attitudes towards disability.

Mary features in the novel only briefly—she is afforded more space in this chapter than she is in Quinn’s novel—but she plays a vital role as the emblem of the undesirable (disabled) future. Marriage to Mary is positioned as the abhorrent other of the HEA Gareth eventually secures with the nondisabled heroine, enhancing the novel’s affects; the ending is rendered even more joyful through a contrast with the grim fate that has been avoided.²¹ Kafer writes that many of those who

21 For an earlier example of the same motif, see Violet Winspear’s *Dearest Demon* (1975). The hero agrees to marry his cousin, who has polio, out of pity; in the novel’s final pages, the disabled character ends the relationship so that the hero can marry the nondisabled heroine.

see her wheelchair and burn scars imagine for her a ‘future of relentless pain, isolation, and bitterness’ (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 2). In *It’s in His Kiss* a future with disability is the undesirable opposite of the joyful imagined future—reflecting, perhaps, Joy’s statement that she finds a focus on disability in the romance context ‘depressing’. By positioning a future with disability as the undesirable other of the HEA, Quinn’s novel (re)situates disability feelings as affectively opposed to the sense of joy, hope, and openness to the future that romance novels seek to create.

Romance, Cure, and the Curative Imaginary

The futures evoked in Quinn’s novel, and the feelings associated with them, are shaped by the presence or absence of disability. In a similar way, romances in which disabled protagonists are cured—a common trope in the genre—also tend to evoke two very different futures: a joyful future with a loving partner, where disability has been eradicated or ameliorated; and an unhappy and lonely future to which disability adheres. It is tempting, therefore, to assume that texts where disabled characters are cured have little to offer disability studies beyond an additional archive of disablist images, and to focus on texts where disabled characters *stay* disabled (as I do in the final part of this chapter). However, to entirely discount narratives where disability is cured or ameliorated is limiting, not least because it requires dismissing a significant proportion of romance’s disability representations. In the discussion that follows, I do not attempt a generalised recuperation of romance’s cure narratives, many of which are problematic in their implicit (and sometimes explicit) positioning of a nondisabled bodymind as a requirement for living happily ever after.²² Rather, I examine three novels which offer variations on the cure paradigm, in order to demonstrate that romance’s handling of cure is far from monolithic. In particular, I argue that romance novels

22 Such romance novels might be argued to perform a similar social function to the various forms of ‘rehabilitative edutainment’ examined by Elman: both link the formation of “‘healthy” heterosexual romantic relationships’ to the achievement of able-bodiedness, and aim to evoke strong emotional responses (6). However, there are crucial differences between the two forms. Unlike romance, rehabilitative edutainment has an explicitly pedagogical function, mediating emotion in a teen audience in order to help form docile citizens; as such, the consumption of such texts is culturally sanctioned in a way that romance reading is not.

featuring cures or pseudo-cures may trouble the dichotomy between contrasting visions of a loving future where disability is eliminated, and a disabled unhappily-ever-after.

Barbara McMahon's *One Stubborn Cowboy* (1995) serves as a useful exemplar of romance's narratives of cure, illustrating three tropes that occur repeatedly in romance novels with disabled protagonists: the concluding cure; the nondisabled partner as agent of cure; and the disabled protagonist who feels unworthy of love. At the start of *One Stubborn Cowboy* the hero, Kit, is partially paralysed after a rodeo accident, able to walk short distances with crutches but more often using a wheelchair. In the novel's epilogue, it is revealed that Kit has had an experimental operation, and he walks the heroine down the aisle using only a cane. The novel promises a future where even that symbol of disability will be discarded: though he will always limp, Kit will be 'almost as good as new' after further physical therapy (185). McMahon's novel follows a typical pattern for romance's cure narratives. The cure comes at the end of the story and is used to intensify the happiness of the ending. Not only have the protagonists each found their perfect partner, but their lives have been transformed for the better by the obliteration or amelioration of disability. The revelation of Kit's physical transformation in the book's final pages enriches the HEA, and readers are expected to celebrate it unreservedly. Such narratives reinforce the dominant ideology that it is better to walk than to use a wheelchair, better to perceive visually than not, and so on; they risk implying that a person who cannot be cured or healed is barred from achieving romantic fulfilment.

When disabled characters are cured in romance it is nearly always because of a nondisabled partner, whether directly or indirectly—a narrative habit that locates agency with the nondisabled person and reinforces disability's associations with passivity and inability.²³ In Teresa Medeiros's *Yours Until Dawn* (2004), for example, the blow to the head that restores the hero's sight happens while he is rescuing the heroine from a burning building. In other narratives, falling in love provides the motivation for the disabled person to seek treatment or therapy, as they begin to imagine a different sort of future. In *One Stubborn Cowboy* it is his relationship with Kelly that finally motivates Kit to have the experimental operation, since greater

23 Longmore writes that film and television narratives of disability often present scenarios where 'disabled characters lack insight about themselves and other people, and require emotional education, usually by a nondisabled character. In the end, nondisabled persons supply the solution' (138).

mobility would mean that he could 'Offer more' to 'someone like Kelly' (175).

Finally, *One Stubborn Cowboy* features a near-universal element in romances with disabled protagonists: the disabled person who feels that, because of their disability, they are unworthy of or will be a burden upon the nondisabled partner. Kit knows that to lose Kelly would 'tear him apart', but reflects in anguish: 'how could he tie her to a cripple? [...] She deserved so much more!' (179). In such texts, the disabled partner's sense of unworthiness is situated as a primary barrier to the success of the relationship. Pamela Regis identifies the barrier as one of the essential elements of the romance novel, and the depiction of barriers that are sufficiently daunting is vital to the final emotional payoff when those barriers are overcome.

In romances with disabled protagonists, whether or not they are narratives of cure, disability itself is rarely a barrier to love. Indeed, the heroes and heroines of disability romances are almost universally sanguine about falling for a disabled person. In McMahan's novel, for example, Kelly insists that she does not want Kit to be 'any different [...] his limitations didn't matter to her one bit' (153). Yet, while disability is rarely a direct barrier, the primary barrier is nearly always disability-related, centred in a sense of unworthiness that arises directly or indirectly from disability. Typically, something happens to trigger a realisation in the disabled protagonist that they are unworthy of the nondisabled partner.²⁴ In McMahan's novel, the catalyst is an accident that leaves Kelly unconscious and Kit unable to help her immediately because of his restricted mobility. Though Kelly's injuries are minor, Kit resolves to end the relationship: 'What kind of woman would want a man who couldn't help her if she was injured? [...] They had no future together' (127). The protagonist realises that their disability means that they have 'no future' with the nondisabled partner; often, at this point, they end or attempt to end the relationship, in an act of self-sacrifice. Crucially, this trope is always deployed after it has been firmly established that the protagonists are perfect for each other and *should* be together. It generates affect by making the union of the hero and heroine seem unlikely or impossible, evoking suspense about how the issue will be resolved, and engaging the reader affectively

24 Often, this is the arrival on the scene of a nondisabled rival suitor or perceived rival. In Tami Hoag's *Rumor Has It* (1989), for example, the disabled heroine decides to break up with the hero after watching him dance with another woman, saying 'You deserve someone who's strong and whole' (162).

with the characters' despair.²⁵ The barrier created by the disabled person's sense of unworthiness is, of course, always overcome: either the nondisabled partner convinces the disabled person that they are, indeed, worthy of love, or the disabled person comes to that realisation by themselves, as in McMahon's novel. Yet the endless repetition of this device positions disability, albeit indirectly, as a problem—and the love of a nondisabled partner as the solution.

McMahon's novel, then, illustrates several tropes that recur in romances with disabled protagonists. However, other romances with disabled protagonists—including those which offer narratives of cure—resist or problematise these conventions, as in Christina Dodd's medieval-set *Candle in the Window* (1991). Dodd's novel is unusual in that both hero and heroine are blind: the heroine since birth, and the hero since a recent head injury. William, the hero, is cured via an implausible device that is a naturalised convention in the romance genre, the blow to the head that cures blindness.²⁶ Yet Dodd's novel also writes back, in important ways, to the conventions of romance's cure narratives: in the lack of a cure for the heroine, in the way William's cure is framed and located, and in the specific obstacles that have to be overcome before the two are fully united.

Where romance novels offer narratives of cure, the cure is nearly always a *concluding* cure. Coming at or near the end of the narrative, it is used in a straightforward way to intensify the happiness of the ending: the cherry on the top of the (wedding) cake. *Candle in the Window* most obviously resists this model by failing to offer a cure for its heroine, Saura, who does not feel her blindness as a loss but as 'part of myself' (location 2146). Yet William's cure is also a misfit with the concluding cure trope. William's sight is restored not at the end of the novel, but roughly a quarter of the way through. It is widely separated from the HEA, and not positioned as essential to it. Though the cure depicted in the novel does produce happiness, it does not function in the way cure usually does in the romance text.

Candle in the Window invokes but significantly problematises the notion of the (nondisabled) partner as agent of cure, and the fact that

25 Very often, it is what Regis terms the 'point of ritual death', at which the union of the lovers seems 'completely impossible' (14).

26 The blow to the head that cures blindness is a recurring motif in romance novels—see, for example, Medeiros's *Yours Until Dawn*, Gordon's *Blind Man's Buff* (1982), and (for incipient blindness) Britton's *The Wrangler* (2009). Readers may well be aware that it is highly implausible, but accept it in the romance context because there is a tradition of such depictions.

Saura is also blind deflects some of the troubling questions about agency that this trope tends to raise. Villains attack William and Saura, and he is hit on the head while defending her. With William still unconscious, the couple are locked in a dark cell together and, when he regains consciousness, they make love for the first time. William awakens afterwards to find his vision restored. Though he briefly wonders if he has been cured by ‘the love of a good woman’, later dialogue makes clear that he and Saura know that it was the head injury that restored his sight (location 1769). Telling the story publicly, though, William explicitly positions Saura—and, specifically, making love to her—as the cause of his cure: ‘She bandaged my wounds, mending them with her touch [...] as she lay in my bed, she healed my eyes with her virtuous kiss’ (location 2512). As he adds, ‘all know of the curative power of a virgin bride’ (location 2519). This story serves William in several ways: the public declaration of their sexual relationship puts pressure on Saura, who is reluctant to marry him, but it also squashes any doubts his men might have about their lord marrying a blind woman. William casts Saura as the hero of the narrative in ways that are patently untrue—the miraculous healing—but also in ways that are: ‘She shamed [their captors] with her kindness and amazed them with her beauty, and these outlaws brought her food and drink and blankets’, all of which did actually happen (location 2512). His narrative reminds the reader of the ways in which Saura protected him and helped to preserve his life.

Candle in the Window acknowledges the appeal of the miracle cure narrative even as it undercuts it. Saura dismisses William’s story as a ‘pretty bit of fable’, but the rest of his audience are ‘overjoyed by the telling of such a love story and its pretty ending’—just as readers are typically enthralled by such narratives when they appear in romance (location 2541, 2534). Dodd foregrounds the ways in which cure narratives work upon readers to produce joyful feelings. By labelling this story of curing through love as ‘fable’, and refusing to position William’s cure as the ‘pretty ending’ to the novel, Dodd reworks standard romance tropes.

Dodd also offers a challenge to the trope where disabled characters feel unworthy of their partners. In *Candle in the Window* Saura does feel unworthy, and that sense of unworthiness is presented as one of the barriers to her relationship with William: Saura thinks that he ‘deserved better’ and repeatedly tries to prevent their wedding (location 2369). Saura’s feelings are the result of years of abuse from her stepfather Theobald, one of the novel’s major villains. However, the novel undercuts the idea that Saura should feel unworthy in a number

of ways, firstly by associating this belief with the villainous Theobald—‘She wasn’t worthy of love, he’d said’ (location 1397)—and secondly by having William and Saura eventually agree that internalised oppression, was not, after all, what kept her from fully committing to their relationship. Living with Theobald did indeed cause ‘scars’, but Saura is ‘so resilient, so sure of [her] worth, that Theobald did little actual damage’ (location 5459). Instead, it transpires that Saura is afraid to love because the people she has loved before (specifically, her younger brothers) have all grown up and left her, an impediment to the relationship that is entirely unconnected to disability. Dodd’s novel thus features a cure, but presents it in a way that is a misfit with the genre’s usual presentation of cure, denaturalising and undermining genre conventions for disability representation. Combined with other aspects of the text, such as its foregrounding of disability-related prejudice,²⁷ the result is a reflexive representation of disability which encourages readers to question the tropes and norms of romance’s cure narratives.

Despite featuring a disabled protagonist who is cured, *Candle in the Window* offers a number of challenges²⁸ to what Kafer terms the *curative imaginary*, ‘an understanding of disability that not only *expects* and *assumes* intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention’ (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 27).²⁹ In contrast, Barbara Delinsky’s contemporary romance *An Accidental Woman* (2002) does not cure its disabled heroine, but nonetheless reifies the curative imaginary by positioning disability as something to be overcome. *An Accidental Woman* is a pseudo-cure narrative: it depicts something that looks like cure, and functions like cure, but there is no real change in the disabled character’s physical state. Twelve years before the events of the novel, the heroine was injured in a snowmobile accident that left her paralysed and her boyfriend dead. Though she has a job, close family and friends, and a valued position in her small-town community, Poppy views herself as less than a whole woman, and discourages would-be suitor Griffin.

27 For example, William says bitterly that the people who love him ‘are too afraid’ of his disability to touch him, ‘As if it would rub off’ (location 612).

28 It should be acknowledged that the novel offers less of a challenge to gender roles: Saura is portrayed as very much able to fulfil her culturally mandated role as manager of the household while blind, but the novel suggests that William cannot fulfil his role as leader and warrior without sight.

29 As Kafer notes, a ‘desire for cure’ on the part of an individual ‘is not necessarily an anti-crip or anti-disability rights and justice perspective’ (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 27). In contrast, the dominance of the curative imaginary does militate against disability rights.

Poppy uses a wheelchair for her daily mobility. Her physical therapist has provided her with crutches and leg braces, and the equipment to train for using them, which Poppy pointedly ignores. Poppy refuses to attempt to walk, since 'at best she would need crutches, and, even then, she would lurch. She didn't know why she should do that, when she could wheel herself around ever so smoothly' (246). Poppy's decision to wheel rather than walk is presented not as a legitimate choice but as an admission of defeat, and a symbol of the way she has put her life on hold. In a reflection of 'the intertwined ideological demands of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness', the decision not to walk is bound up with Poppy's guilt over the accident, which she feels was her fault, and her consequent refusal to imagine a future with a partner or children (Baldys 127).³⁰ Poppy thinks that it might be worth the effort to try to walk if she had children, but, despite expertly caring for her young nieces, believes that she should not do so.

The novel is deeply invested in an ideology which demands that Poppy *should* walk, rather than wheel, regardless of the fact that it 'wouldn't be smooth or practical' (189). As her relationship with Griffin deepens, Poppy begins the physical therapy that will allow her to walk using leg braces. The emotional climax of the story comes in the final pages, when Poppy uses the braces and crutches to walk to the grave of her former boyfriend, which she has never visited. Poppy's struggle to cover the twenty yards between her car and the grave is narrated in minute detail over several pages:

Determinedly, she shifted her weight onto her left leg, used her right hip to throw the right leg forward, shifted her weight onto that leg, drew the back leg forward, and let both share the weight. Taking a breath, she repeated the motion—shift onto the left, throw the right forward with the hip, drag the back leg up.

She did it again. And again. And again. (496–97)

In overcoming her bodily limitations, Poppy also overcomes the guilt and shame that have limited her life, the illusory healing of her body paralleling a healing of the mind and heart. Reaching the grave, Poppy is finally able to forgive herself for her role in her boyfriend's death, looking for the first time towards 'the present and the future' instead of the past (500). She looks up from the grave to see Griffin

30 The idea that Poppy might prefer a life without a partner or children is never entertained.

waiting for her, and walks towards him, in a symbolic exchange of death for life. Griffin asks Poppy to marry him, and her cry of ‘Yes!’ in response to his proposal is echoed by a bird call which marks a ‘rebirth’—an allusion both to Poppy’s rebirth and the children she and Griffin will have (501).

In *An Accidental Woman* the concluding pseudo-cure simulates the affective payoff of an actual cure. It offers a symbolic overcoming of disability as negative attribute, enhancing the happiness of the HEA and creating a sense of narrative closure. The reader takes away an image of restoration and healing through love. Though Griffin insists he doesn’t care about Poppy’s disability, the achievement of true love seems conditional upon disability being overcome: the novel ends with Poppy embracing Griffin, her crutches falling away in a symbolic detachment of disability from her bodymind.³¹ Thus, though it only simulates cure—physical therapy and the use of aids has allowed Poppy to walk, not brought about any change in her underlying condition—Delinsky’s novel, like novels that position cure as essential to the HEA, reifies the curative imaginary. *An Accidental Woman* endorses the ideology that it is better to walk, even with difficulty and pain, than it is to wheel, and the text’s affects are enriched if the reader views disability as a negative attribute to be overcome.

In Delinsky’s novel, the only acceptable disabled bodymind is one ‘cured or moving towards cure’ (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 28).³² McMahon’s *One Stubborn Cowboy* initially appears to operate within the same paradigm. Almost as soon as the heroine learns the details of how Kit acquired his injury the possibility of an operation that could improve his condition is mentioned, cueing the reader to anticipate a cure. When Kit and Kelly finally discuss it openly, it transpires that Kit doesn’t want the experimental operation because of the pain it will involve and the uncertainty of the outcome: ‘The only guarantee is that there’d be more time in the hospital, more tubes, shots, searing pain [...] I couldn’t stand the thought of all that pain for a maybe’ (140). Like Poppy’s refusal to attempt to walk, Kit’s refusal of further surgery is framed, at least initially, as an act of cowardice. Kit explicitly says that he chooses not to have the operation because he is

31 For a similar motif, see Joan Kilby’s *Family Matters* (2004), where the hero walks to the heroine to propose marriage in the final chapter, symbolically stepping out of his wheelchair.

32 Kafer specifies that her notion of cure includes ‘normalizing treatments that work to assimilate the disabled mind/body as much as possible’ (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 28).

a 'coward', though Kelly rejects his assertion (138). Later in the novel, it transpires that the extreme pain Kit experienced with his previous surgeries was because he refused painkillers, due to a never-explained fear of becoming addicted.³³ Kelly's affirmation that the doctors won't allow him to become addicted, and that she will be by his side, seems to entirely allay Kit's concerns.

By framing Kit's reasons for refusing the operation as irrational, the novel would seem to offer little in the way of resistance to the curative imaginary. However, other aspects of McMahon's novel problematise the expectation of intervention and the positioning of it as an unquestioned good. Kit criticises the 'platitudes his friends and family had spouted' when telling him to have the surgery, and their dismissal of his pain (139). More significant, though, is Kelly's insistence that she doesn't care whether Kit can walk or not, or about whether he seeks further surgery or not. When Kelly describes her ideal man, and Kit comments that he'd need to be able to walk, Kelly contradicts him: 'I don't care if he walks, hears, or sees, as long as he loves me to distraction and I love him' (99). Variations of this statement are repeated multiple times, and Kelly repeatedly states that she loves Kit as he is. Even in the novel's epilogue, after Kit has had the operation, Kelly reiterates that she never cared whether Kit 'could walk or not' (184).

Kelly's insistence that she loves Kit regardless of whether he can walk or not complicates the dichotomous vision of the future often presented in romance narratives of cure and pseudo-cure. Such narratives typically evoke two possible futures. The first is the joyful HEA, in which the couple are united and disability is eradicated, ameliorated, or symbolically erased. The other, affectively opposed future, is one where the lovers are not united and the disabled protagonist remains disabled. One future is joyful, the other miserable; one fecund, the other barren. McMahon's novel is significant because it invites the reader, albeit briefly, to imagine a third possible future, a future where Kit does not have the operation, but he and Kelly nonetheless live happily ever after. Although he still has concerns about being unworthy of Kelly, Kit declares his love and proposes marriage before there is any suggestion that he has decided to have the surgery, and the 'bright future' evoked at the end

33 Had Kit's fear been contextualised (for example, if he had lost a friend to addiction, or had a history of addiction) this might have been effective. However, the lack of explanation for Kit's fear of pain medication makes his refusal of painkillers seem irrational, suggesting that his other reasons for not wanting the operation may be equally so.

of the novel's penultimate chapter is not dependent on his ability to walk (182). Both Kit's decision to have the surgery and the operation itself happen offstage, in the eight months between the penultimate chapter and the epilogue. For a short time, at least, the novel invites the reader to imagine an alternative to either a disability-free HEA or a disabled unhappily-ever-after: a future where the protagonists live happily ever after *with* disability.

These three novels demonstrate that romance's narratives of cure and pseudo-cure have diverse and complex relationships to the curative imaginary. Dodd's *Candle in the Window* and McMahon's *One Stubborn Cowboy* illustrate that even romance narratives which feature cure can problematise intervention or position disability as part of a desirable future, while Delinsky's *An Accidental Woman* demonstrates that novels may simultaneously resist literal cure and reify the curative imaginary. In Dodd's and McMahon's novels cure is one ingredient of the HEA, but not necessarily an essential one. Even Delinsky's novel can, albeit optimistically, be read as offering a third way; no matter how problematic its symbolic overcoming of disability, Poppy is still a disabled woman who secures her happily ever after. In a cultural context where disabled people are 'continually being written out of the future, rendered as the sign of the future no one wants', these narratives of cure and pseudo-cure may still do productive cultural work (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 46).

My reading of these three novels—as indeed my approach in this book as a whole—shares some of the optimistic, hopeful spirit that romance itself aims to evoke. This is not to deny the 'race, (dis)ability, gender, and sexuality norms that structure the genre',³⁴ or the ways in which romance novels often foreclose certain kinds of future: in romance, 'happily ever after tends to come only under certain terms and conditions' (Schalk, 'Happily Ever After for Whom?' 1256–57, 1256). Such concerns may be militated, but are not erased, by acknowledging the complexity of readers' engagements with texts and the ways in which even the most normative texts may be queered (or crippled) by readers. I suggest, however, that my optimism is justified. The future, in romance, may be 'deployed in the service' of compulsory able-bodiedness, compulsory able-mindedness, and other restrictive ideologies (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 27). However, romance also offers readers the possibility of an intimate affective engagement with hopeful futures in which disabled people live happily ever after.

34 Romances which diverge from the traditional focus on a cisgender heterosexual couple are often deeply homonormative.

As Kafer writes, ‘How one imagines disability in the present determines how one imagines disability in the future’ (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 2). The bleak imagined futures associated with disability are the product of negative assumptions about disability that are pervasive in contemporary culture. However, the relationship between imagined futures and contemporary attitudes is two-way rather than unidirectional: to imagine disability futures differently can result in a shift in how disability is imagined or conceptualised in the present. Romances where disabled protagonists secure a HEA matter because in order for the reader to secure the desired affective experience the reader *must* imagine a joyful future for the disabled protagonist(s); imagining a different kind of future for disability is an affective necessity. By encouraging readers to imagine disability futures in affective opposition to the ‘grim imagined futures’ usually evoked by disability (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 2), such texts produce a misfit between naturalised feelings about disability and the way the text requires the reader to feel for its affects to be secured. The resulting discomfort can be resolved or eased in multiple ways, but one of them is through a shift in the way the reader thinks (and feels) about disability—a shift that may affect behaviours and feelings in all kinds of disability encounter.

Affective Imaginings and Reflexive Representations: Mary Balogh’s ‘Simply’ Quartet

The final section of this chapter examines in more detail the ways in which romance novels encourage a felt engagement with disability experiences and encounters, and how this might create a reflexive engagement with disability. Even more than fantasy, romance novels aim to generate the deep immersion of enchantment, and enchantment in romance is particularly bound up with affective engagement, a process of feeling with and for the protagonists. More broadly, romances constantly foreground feelings: how the characters feel is a primary focus of the romance text. The genre is therefore ideally positioned to explore the feelings involved in interpersonal disability encounters, including how these encounters might be transformed by the revelation or recognition of disability and its affective consequences. Like the other genres discussed in this book and indeed mainstream literature, romance can highlight prejudice and its affects, but romance has an extraordinary capacity to make prejudice *felt*, endowing it with an affective impact. The final part of this chapter examines the affects evoked in and by Mary Balogh’s ‘Simply’ quartet

of historical romances (2005–08) and the interconnected ‘Slightly’ series (2003–04), focusing on *Simply Love* (2006).³⁵ Balogh’s works frequently present disabled characters as actual or potential romantic actants, encouraging readers to reflect upon dominant assumptions about disability. I examine how *Simply Love* and other novels encourage the reader to develop a reflexive engagement with disability, which includes the creation of moments of recognition and a mobilisation of meta-affect.

As explored in Chapter 4, representations of disability may encourage readerly reflection by explicitly calling into question existing conceptualisations or metanarratives of disability. In Balogh’s works characters frequently reflect upon their own or others’ understanding of disability, as when the heroine of *Simply Love* thinks of the cognitively disabled Prudence Moore as ‘a child who was not normal according to the definition of normality that society had concocted’ (32). Claudia, the heroine of *Simply Perfect* (2008), notes that definitions of normality are socially constructed, commenting that ‘all girls are different from the norm [...] the norm does not exist except in the minds of those who like tidy statistics’ (114). Nondisabled people admit the limitations of their understanding of disability. Prudence’s cousin Joshua acknowledges that in viewing those with ‘physical and mental abilities different from the norm’ he and other nondisabled people view them from a ‘limited perspective’ (*Slightly Scandalous* 256). Rather than the disabled person, it is the nondisabled perceiver who is positioned as limited and lacking.

Such comments invite reflection by suggesting ways of perceiving disability that diverge from dominant perspectives. In particular, the depiction of Prudence challenges the framing of disabled people always in terms of loss and lack. Prudence first appears in *Slightly Scandalous* (2003), where she initially takes on a yardstick role. However, after that function is performed she remains one of the major secondary characters and by the end of the novel she has married the man with whom she is in love. *Simply Love* offers an update on Prudence’s story: she has two sons, and the heroine envies her happiness. Two books later, in *Simply Perfect*, another character summarises Prudence’s story: she ‘married a fisherman and bore him sturdy sons and runs his home and is as happy as it is possible to be’ (329–30). Although Prudence’s story remains at the level of sub-plot, she—unlike Quinn’s Mary Winthrop—is not an impediment to the HEA but actually secures it.

35 For a more extensive discussion of Balogh’s work, see my article ‘Disability Studies Reads the Romance’.

Balogh's works also draw attention to disability-related prejudice. In *Simply Perfect*, one of the secondary characters is the hero's eleven-year-old daughter Lizzie, who is blind. Her father Joseph is searching for a way to educate and care for her after the death of her mother, and suspects that the boarding school run by heroine Claudia may offer the solution. Claudia proposes a trial where Lizzie will join a group of charity pupils—girls from impoverished backgrounds who attend the school without paying fees—whom she is taking to the house of an acquaintance for the summer. The scheme allows Joseph, who is visiting family nearby, to remain in contact with his daughter, although it requires the pretence that they are unrelated (Lizzie is illegitimate and his extended family is unaware of her existence).

The scheme proceeds, but, although most characters accept Lizzie, one person's attitude stands out in sharp contrast: Portia Hunt, the bride selected for Joseph by his parents, and to whom he becomes engaged. When Joseph, Portia, and others see Lizzie dancing with the other girls, Portia is the only one to comment negatively: 'Is that the *blind* girl I have heard about? [...] She is spoiling the dance for the others. And she is making a spectacle of herself, poor girl' (211). Portia also comments within Lizzie's hearing that Lizzie is a clumsy dancer (224). Yet another character describes the same scene as a 'delight', commenting approvingly that the 'little blind girl was quite undaunted by her affliction' (222). Portia's hostility to Lizzie is partly based upon her (assumed) class background, but also specifically relates to her impairment. After Claudia and her pupils attend a local event to which they have been invited, Portia comments that it is disrespectful 'to have brought *charity* pupils to mingle with such a gathering', while 'a *blind* charity girl is the outside of enough' (251). Portia's attitude is in marked contrast to those of the other members of the aristocratic group (which includes the heroes and heroines of other novels in the series), who are universally accepting of Lizzie. One comments that Lizzie 'is a delightful child' who has become 'something of a favourite' (232, 223). After Lizzie's true identity is revealed, the same group is surprisingly, and perhaps implausibly, sanguine, as 'Everyone had fallen for her anyway' (257). The secret out, Joseph seizes the chance to have Lizzie live with him, but Portia rejects the idea absolutely, referring to Lizzie as 'that dreadful creature' and 'that dreadful blind child', and saying she will marry him only if she never sees Lizzie or hears her name again (263, 280). Their broken engagement clears the way for Joseph and Claudia to be united.

Lizzie functions as a yardstick character in *Simply Perfect*. The only characters who respond to her less than positively are those

who function as barriers to the union of Claudia and Joseph, and the reader is repeatedly invited to judge characters based on their reaction to Lizzie.³⁶ In Balogh's novel the disabled character serves the romance narrative both in her role as yardstick and as justification for bringing the hero and heroine together across class boundaries. Yet the romance narrative also serves to challenge disablist prejudice: Portia, who rejects a future to which disability adheres, is decisively situated as an *undesirable* partner. Lizzie acts as a measure by which Portia can be assessed and evaluated, but the novel also conveys that Portia's attitudes towards disability are unacceptable. It is clear that Lizzie's father believes that it is possible for her to have a desirable future in a loving relationship; his concern is with finding 'a husband who will be kind to her', rather than about whether she will marry (*Simply Perfect* 117). The novels in Balogh's series encourage a reflexive engagement with disability through their depiction of disabled characters as actual or potential romantic actants, their problematisation of what disability means, and their positioning of disability-related prejudice as unacceptable.

Romance's potential for encouraging reflection on disability is bound up with the powerful affective engagement encouraged by romance texts. Stephanie Moody writes that, as well as foregrounding romantic relationships, romances 'position readers to experience those relationships intimately' (105). The success of a romance novel depends on a text's ability to encourage readers to immerse themselves in the affective worlds of the protagonists. For Kamblé, one of the key pleasures of reading a romance novel is 'sentiophilia', the 'pleasure in thinking and feeling another's thoughts and feelings' (10). While these affective engagements might be analysed in terms of reader identification,³⁷ Feagin's notion of *affective imaginings* is helpful in investigating the ways in which romance novels catalyse affective connections. One of the forms that affective engagement with literature may take, affective

36 It is worth noting that this is not the entirety of Lizzie's role in the novel; considerable attention is given to her character development, and one section of the novel is told from her viewpoint.

37 Felski writes that identification as used in literary studies is 'a term that is notoriously imprecise and elastic, blurring together distinct, even disparate, phenomena' (34). In particular, Felski distinguishes between *alignment* and *allegiance*: a reader may be aligned with a particular character through techniques such as focalisation, but alignment does not generate or require a 'felt sense of affinity or attachment' (34). See also Warhol 45–46 for a problematisation of identification in the context of an affectively attuned interpretive method.

imaginings involve ‘not merely imagining *that* someone feels anguish or distress, but imagining (what’s it like to have?) the anguish or distress’ (Feagin 8). In romance, readers feel with the protagonists, imagining their feelings of hope, despair, and joy as obstacles to their union are encountered and overcome. Affective imaginings are linked to immersion in the text in a feedback loop that makes causality difficult to determine: affective imaginings depend upon the reader feeling a sense of allegiance to the protagonists—defined by Felski as a ‘felt sense of affinity or attachment’ (34)—but affective imaginings also generate and enhance that allegiance.

Balogh’s *Simply Love* mobilises affective imaginings as cause and effect of a deep emotional involvement with the protagonists. In so doing, it highlights the feelings involved in disability encounters and the ways in which the revelation or recognition of disability can disrupt the norms of both interpersonal encounters and the romance genre. In *Simply Love* the reader is introduced to the hero and heroine separately. Schoolteacher Anne reluctantly agrees to spend the summer at the home of an aristocratic family; Sydnam is the steward of the estate where the party takes place. The depiction of their first meeting both encourages and rewards a deep affective engagement with the characters. As Anne walks on a clifftop path, her feelings are described in vivid and evocative detail: her nostalgia for her former home in Cornwall, her fear that she will be shunned because she is an unmarried mother, and her need to escape from a house in which she feels an interloper. Spotting an unknown man ahead of her, Anne is ‘transfixed’ by the beauty of his profile and, as she approaches him, begins to weave ‘romantic fantasies’ in her mind (29, 30).

The scene is thus set for a meet cute, but when Sydnam becomes aware of her presence, and turns to face her, Anne is ‘transfixed’ again, the mood of romance and desire suddenly shattered:

it was the right side of his face that caused the horror [...] He was a man with half a face, the extraordinarily beautiful left side all the more grotesque because there was no right side to balance it. He was beauty and beast all rolled into one. And all of a sudden his height and those powerful thighs and broad shoulders seemed menacing rather than enticing. (30)

The revelation of disability triggers an abrupt affective shift, with ‘beauty’ and ‘peaceful solitude’ suddenly replaced with a sense of ‘danger and the threat of an unknown evil’ (31). Seeing the man take a step towards her, Anne is overwhelmed by panic, and runs away.

This initial meeting between Anne and Sydnam is the antithesis of a typical meet cute. As soon as her panic subsides, Anne realises what she has done, and is deeply ashamed. She returns to the spot, hoping to find the man and apologise, but he has gone. The novel makes no attempt to justify Anne's actions, clearly positioning them as unacceptable, and emphasising her feelings of mortification: 'How *could* she have done it? How could she?' (33). Nussbaum argues that to read as an 'immersed participant' is necessarily to make connections and comparisons between the social world depicted in the text and one's own social context (8). Balogh's novel invites readers to consider how they might have reacted in Anne's place, encouraging them to reflect on the emotions they feel or have felt in disability encounters.

After Anne runs away, the narrative focalisation shifts to Sydnam, and the episode is recounted from his point of view. Like Anne, Sydnam is daydreaming; transported by the beauty of the night, he is at first unaware of Anne's presence. Initially, seeing Anne does not break the spell. For a moment it seems that she is 'a part of the beauty of the evening', and that she has 'walked out of the night into his dreams', and he takes a step towards her (35). Anne's reaction, though, causes a 'crash back into awareness': 'he had seen the horror in her eyes. And then she had turned and fled in panic' (34, 35). The reader's affective imaginings include not only Anne's experience of the encounter, but Sydnam's. When Anne runs away, Sydnam's romantic daydreams are shattered:

He gazed after her and was again Sydnam Butler, grotesquely ugly, with his right eye gone and the purple scars of the old burns down the side of his face [...] Sydnam Butler [...] for whom no woman would ever walk beautiful out of the night. (35)

Despite having 'left self-pity behind long ago', Sydnam knows that 'it would take him days to recover his equilibrium' (36). Balogh does not just depict, but encourages the reader to feel, the pain Anne's reaction causes.

In *Simply Love*, the affective involvement generated by narrative techniques and genre expectations encourages a felt engagement with both the causes and effects of disability feelings. The novel repeatedly returns to the emotional and sensational responses disability generates and explores how those responses might shape interpersonal encounters. When Anne and Sydnam are formally introduced Anne apologises for her behaviour and the two agree to start afresh, but their interactions remain strained. Finding it 'difficult to look at him

as if he was any normal man', Anne has to make a conscious effort to look at both sides of Sydnam's face (57). The consequences of Anne's efforts are emphasised:

She was looking directly into his face. Most people, he had observed, either did not look quite at him or else focused their eyes on his left ear or his left shoulder. With most people he felt the urge to turn his head slightly to the side so that they would not have to be repulsed quite so badly. He did not feel that urge with her. (68)

As well as highlighting the burden of emotional labour placed on disabled people in social interactions, then, the novel highlights how small changes in the behaviours of nondisabled people might reduce or remove that burden.

The initial meeting between Anne and Sydnam is a scene of simultaneous recognition and misrecognition: Anne misrecognises a 'maimed man' as a 'monster', while Sydnam recognises Anne's response as motivated by fear and horror—a reaction he has encountered many times before (32, 33). This affectively intense scene generates a further type of recognition for the reader. For Felski, *recognition* involves moments when the reader is 'arrested': 'a flash of connection leaps across the gap between text and reader; an affinity or an attunement is brought to light' (23). The reader feels 'addressed, summoned, called to account' (Felski 23). Such moments of recognition can have powerful and transformative effects for the reader's self-conception: in them, a 'fictional persona' can serve as 'a prism that refracts a revised or altered understanding of a reader's sense of who she is' (Felski 35).³⁸

Moments of recognition may deepen the reader's immersion in the text, but they can also result in 'a clarifying self-scrutiny', a process which may be 'discomfiting, even unpleasant, requiring a reckoning with one's own less appealing motivations and desires' (Felski 47). By engendering moments of recognition, *Simply Love* generates such a 'clarifying self-scrutiny'. Anne is the reader's affective (and reflective) guide, the reader feeling with and for her as her example encourages a critical reflection upon feelings and behaviours in disability encounters. Balogh's novel denaturalises naturalised responses to disability,

38 While the notion of recognition used in political theory involves affirmation in the sense of having one's differences 'seen as desirable and worthy', literary recognition is not necessarily affirmative in this sense, nor does it rely on similarities between reader and character (Felski 47).

making the reader feel the effects of negative reactions. By having the reader feel the encounter with both Anne and Sydnam, the novel ‘sets into motion an interplay of self-knowledge and acknowledgement, an affiliation that is accompanied by a powerful cognitive readjustment’ (Felski 35).

This process of cognitive readjustment is also encouraged by a mobilisation of not just affect but meta-affect. In the aftermath of the first meeting between Anne and Sydnam it is not only Anne’s instinctive emotional response that is foregrounded but how she feels about it. Several pages are devoted to Anne’s self-recrimination—‘How *could* she have done it? How could she?’—and her feelings of shame and mortification (33). After the encounter ‘She could not get the maimed man out of her head [...] She kept waking and thinking of him’ (33). *Simply Love* explores the role of disability feelings in shaping interpersonal encounters, but it goes beyond this to explore the role of meta-feeling in its focus on how Anne feels about her affective response to disability. Anne’s awareness that her response was unacceptable, her determination to make amends, and the new feelings she develops for Sydnam as she falls in love with him position the affective responses disability generates as not only contingent but as subject to change over time. Importantly, it also positions those responses as changeable by conscious effort. Seemingly instinctive affective reflexes are reframed as responses that might be managed, change, or be changed. In Balogh’s novel the shift from disability feelings to meta-feelings encourages self-consciousness about disability feelings, the reader invited not just to reflect on their feelings and actions in disability encounters but also to evaluate those feelings.

Conclusion: Feeling Disability

Romance’s disability narratives can encourage readers to think and feel differently about disability in a number of ways. Romances present readers with narratives of disability not commonly found elsewhere: stories where disability is situated as part of, rather than antithetical to, a joyous life of sexual fulfilment, romantic adoration, and lasting happiness. To change the present, we need to ‘imagine disability and disability futures otherwise’ (Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 34). Romances where disabled protagonists live happily ever after situate disability as part of a desirable future. Critical work such as Kafer’s *Feminist, Queer, Crip* imagines ‘futures and futurity otherwise’, but romance novels, too, are a space in which readers are encouraged—even required—to

imagine disability futures that differ radically from dominant narratives of disability (27).

Romance readers read in search of deep feeling; they hope to be moved by a text, to feel with and for the protagonists. Roach, for example, writes of her desire for books to make her 'cry' and 'sigh', and the measures she takes to prevent 'anything loosen[ing] the book's emotional grip' (5). Romance readers search for both the deep immersion of enchantment and the flashes of recognition that entail intense affective connection—and which may also offer the chance to perceive one's own feelings and assumptions in new ways. The key to romance's potentials with regard to disability representation is the felt engagement with disability (and disability feelings) that the genre enables.

In one of the first critical works on disability in genre fiction, Irving K. Zola highlights the way in which crime fiction ignores or minimises social and structural barriers. He calls for the protagonists of such works to 'go public', to draw attention to those barriers by explicitly locating the problem in the environment or social encounter, rather than the disabled bodymind (246). Romance is ideally suited to raising awareness of the ways in which disability disrupts interpersonal encounters and it can effectively highlight both prejudice and its causes and effects. However, as Balogh's *Simply Love* illustrates, romance can do more than simply draw prejudice to the reader's attention: romance can make prejudice *felt*. Romance's key potential with regard to disability representation comes not just from the ways it encourages 'knowing afresh' by generating moments of recognition (Felski 48) but from the ways it encourages disability to be *felt* afresh in ways that can destabilise habitual feelings and responses. Such moments are profoundly transformative: 'Indisputably, something has changed; my perspective has shifted; I see something that I did not see before' (Felski 23). Romance mobilises disability and disability feelings to enhance its affects, but the genre also engages readers affectively with disability in ways that can have a transformative effect on readers' feelings. If disability studies 'works to imagine the world otherwise', romance novels can create a world in which disability might be *felt* anew (Kafer, 'Un/Safe Disclosures', 9).

Conclusion: Reading and Feeling

Literary disability studies and genre fiction studies are both expanding fields at the cutting edge of literary research, but they are fields which have often operated in isolation from one another. In bringing them together, this book explores issues that are important not just for academics in literary studies and disability studies but for disabled people, their allies, and genre communities (which include the readers, writers, publishers, editors, and reviewers of genre fiction). This book aims to complement and stimulate, rather than supplant, ongoing conversations about disability representation taking place in genre-focused and disability-focused venues outside academia, in reviews, blogs, forums, and discussion groups, and at conventions, writers' groups, and book clubs.¹ For academic readers, it crosses boundaries (disciplinary, generic, methodological) to contribute to dialogues in literary studies, disability studies, medical humanities, and popular culture studies.

Examining the affects at play in genre fiction's representations of disability and the disability encounters mediated by genre texts allows for a deeper understanding of genre reading and of disability's affects within (and beyond) literary texts. It reminds us that disability affects are complex and context-specific and that the use of disability to

1 As such, I have aimed to make this book as accessible as possible to readers who are not part of the academic system. As Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc write, accessibility 'does not mean eliminating complexity or abandoning difficult ideas'; rather, it means 'taking responsibility for knowing what your reader will need to know in order to understand your writing', for example by 'defining buzzwords or footnoting background', and striving for clarity (12).

produce affects coded as negative need not produce correspondingly negative feelings about disability or disabled people. Siebers writes that 'aesthetic feelings of pleasure and disgust are difficult to separate from political feelings of acceptance and rejection' (*Disability Aesthetics* 2). However, the readings in the preceding chapters demonstrate that genre texts that use disability to create 'negative' affects such as fear or anxiety may in fact have productive *effects* in the struggle against oppression.

This book has repositioned genre reading as a form of affective practice, arguing that genre fiction's combination of affectivity and reflexivity facilitates the creation of reflexive representations of disability by, among other things, making perceptible naturalised habits of representation and interpretation. Reflexive representations encourage the reader to think or feel disability anew, challenging, destabilising, or denaturalising assumptions about disability or disabled people. As Titchkosky writes, 'Reflecting on, and thus re-engaging, the place of existing meanings makes possible something other than the repetition of more of the same' (16). Reflexive representations are always affective. They may arise specifically from affective misfits, where the way disability is depicted in a text makes the reader feel in ways that are unexpected or incongruent, either in the context of that particular genre or within a disablist society. For example, Deaver's *The Bone Collector* uses disability to make the reader feel conflicted about the desire for closure and resolution that drives crime reading. Romance novels that show disabled characters achieving a happily-ever-after ending associate disability with feelings of joy, desire, and optimism—emotions rarely linked with disability outside this context.

Secondly, reflexive representations may produce discomfort or surprise by depicting disability in ways that deviate from or conflict with disability tropes or icons conventional to a particular genre. King's *Duma Key*, for example, rejects disability as the locus of horror, while Dodd's *Candle in the Window* undercuts the idea that the blind heroine's sense of unworthiness is the primary barrier to the union of the protagonists. These misfits are productive precisely because they are discomforting; they make the reader feel in a way they did not expect to feel. In both cases, the affects produced by the misfit encourage the reader to attempt to resolve or diminish their discomfort by shifting their expectations about disability, about genre, or both.

A third type of text enables reflexive representations by generating uncertainty about disability, a productive wondering that encourages the reader to question existing assumptions and beliefs. In Bujold's *Mirror Dance* the reconceptualisation of cognitive exceptionality as

mental illness, and of insanity as triumph, functions in precisely this manner. Texts that produce affective uncertainty, conflict, or confusion may also destabilise assumptions about disability, calling what the reader knows or feels into question—as in Watts’s ‘Rifters’ trilogy, or the conclusion of Harris’s *Hannibal*. As Ngai notes, affective disorientation itself produces a further ‘dysphoric affect’, the feeling of insecurity and confusion that comes from being ‘lost on one’s own “cognitive map” of available affects’ (14). Such texts therefore generate not just affect but meta-affect: feelings *about* (disability) feelings.

As Titchkosky writes, ‘Processes of inclusion, and thus, access, can arise only insofar as exclusion has already become an issue and is already perceivable’ (ix). The final type of reflexive representation works to make ‘natural’ feelings and assumptions about disability perceivable by foregrounding or denaturalising them. Balogh’s romance novels, for example, feature characters who discuss and debate how they understand disability. *Simply Love* engages the reader affectively with the causes and effects of prejudice in ways that encourage the reader to reflect on their own behaviours in disability encounters. Such texts encourage readers to be aware of their affective responses to disability and their possible consequences. In so doing, they encourage an evaluative engagement with those affective responses, mobilising meta-affect. In *Simply Love*, the shame Anne feels about her response to disability, and her ongoing reflection upon those feelings, invite the reader to engage in a process of self-scrutiny, judging or evaluating their own affective responses to disability—with the potential to create discomfiting meta-affects that might trigger behavioural and/or attitudinal change. Warhol writes that we ‘can make choices about metaemotion’, but suggests that we may not be able to change or control emotional responses (57). In contrast, I suggest that it is precisely through meta-feelings or meta-emotions that naturalised disability feelings might be challenged or changed. By working with and upon feelings, generating affects and meta-affects, reflexive representations can destabilise sedimented responses to disability and encourage readers to develop new habits of affective response.

Genre Reading as Affective Practice

Reflexive representations of all kinds are enabled by the reader’s felt engagement with the text, their desire to be moved and to experience anticipated genre affects. As Stephanie Moody writes, romance readers ‘are not resistant but, rather, open to the influence of romance novels’

(106). The same is true for the other genres examined in this book. Genre reading, as affective practice, always involves reading with a degree of openness. To read for enchantment, for horror, or for joy is to read with lowered defences since, to secure the desired affective experience, the reader must be willing to have their feelings worked upon.² At the same time, genre texts strive to generate emotional involvement, resisting attempts to read distantly or dispassionately. This is not to suggest that readers are always deeply affected by the genre texts they read, or that readers' affective responses are identical. Rather, the ways readers approach genre fiction and the ways genre texts are constructed work together to encourage an affective engagement.

In her theory of literary appreciation, Feagin writes that part of appreciating a literary text is 'getting the value out of it' (2). In the context of genre fiction, this means being moved or engaged affectively. However, appreciation also involves recognising the 'properties, aesthetic qualities, or artistic values' of a text, as well as the features of the text that endow it with those qualities or values (2). Appreciation involves 'interacting with a work [...] not simply reacting to it' (11). Feagin's conceptualisation of appreciation provides a useful model for genre reading: genre readers do not simply react emotionally to fictional texts but interact with them, recognising their qualities and values, with awareness of favoured tropes and conventions. Though genre reading practices are very different to the suspicious or detached stance that typically characterises academic engagement with literature, this does not mean that genre readers read naively or uncritically, or that their openness to affective experience positions them as passive receivers of ideology. As Kelly Faircloth writes about romance reading, it is 'perfectly possible to roll your eyes at yet another hero with jet [*sic*], an island and an overinflated sense of his own authority; arch your brow at the fucked-up gender politics of a particular scene; cheer when the heroine reads the hero the riot act; and swoon at the emotional climax'. To be engaged affectively, to be moved by a text, does not preclude but can actually encourage critical reflection. The notion of reflexive representations developed in this book is one specific example of how affective engagement may spur critical engagement, but the idea that affective response may encourage critical or analytical response holds more broadly.

2 Klein makes the broader but related point that the widespread exposure readers have to detective fiction means that 'these novels are considered familiar, accessible, and unthreatening by readers who might be resistant to other texts' (2).

In 1949 William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley warned against the *affective fallacy*, under which critics focus on the ‘psychological effects’ of literary works and/or value texts on the basis of the ‘degree of feeling’ they evoke in their readers (1246, 1251). For Wimsatt, Jr. and Beardsley, readers’ reports of what or how intensely a text makes them feel are irrelevant to the business of literary criticism, as is the individual critic’s affective response. To contemplate the emotions invoked by a literary text leads only to an ‘impressionism and relativism’ antithetical to the objectivity to which New Criticism aspired (1246). In positioning genre reading as affective practice, I assert that in the context of genre fiction there can be no affective fallacy. Readers go to genre fiction because they desire particular affective experiences, and they value genre texts on the basis of the degree (and type) of feeling they evoke.

I invoke Wimsatt, Jr. and Beardsley’s work not just as a straw man but to highlight the extent to which, despite the affective turn, similar beliefs about the incompatibility of affective engagement and critical work still influence critical approaches in literary and cultural studies. Felski writes that the ‘default position of contemporary criticism is best described as one of “standing back”’, while academics are told ‘that our affective relations to popular texts must be cast aside so we may more fully understand how “they work on us”’ (Felski 57; Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 7). For Wimsatt, Jr. and Beardsley, to fall into the affective fallacy is to make the mistake of confusing what a text *is* with ‘what it *does*’—in other words, how it makes the reader feel (1246). They oppose ‘affective’ and ‘cognitive’ criticism, and ‘emotive’ and ‘referential’ meaning (1247). But what a text is, what it does, and how it makes the reader feel are inextricably interconnected. Reading ‘fuses cognitive and affective impulses’, and ‘all meaning-making is affective’ (Felski 132; Wetherell 96). What we know cannot be divorced from what we feel.

It is therefore not only possible but desirable to be a feeling scholar as well as a feeling reader, and this is particularly the case when engaging with popular texts. Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc write of the need to ‘embrace our immediate engagement with popular culture’ as both a source of knowledge and a ‘motivating force’ for scholarly work (7). The felt aspects of textual engagement cannot simply be ignored, however uncomfortable exploring them might be.³ Examining how texts evoke affects such as enchantment, anxiety, wonder, fear,

3 Ngai notes ‘the perceived threat of a “soft” impressionism which has always haunted feeling’s role in any analytic endeavor’ (42).

or joy enables a deeper understanding of how texts relate ‘outward to the world as well as inward to the self’ (Felski 132). In particular, an affective approach is essential to understanding not only the workings of genre fiction but genre fiction’s potentials with regard to disability representation: the productive ways in which genre texts might work upon the world via the creation of reflexive representations.

In asserting that the reflexive representations of disability found in genre fiction may help shift feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about disability, I do not intend to position genre fiction as a simple prescription for either individual or structural disablism: *read Book X, and your prejudices will disappear!* Texts work on readers’ feelings about disability in complex and cumulative ways,⁴ and how individual readers will respond to specific representations is often unpredictable.⁵ Assumptions and beliefs are ‘inevitably influenced’ by representational disability encounters, but they are also shaped by other types of disability encounter in everyday life (Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 42). As Nussbaum writes, ‘The literary imagination has to contend against the deep prejudices of many human beings and institutions and will not always prevail’ (xvii). While this book’s primary focus is on the ways in which genre fiction’s representations of disability can contend against disablism, Chapters 2 and 5, in particular, also explore the ways in which the representational habits of genre fiction may shore up or encourage disabling attitudes (for example, through the creation of unreflexive representations of disability). The combination of affective and reflexive engagement characteristic of genre reading has important potentials to work upon attitudes and feelings about disability, but the results can be problematic as well as productive.

Valuing Genre(s)

In the context of genre scholarship, this book is unusual in bringing together multiple popular genres and in valuing those genres equally. Genre studies is dominated by single-genre studies, and even those works which stake a claim to a wider territory tend to be heavily weighted towards a few favoured genres, giving short shrift to others.⁶

4 As Cawelti writes, ‘Our artistic experiences over a period of time work on the structure of our imaginations and feelings and therefore have long-term effects on the way in which we understand and respond to reality’ (24).

5 See Elman 27.

6 For example, Cawelti’s foundational *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* gives only

The decision to examine horror, crime, science fiction, fantasy, and romance together, and the refusal to privilege any particular genre, is partly motivated by my frustration with existing critical work. Genre scholarship has often tended towards hyperbole in its efforts to position a favoured genre or genres as particularly significant or valuable.⁷ It has also frequently devalued other genres—usually implicitly but sometimes explicitly—in an attempt to secure legitimation through differentiation. These critical habits shore up genre prejudice and result in a body of scholarly work that, in its focus on what makes individual genres distinctive, often loses sight of (or is simply uninterested in) what they share. Although there is greater traffic between work on the fantastic genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, genre scholarship is highly segregated: romance scholars tend to be unfamiliar with work on science fiction, scholars of horror unacquainted with work on crime, and so on. Bringing together the five genres examined in this book, then, enables a generative juxtaposition not only of fictional works but of insights from different critical traditions.

Exploring disability's affective contribution to texts in multiple genres, then, has a number of productive consequences. It makes clear the extent to which affective responses to disability are shaped by genre context, establishing genre as a crucial factor in the production and reception of representations of disability.⁸ Siebers writes of the 'corporeal substrata on which aesthetic effects are based': the 'senses revolt against some bodies, while other bodies please them' (*Disability Aesthetics* 1). Yet an approach which encompasses multiple genres reveals that the same corporeal form might produce quite

the most glancing attention to romance and almost completely ignores science fiction and fantasy. Cranny-Francis's *Feminist Fiction* discusses feminist appropriations of science fiction, fantasy (including horror), utopia, detective fiction, and romance, but the discussion of romance is notably thinner than the consideration of the other genres. Roberts's *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction*, which offers important insights into several types of genre fiction, mentions romance scholarship but does not reference a single romance novel. Wolfe's *Evaporating Genres* (2011) offers insights that can be applied to genre fiction more broadly, but focuses on science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

7 For example, Badley writes that horror in the 1980s became 'more than one of the popular genres or even a genre' (xii), while Priestman claims that 'the crime story has some claim to have driven the main structural transformations of narrative for (at least) the last half-century' (6).

8 As Barker notes, 'narrative disability theories' tend 'to universalize their assumptions: regardless of genre, period and context of production, or political orientation, literature is understood to follow prescribed patterns of disability representation' (21–22). See also Wilde 55.

different affects depending on the genre in which it is embedded. The 'horribly maimed' man might be the worthy hero of romance, as in Balogh's *Simply Love*, or the fearful monster of horror (32). The feelings and meanings associated with particular bodyminds are profoundly influenced by genre context. Genre is thus a vitally important factor in disability representation, shaping how authors depict disabled bodyminds, how they are interpreted, and the feelings they are likely to evoke.

Examining the representational habits of genre fiction generates insights that reverberate beyond genre fiction. Even leaving aside the very large number of texts that, while not marketed or labelled as genre fiction, enter into some sort of dialogue with genre conventions, representations of disability in genre fiction are a vital part of the larger system of cultural representations. They are shaped by that broader system and shape it in turn. For example, the depiction of disabled victims in the crime and horror genres reflects (and often reinforces) wider cultural perceptions of disabled people as pitiful or as victims. While this type of representation features particularly frequently in these two genres, it appears in many other kinds of narrative, and a better understanding of the affects it generates allows for a deeper understanding of this trope in all kinds of text. Analysis of the representations of disability in genre fiction illuminates representational habits in all kinds of fiction.

The genre-based investigation developed in this book also suggests a productive approach to the affective engagements involved in interpersonal and individual disability encounters, as well as representational ones. Research indicates that responses to disability in interpersonal encounters are contingent; both the type of impairment and the type of encounter affect how comfortable nondisabled individuals are in interacting with disabled people,⁹ and the same is true of disabled people's encounters with disability. As Luke Staniland writes, 'people do not simply have positive or negative attitudes' towards disabled people, and affective responses to disability are different in different kinds of disability encounter (71). Given that 'all forms of knowing are shaped by the constraining and enabling conventions of genre' (Felski 84), one productive avenue of investigation for

9 For example, Staniland found that nondisabled people 'are most comfortable interacting with people with physical or sensory impairments and in social situations', but 'less comfortable interacting with people with learning disabilities or mental health conditions and in situations where disabled people are in positions of responsibility' (71).

disability studies is to explore different genres of disability encounter.¹⁰ The field might consider how affective responses to disability are shaped by the restrictions and possibilities inherent in particular types of encounter, the genre norms and expectations at work, and how they might be shifted or subverted. Examining the expectations, assumptions, and affects involved in different kinds of disability encounter, and the catalysts for generic transformation, can deepen our understanding of disability as it is constructed and experienced in the social world.

Evaluative Approaches and Methodological Imperatives

Approaching popular genres in terms of characteristic affects or affective trajectories allows for a better understanding of the workings of genre and the appeal of genre texts. This book has teased out some of the ways in which disability affects function in genre texts, and how disability is framed to elicit particular emotional and sensational responses. Genre reading is always evaluative, with readers considering whether a particular text or trope produces the anticipated affective experience, and whether depictions of disability enhance or disrupt anticipated affects. The approach to disability representations in this book is likewise evaluative. Although the intersection of disability and genre is explored in a range of texts, including some which discourage a reflexive engagement with disability, I privilege texts which offer reflexive representations both implicitly (by allotting them greater space) and explicitly. I value these texts because I view them as contributing to the struggle against disablism by encouraging affective and attitudinal change.

This unapologetically evaluative approach is unusual in contemporary cultural disability studies, as a result of a range of factors in the field's critical history. The role of evaluative criticism has been a contested point in cultural disability studies for as long as the field has existed. Literary disability studies, and the larger field of cultural disability studies, emerged as a distinct field in the late 1990s, coalescing around three major monographs: Davis's *Enforcing Normalcy* (1995), Garland-Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), and Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis* (2000).¹¹ Literary disability studies derives

10 See Carpenter for an argument for viewing disability itself as a genre.

11 Garland-Thomson and Mitchell and Snyder had previously edited important

from at least two academic traditions: a tradition of analysing disability within literary studies and a cultural or representational strand within disability studies. The examination of cultural representations of disability began to emerge as a distinct strand of disability studies in the late 1970s.¹² Building on a tradition of identifying and critiquing disability representation that had begun with disabled activists, these works analysed disability representation in particular forms of cultural production, with the goal of understanding how those representations might contribute to a disabling society or to challenging disablism. Representations were understood as a barometer of cultural attitudes and academics took an explicitly evaluative approach, identifying positive—or, more frequently, negative—images of disability. Although scholars sometimes acknowledged that there might be problems in classifying images, or that images might be positive in some aspects but negative in others, the fundamental impulses were to classify and to evaluate. Positive representations were those which were understood as contributing something to the struggle against disablism, while negative representations of disability were those that were likely to contribute to the further oppression of disabled people. This strand of cultural criticism within disability studies effectively collapsed the distinction between representations and their effects.

Literary disability studies is also heir to a strand within literary studies focusing on disability in literature, though not from a disability studies perspective. It is this tradition that Garland-Thomson refers to when she writes that ‘when literary critics look at disabled characters, they often interpret them metaphorically or aesthetically, reading them without political awareness’ (*Extraordinary Bodies* 9–10).¹³ Though some of this work has since been appropriated or reclaimed by cultural disability studies researchers, in general scholars in this tradition were interested in disability only insofar as it would illuminate the particular author, text, or genre under consideration, and often their analyses or conclusions are problematic from a disability studies perspective.

The literary studies strand examined disability to better understand literature, while the cultural strand of disability studies examined texts to better understand disability. As such, these two

volumes on disability and representation but their monographs had the more significant impact.

12 See, for example, Longmore’s early work on film, Gartner and Joe, Zola, Barnes, and Hevey.

13 Texts in this tradition include Wilson’s *The Wound and the Bow*, Hayes’s *The Limping Hero*, and Puccinelli’s *Yardsticks*.

critical traditions approached and valued texts in fundamentally different ways. However, the field that developed from the work of Davis, Garland-Thomson, and Mitchell and Snyder sought to pursue both of these methodological imperatives.¹⁴ Cultural disability studies embraces the struggle to break down disabling barriers, examining the role disability plays in texts with the goal of better understanding both the texts themselves and the workings of a disabling society. Thus, works of literary disability studies aim to contribute both to literary studies (by developing new insights into literature and its workings, or into particular texts) and to disability studies (by developing knowledge of disability and its role in culture). This dual imperative is the defining feature of cultural disability studies.

Although their contributions are often overlooked, authors in the cultural strand of disability studies did pioneering work, offering sustained analysis of disability imagery, beginning to map the history of disability representations, and establishing the importance of representational analysis. However, as the field of cultural disability studies developed, scholars developed new paradigms for engaging with representations and insisted on the complexity of the ways in which representations work on both the individual and the social world. In particular, explicitly evaluative approaches came to be identified with the evaluative approach which was previously the most prominent, an approach based in identifying negative or positive images. Influentially critiqued by Mitchell and Snyder in *Narrative Prosthesis*, negative image approaches—and by extension all explicitly evaluative approaches—came to be perceived as naïve, simplistic, and ‘crudely political’ (Alice Hall 4).¹⁵ As a result, the terminology of positive and negative largely disappeared from the field,¹⁶ and scholarship in cultural disability studies became covertly, rather than overtly, evaluative.

As Bérubé writes, ‘who in disability studies—who in any realm of endeavor—would want to pursue an inquiry into the representation of disability in literature that did *not* have implications and possible consequences for the lives of people with disabilities?’ (*The Secret*

14 See Hoeksema and Smit for a discussion of the problems of analysing filmic representations of disability without engagement with film studies. In this piece, published in 2001, the authors call for ‘the fusion of Film Studies and Disability Studies perspectives’ (35).

15 For an example of a critical work which uses a negative-image approach to develop a nuanced and sophisticated engagement with representations, see Hevey.

16 Some negative-image scholarship is still published (see, for example, Yenika-Agbaw), but this type of work is increasingly rare.

Life of Stories 52). Bérubé suggests that such enquiry would be pointless ‘if it were “academic” in the sense of an “academic” question, a moot point, a question that does not matter’ (*The Secret Life of Stories* 52). I would add that such an approach, while certainly not limited to a simplistic model in which representations are slotted in boxes marked ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, must always be somewhat evaluative. To explore the ‘social and political consequences’ of representations inevitably involves an evaluative engagement, whether this is explicitly acknowledged within a piece of scholarship or not (Garland-Thomson, ‘The Politics of Staring’, 75). To explore the sort of cultural work a text might do is to exercise an evaluative judgement. This book has sought to demonstrate how an affect-focused approach might be useful, if not transformative, for representational analysis. However, I suggest that an affective approach and the notion of reflexive representations are also significant because they offer a way forwards for evaluative criticism: a way to engage with texts that is alert to what they are, what they do, and how they do it. An affect-based evaluative approach illustrates that evaluative criticism does not need to be based around narrow dualisms of positive or negative, and that it can embrace complexity, idiosyncrasy, and divergent responses to texts.

In exploring the affective function of disability in genre texts, I am not suggesting that genre fiction should be read as ‘disguised ethics or politics’ (Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, 35). Rather, examining the role of disability in these texts—and in particular its role in the affective experiences they facilitate—enhances understanding of genre fiction, as well as of disability’s affects in both literary and non-literary worlds. The readings in the preceding chapters engage both the politics and the pleasures of genre fiction,¹⁷ and an affect-focused approach reveals the ways in which politics and pleasures are always intertwined in genre fiction. As Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc argue, ‘any viable politics must begin in the spaces people already inhabit’ (22). Through their felt engagements with genre fiction, readers are encouraged to engage reflexively with their own attitudes towards and feelings about disability. Such encounters can shift the affects associated with disability, in ways that may have productive consequences for individual and interpersonal disability encounters as well as representational ones. Disability and genre fiction both make us feel. In order to appreciate how genre fiction’s representations of disability might make us feel disability differently, an affective approach is required.

17 See Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 21.

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Disability in Genre Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography

Books in a series are grouped together in a single entry if they feature disabled characters in the same (or similar) roles.

- Abercrombie, Joe. The First Law trilogy (*The Blade Itself*, 2006; *Before They are Hanged*, 2007; *Last Argument of Kings*, 2008). Fantasy. Central character who is physically impaired and in constant pain after torture, another who is scarred and missing a finger. Numerous secondary and incidental characters who are scarred or disabled.
- Abercrombie, Joe. Shattered Sea trilogy (*Half a King*, 2014; *Half the World*, 2015; *Half a War*, 2015). Fantasy. Yarvi, a central character in all three novels, has a deformed hand. Thorn, the protagonist of *Half the World*, ends up scarred.
- Adair, Cherry. *In Too Deep*. 2002. Romance. Hero has lost an eye.
- Adams, Jennie. *Once Upon a Time in Tarrula*. 2011. Romance. Hero has a limp.
- Albert, Annabeth. *Connection Error*. 2016. Romance, #gamers series. One hero has ADHD, the other is an amputee veteran.
- Aldiss, Brian. *Finches of Mars*. 2013. Science fiction. Humans have colonised Mars but children there are born stillborn or 'malformed'.
- Alexander, Bruce. *Blind Justice*. 1994. Crime, first Sir John Fielding mystery. Features a visually impaired detective.
- Anderson, Catherine. *Phantom Waltz*. 2001. Romance. Heroine is paraplegic, character with intellectual impairment.
- Anderson-Minshall, Diane, and Jacob Anderson-Minshall. *Blind Leap*. 2007. Crime, Blind Eye series. Features disabled detectives including a visually impaired character and a wheelchair user.
- Baker, Fran. *Seeing Stars*. 1986. Romance. Hero is visually impaired and has some facial scarring.
- Balogh, Mary. *Red Rose*. 1986. Romance. Heroine has a limp.
- Balogh, Mary. *The Devil's Web*. 1990. Romance, Web trilogy. War-wounded Allan Penworth reappears as a minor character, largely recovered from his injuries and with an artificial leg.
- Balogh, Mary. *Web of Love*. 1990. Romance, Web trilogy. Secondary character Allan Penworth lost an eye and his leg from war wounds.

- Balogh, Mary. *The Secret Pearl*. 1991. Romance, historical. Hero is scarred by war; hero's wife is consumptive.
- Balogh, Mary. *Dancing With Clara*. 1994. Romance. Heroine is 'crippled' after a childhood illness, but is recovering by the end of the novel.
- Balogh, Mary. *Lord Carew's Bride*. 1995. Romance. Hero has a limp and a 'twisted' hand after a childhood accident.
- Balogh, Mary. *Silent Melody*. 1997. Romance. Heroine is deaf and assumed to be mute; speaks her wedding vows at the end of the novel.
- Balogh, Mary. *One Night for Love*. 1999. Romance. Hero and heroine are both physically scarred by war.
- Balogh, Mary. *Slightly Married*. 2003. Romance, first in Slightly series. Characters with physical and cognitive impairments appear in secondary roles.
- Balogh, Mary. *Slightly Scandalous*. 2003. Romance, Slightly series. Secondary character with a cognitive impairment.
- Balogh, Mary. *Slightly Sinful*. 2004. Romance, Slightly series. Hero has amnesia for much of the novel; one secondary character has lost an eye.
- Balogh, Mary. *Simply Love*. 2006. Romance, Simply quartet. Hero lost an eye and one arm in wartime torture.
- Balogh, Mary. *Simply Perfect*. 2008. Romance, Simply quartet. Hero's daughter is visually impaired.
- Balogh, Mary. *First Comes Marriage*. 2009. Romance, first in Huxtable quintet. The deceased younger brother of one character had Down syndrome.
- Balogh, Mary. *The Proposal*. 2012. Romance, first in Survivors' Club series. Heroine has a limp after an accident years earlier, hero was mentally ill after war trauma, minor characters with a range of impairments.
- Balogh, Mary. *The Arrangement*. 2013. Romance, Survivors' Club series. Hero is visually impaired.
- Barclay, Alex. *Blood Loss*. 2012. Crime, first in Ren Bryce series. Protagonist is bipolar; a crime is committed at a former insane asylum.
- Barker, Clive. *Cabal: The Nightbreed*. 1988. Horror. Protagonist is mentally ill; exploration of insanity and monstrosity.
- Baxter, Mary Lynn. *Evening Hours*. 2005. Romance. The heroine limps, is scarred, and has pain from a car accident in her teens.
- Bear, Greg. *Queen of Angels*. 1990. Science fiction. Advances in the understanding of mental health have resulted in effective therapies for mental illness, but also created new forms of discrimination. New technology allows the wealthy to reshape their bodies.
- Blake, Toni. *Whisper Falls*. 2011. Romance, contemporary. Heroine has Crohn's disease.
- Blatty, William Peter. *The Exorcist*. 1971. Horror. Demonic possession initially interpreted as mental illness, numerous secondary characters with impairments.
- Bliss, Karina. *Here Comes the Groom*. 2011. Romance. Heroine's grandmother has dementia, heroine has had a mastectomy, minor character who limps after war injuries.
- Bolton, Sharon. *A Dark and Twisted Tide*. 2014. Crime, Lacey Flint. Significant secondary character with sirenomelia.
- Bolton, S.J. *Now You See Me*. 2011. Crime, first in Lacey Flint series. Secondary character with burn scars and a missing ear.

- Bolton, S.J. *Dead Scared*. 2012. Crime, Lacey Flint. Villains target students with mental health issues; central character with pain and mobility impairment.
- Bolton, S.J. *Like This, For Ever*. 2013. Crime, Lacey Flint. A child with OCD is a major character, other disabled characters appear in minor roles.
- Bradford, Laura. *Storybook Dad*. 2012. Romance. Heroine has been recently diagnosed with MS; hero volunteers with an organisation supporting disabled people. Hero's mother and another minor character are wheelchair users.
- Britton, Pamela. *The Wrangler*. 2009. Romance. Heroine is losing her vision owing to a blood clot.
- Brockmann, Suzanne. *Frisco's Kid*. 1997. Romance. Navy SEAL hero has a mobility impairment.
- Brown, Sandra. *Unspeakable*. 1998. Crime. Heroine is deaf, villain with a cognitive impairment.
- Bujold, Lois McMaster. Vorkosigan series. Science Fiction. 1986–. (*The Warrior's Apprentice*, 1986; *Brothers in Arms*, 1989; *The Vor Game*, 1990; *Mirror Dance*, 1994; *Cetaganda*, 1996; *Cryoburn*, 2010; *Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen*, 2016). Protagonist Miles Vorkosigan is of short stature with a limp, hunched back, and brittle bones, though his bones are gradually replaced with synthetics in the course of the series. Novels from *Brothers in Arms* onwards features Miles's clone, Mark, who is identical in appearance but does not have brittle bones. Both characters experience forms of mental illness, and in later novels Miles has a seizure disorder.
- Bujold, Lois McMaster. *The Spirit Ring*. 1992. Fantasy. Secondary character who is mad.
- Bujold, Lois McMaster. *The Curse of Chalion*. 2001. Fantasy. Protagonist is physically and psychologically scarred; secondary character who is mad; another who is mute.
- Burrows, Annie. *Captain Fawley's Innocent Bride*. 2008. Romance. Hero has facial scarring and his hand and lower leg have been amputated.
- Cadigan, Pat. *Mindplayers*. 1987. Science fiction. Set in a future society where forms of mental illness are licensed and traded.
- Card, Orson Scott. *Xenocide*. 1991. Science fiction, Ender series. Central character with brain damage who is cured at the end of the novel; the people of the planet Path have obsessive-compulsive disorder; minor character with prosthetic vision.
- Chase, Loretta. *Miss Wonderful*. 2004. Romance. Hero is lame from war wounds.
- Chesbro, George C. *Shadow of a Broken Man*. 1977. Crime, 'Mingo' series. Protagonist is a dwarf detective; another character suffers traumatic after-effects of torture.
- Christie, Agatha. *The Clocks*. 1963. Crime, Hercule Poirot series. A dead man is found in the home of a visually impaired woman.
- Clarke, Arthur C. *Islands in the Sky*. 1954. Science fiction. Features a lower-limb amputee who lives on a zero-gravity space station.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Postmortem*. 1990. Crime, first in Scarpetta series. Murderer has an enzyme defect which causes a distinctive smell.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Cruel and Unusual*. 1993. Crime, Scarpetta. Character scarred by bomb blast plays key role in the novel's resolution; another has had his voice box removed after cancer. Brief appearance of character with Parkinson's disease.

- Cornwell, Patricia. *Cause of Death*. 1996. Crime, Scarpetta. Murder victim with a malformed penis; minor character with a knee brace.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Hornet's Nest*. 1997. Crime, Andy Brazil series. Brief appearances by a male character with unspecified cognitive impairments and a female wheelchair user.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Southern Cross*. 1998. Crime, Andy Brazil. The major villain is described as a 'special needs child', one murder victim is a disabled woman. Minor character who lost his foot and part of his hand in Vietnam and has spent time in mental hospitals.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Black Notice*. 1999. Crime, Scarpetta. Villain is Jean-Baptiste Chandonne, who has hypertrichosis and is disfigured.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *The Last Precinct*. 2000. Crime, Scarpetta. Features Jean-Baptiste Chandonne.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Blow Fly*. 2003. Crime, Scarpetta. Features Jean-Baptiste Chandonne and a child who has been institutionalised due to self-harming.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Trace*. 2004. Crime, Scarpetta. Perpetrator has a respiratory disease; secondary characters with various physical and psychological impairments.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Scarpetta*. 2008. Crime, Scarpetta. Victim has achondroplasia and a compulsive condition; suspect with achondroplasia.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *The Scarpetta Factor*. 2009. Crime, Scarpetta. Jean-Baptiste Chandonne appears after surgery to normalise his appearance. Secondary villains include a character with a personality disorder and another with a hearing impairment.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Dust*. 2013. Crime, Scarpetta. Murderer has sensory processing disorder, Scarpetta's mother has a hearing impairment.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Flesh and Blood*. 2014. Crime, Scarpetta. Secondary character has a facial deformity and the main perpetrator has been institutionalised for mental illness.
- Cox, Connie. *Christmas Eve Delivery*. 2013. Romance. Hero has panic attacks after war experiences.
- Cullinan, Heidi. *A Private Gentleman*. 2012. Romance. One hero has a stutter and is drug-addicted, the other has poor vision and suffers the after-effects of trauma. Various secondary and minor disabled characters.
- Cullinan, Heidi. *Carry the Ocean*. 2015. Romance, The Roosevelt series. One hero is autistic, the other has depression and anxiety. Various secondary and minor disabled characters.
- Creighton, Kathleen. *Daredevil's Run*. 2008. Romance. Hero is paralysed after a spinal injury; heroine works with disabled people.
- Cross, Ethan. *Blind Justice*. 2013. Crime. Protagonist is visually impaired, secondary character has a limp, and a minor character has Alzheimer's.
- Dailey, Janet. *The Ivory Cane*. 1977. Romance. Heroine has recently lost her sight.
- Dare, Tessa. *Three Nights With a Scoundrel*. 2010. Romance. Heroine is deaf, hero's mother was deaf, and there are brief references to signing communities.
- Dart-Thornton, Cecilia. *The Ill-Made Mute*. 2001. Fantasy, first in Bitterbynde trilogy. Protagonist is mute, amnesiac, and facially disfigured.
- Davis, Justine. *Left at the Altar*. 1994. Romance. Hero is a lower-leg amputee; secondary character who is also an amputee.

- Davis, Justine. *The Morning Side of Dawn*. 1995. Romance, contemporary. Hero is an amputee.
- Deaver, Jeffery. *A Maiden's Grave*. 1995. Teachers and students from a school for the Deaf are taken hostage; numerous Deaf and hearing-impaired characters.
- Deaver, Jeffery. Lincoln Rhyme series. Crime. 1997–. (*The Bone Collector*, 1997; *The Coffin Dancer*, 1998; *The Empty Chair*, 2000; *The Stone Monkey*, 2002; *The Vanished Man*, 2003; *The Twelfth Card*, 2005; *The Cold Moon*, 2006; *The Burning Wire*, 2010; *The Kill Room*, 2013; *The Skin Collector*, 2014; *The Steel Kiss*, 2016; *The Burial Hour*, 2017; *The Cutting Edge*, 2018). The series protagonist is quadriplegic, and his partner Amelia has an undefined compulsive condition and arthritis. In *The Bone Collector* a minor character with history of mental illness is initially a suspect and later revealed to be a victim. In *The Coffin Dancer* a secondary villain has an unspecified mental illness. In *The Empty Chair* a character has multiple chemical sensitivity. *The Vanished Man* features a scarred villain. In *The Cold Moon* a minor character has paranoid schizophrenia and a key plot point hinges around the revelation that one of the victims was deaf and mute. *The Burning Wire* features a secondary character suffering after-effects from a head injury and a minor character who is paraplegic. In *The Kill Room* a minor character is medicated and sees a psychiatrist for anger issues.
- Dee, Bonnie. *New Life*. 2013. Romance. Hero has a brain injury.
- Delinsky, Barbara. *Lake News*. 1999. Romance. Heroine Lily has a stutter, her sister Poppy is a wheelchair user.
- Delinsky, Barbara. *An Accidental Woman*. 2002. Romance, sequel to *Lake News*. Heroine Poppy is a paraplegic wheelchair user.
- Dexter, Colin. *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn*. 1977. Crime, Inspector Morse series. Murder victim is hearing impaired, minor character with schizophrenia.
- Dexter, Colin. *Service of all the Dead*. 1979. Crime, Inspector Morse. The mother of one of the central characters is disabled, several other physically impaired characters appear briefly.
- Dexter, Colin. *The Dead of Jericho*. 1981. Crime, Inspector Morse. Features the 'hump-backed police surgeon' and another character who ends up blind in one eye.
- Dexter, Colin. *The Jewel That Was Ours*. 1991. Crime, Inspector Morse. Two characters with hearing impairment, another character who is a wheelchair user.
- Dexter, Colin. *The Way Through the Woods*. 1992. Crime, Inspector Morse. Max, the 'hump-backed police surgeon' who appears in several of the Morse novels, dies.
- Dexter, Colin. *The Daughters of Cain*. 1994. Crime, Inspector Morse. One character has a hearing impairment and ends up with facial scarring.
- Dexter, Colin. *The Remorseful Day*. 1999. Crime, final Inspector Morse novel. Two characters with hearing impairments, minor character who is a wheelchair user.
- Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 1968. Science fiction. A central character is cognitively impaired; people with schizophrenia may be unable to pass tests designed to distinguish humans from androids.
- Dodd, Christina. *Candle in the Window*. 1991. Romance. Both hero and heroine are visually impaired.

- Donaldson, Stephen. *The Man Who Fought Alone*. 2001. Crime, The Man Who series. Protagonist is a recovering alcoholic, central character with a prosthetic hand, also features secondary and minor disabled characters.
- Enoch, Suzanne. *England's Perfect Hero*. 2004. Romance, historical. Hero limps and has panic attacks after wartime torture.
- Erikson, Stephen. *Gardens of the Moon*. 1999. Fantasy, first in Malazan Book of the Fallen series. Various scarred and disabled characters.
- Farland, David. *The Sum of All Men*. 1998. Fantasy, first in Runelords series. Characters can acquire the attributes of others (e.g. sight, stamina, brawn, intelligence) using magic, but must provide for those whose attributes they have taken.
- Field, Sandra. *Love at First Sight*. 1990. Romance. Hero has recently lost his sight; heroine is a guide dog trainer.
- Fielding, Liz. *The Marriage Miracle*. 2005. Romance. Heroine is a wheelchair user.
- Foley, Gaelen. *The Duke*. 2000. Romance, Knights Miscellany series. Two scarred villains, secondary character who is deaf and mute.
- Foley, Gaelen. *Lord of Fire*. 2001. Romance, Knights Miscellany. Hero's twin brother is traumatised after war.
- Foley, Gaelen. *Lord of Ice*. 2002. Romance, Knights Miscellany. Begins with the murder of a soldier who lost his arm in the war. Hero is traumatised after war.
- Francis, Dick. *Odds Against*. 1965. Crime, first Sid Halley novel. Protagonist has a 'useless' hand after a racing injury, significant secondary character with facial disfigurement.
- Francis, Dick. *Whip Hand*. 1979. Crime, Sid Halley. Protagonist has a prosthetic hand, villain threatens his remaining hand.
- Francis, Dick. *Come to Grief*. 1995. Crime, Sid Halley. Protagonist has a prosthetic hand, villain amputates horses' lower limbs.
- Francis, Dick. *Under Orders*. 2006. Crime, Sid Halley. Protagonist has a prosthetic hand, villain ends up losing the use of his left hand.
- Francis, Dick. *Second Wind*. 1999. Crime. Central character who is 'manic-depressive'. Hero's grandmother is a wheelchair user.
- Francis, Dick. *Shattered*. 2000. Minor character with epilepsy, villain with asthma and colour-blindness.
- Francis, Dick, and Felix Francis. *Dead Heat*. 2007. Crime. Central character traumatised after explosion. Villain who ends up with brain damage.
- Francis, Dick, and Felix Francis. *Crossfire*. 2010. Crime. Protagonist is a former soldier who lost his foot after being injured in Afghanistan.
- Freethy, Barbara. *On a Night Like This*. 2013. Romance, Callaway series. Hero has memory loss after trauma; his young nephew has autism; one character is diagnosed with Alzheimer's.
- Friedman, C.S. *This Alien Shore*. 1998. Science fiction. Central character has multiple personalities. Set in a future where technology used in space travel has caused genetic change.
- Gaffney, Patricia. *Sweet Everlasting*. 1993. Romance. Hero is a doctor still feeling lingering effects of disease and a bullet wound; heroine is mute at the start of the novel. Secondary character with physical and cognitive impairments.
- Gordon, Abigail. *A French Doctor at Abbeyfields*. 2006. Romance. Doctor heroine and hero treat disabled patients.

- Gordon, Lucy. *For the Sake of His Child*. 2000. Romance. Hero's son is deaf, heroine has a cochlear implant.
- Gordon, Lucy. *The Millionaire Tycoon's English Rose*. 2007. Romance. Heroine is visually impaired, her boyfriend's over-protectiveness is the primary barrier to their relationship.
- Gordon, Victoria. *Blind Man's Buff*. 1982. Romance. Hero has psychosomatic blindness brought on by breakup with heroine. Minor character mentions having a wooden leg.
- Grafton, Sue. *A is for Alibi*. 1982. Crime, first in Alphabet series. Deaf child character who reveals key plot point, minor character with a spinal injury.
- Grafton, Sue. *G is for Gumshoe*. 1990. Crime, Alphabet. Secondary character with dementia.
- Grafton, Sue. *H is for Homicide*. 1991. Crime, Alphabet. Villain has Tourette's Syndrome.
- Grafton, Sue. *I is for Innocent*. 1992. Crime, Alphabet. Minor character with a mobility impairment. The accident which injured her was caused by the victim, making her a suspect.
- Grafton, Sue. *L is for Lawless*. 1995. Crime, Alphabet. Secondary characters with various impairments.
- Grafton, Sue. *P is for Peril*. 2001. Crime, Alphabet. Various minor characters with impairments.
- Gray, Marcy. *A Pirate at Heart*. 1989. Romance. Hero is a lower limb amputee with a prosthetic leg.
- Grey, S.L. *The Ward*. 2013. Horror. One protagonist has body dysmorphic disorder, the other is temporarily blinded. Numerous secondary and minor characters with altered bodies.
- Griffith, Nicola. *Slow River*. 1995. Science fiction. A secondary character has prosthetic limbs.
- Hall, Elliott. *The First Stone*. 2009. Crime. Protagonist has an unnamed war-created disease whose symptoms include convulsions, muscle and joint pain, and nausea; minor character with PTSD.
- Hardy, Kate. *The Children's Doctor's Special Proposal*. 2009. Romance. Heroine has a hearing impairment and fears it will affect her ability to be a good mother.
- Harris, Thomas. *Red Dragon*. 1981. Horror, first in Hannibal Lecter series. Serial killer with facial disfigurement, another character who is visually impaired. Insanity and mental illness are central to the narrative.
- Harris, Thomas. *The Silence of the Lambs*. 1989. Horror, Hannibal Lecter. Lecter is a psychiatrist and is described as a sociopath; has an additional finger on one hand.
- Harris, Thomas. *Hannibal*. 1999. Horror, Hannibal Lecter. More on Lecter's pathology; also features one of Lecter's former victims who is paralysed and missing most of his face.
- Heinlein, Robert A. *Farnham's Freehold*. 1964. Science fiction. The future overlords of Earth surgically alter their servants.
- Herbert, James. *Shrine*. 1983. Horror. Characters with illnesses and disabilities are cured by supernatural forces.
- Hibbert, Talia. *A Girl Like Her*. 2018. Romance, Ravenswood series. Heroine is autistic.

- Hibbert, Talia. *Untouchable*. 2018. Romance, Ravenswood. Heroine has depression and hero has dyslexia.
- Hill, Joe. *Horns*. 2010. Horror. Protagonist is asthmatic and the novel's villain is visually impaired. Numerous references to disability.
- Hoag, Tami. *Rumor Has It*. 1988. Romance. Heroine has pain and significant scarring after an accident.
- Iding, Laura. *The Surgeon's New-Year Wedding Wish*. 2009. Romance. Hero's son has selective mutism.
- James, Elle. *Dakota Meltdown*. 2007. Romance. Heroine has severe scarring on her back and legs. Heroine's mother has Alzheimer's disease.
- James, P.D. *Unnatural Causes*. 1967. Crime, Adam Dalgliesh series. Character with mobility impairment is the mastermind behind the murder.
- James, P.D. *The Black Tower*. 1975. Crime, Adam Dalgliesh. Set in a care home for disabled people.
- James, P.D. *A Taste for Death*. 1986. Crime, Adam Dalgliesh. Features several elderly disabled characters, and a character who has spent time in a psychiatric institution.
- James, P.D. *Death in Holy Orders*. 2001. Crime, Adam Dalgliesh. Murderer is missing part of one finger, which proves key to the plot. Various other disabled characters.
- James, P.D. *The Private Patient*. 2008. Crime, Adam Dalgliesh. Victim is murdered just before she is due to have surgery for a facial scar.
- James, Sophia. *Masquerading Mistress*. 2007. Romance. Hero is scarred and mobility-impaired after being injured at war.
- Jemisin, N.K. *The Shadowed Sun*. 2012. Fantasy, Dreamblood duology. A disabled child unwittingly causes plague and death through magical abilities.
- Jordan, Sophie. *Once Upon a Wedding Night*. 2006. Romance. Heroine's father has dementia; she refuses to put him in an asylum. Also features a pox-scarred villain and a minor character in a wheelchair.
- Jordan, Sophie. *Too Wicked To Tame*. 2007. Romance. Hero refuses to marry, believing he and his siblings have an inherited disease which causes madness.
- Joyce, Brenda. *The Perfect Bride*. 2007. Romance. Hero's lower leg has been amputated after war wounds; hero and heroine both struggling with trauma.
- Keyes, Daniel. *Flowers for Algernon*. 1966. Science fiction. Cognitively impaired central character takes part in an experiment to boost his IQ to genius levels.
- Kilby, Joan. *Family Matters*. 2004. Romance. Hero is paralysed after a spinal cord injury and uses a wheelchair, as does the heroine's younger brother.
- King, Stephen. *Salem's Lot*. 1975. Horror. Minor character who has a hunchback, mentions of other disabled townspeople.
- King, Stephen. *Thinner*. 1984. Horror. Protagonist is an obese man cursed to lose weight; another character has a facial disfigurement.
- King, Stephen. *Misery*. 1987. Horror. Villain is mentally ill, hero is mobility impaired after a car accident for most of the novel, and later has his lower leg and thumb amputated.
- King, Stephen. *Needful Things*. 1991. Horror. Central character has severe arthritis, another character was institutionalised, various minor characters with impairments. Antagonist has the ability to cure impairments supernaturally.
- King, Stephen. *Rose Madder*. 1995. Horror. Explores links between abuse, trauma, and mental illness; several scarred characters.

- King, Stephen. *Dreamcatcher*. 2001. Horror. Central character with Down syndrome, another who is described as crazy.
- King, Stephen. *Duma Key*. 2008. Horror. Virtually all of the major characters have impairments.
- King, Stephen. *Mr Mercedes*. 2014. Crime/horror. The novel's villain, one of the detectives, and the victim all have some form of mental disability; disability is central to the crimes committed and the identification of the perpetrator.
- King, Stephen. *Finders Keepers*. 2015. Crime/horror, sequel to *Mr Mercedes*. One of the detective protagonists is neurodivergent; another character is mobility impaired for most of the novel.
- Kinsale, Laura. *Flowers from the Storm*. 1992. Romance. Hero has a stroke and is sent to an asylum; his recovery and resistance to attempts to institutionalise him are a central focus. Heroine's father is blind.
- Koontz, Dean. *Fear Nothing*. 1997. Horror. Protagonist has rare genetic condition; minor character with Down syndrome.
- Koontz, Dean. *From the Corner of His Eye*. 2000. Horror. Central character is visually impaired but is cured by paranormal means. Several other disabled characters.
- Koontz, Dean. *By the Light of the Moon*. 2002. Horror. The younger brother of one of the protagonists has autism; he and the two nondisabled protagonists gain paranormal powers.
- Koontz, Dean. *77 Shadow Street*. 2011. Horror. Central character with autism, visually impaired character plays a minor role, another character who describes himself as insane.
- Koyanagi, Jacqueline. *Ascension*. 2013. Science fiction. Protagonist has a chronic illness, several other characters with disabilities or chronic illnesses.
- Krentz, Jayne Anne. *All Night Long*. 2006. Romance. Both hero and heroine have PTSD, minor character with prosthetic leg.
- Lamb, Charlotte. *Wild Hunger*. 1994. Romance. Heroine has bulimia, hero has PTSD.
- Lawrence, Kim. *The Brunelli Baby Bargain*. 2009. Romance. Hero is visually impaired.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. 1968. Fantasy, first book in Earthsea cycle. Protagonist is injured in the novel and left with facial scarring.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Farthest Shore*. 1973. Fantasy, Earthsea. Sorcerer who had committed evil deeds is blind; minor character with amputated hand.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *Tehanu*. 1990. Fantasy, Earthsea. One character was badly burned on one side of her body, leaving her scarred, blind in one eye, and with limited use of her hand and arm. Minor character with cognitive impairment.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Other Wind*. 2001. Fantasy, Earthsea. Scarred character becomes a dragon. Minor character with cognitive impairment.
- Lessing, Doris. *The Fifth Child*. 1988. Horror. Features a child with Down syndrome and an 'abnormal' child whose difference is sometimes framed in terms of disability.
- Lethem, Jonathan. *Motherless Brooklyn*. 1999. Crime. Protagonist has Tourette's syndrome.
- Levin, Ira. *Rosemary's Baby*. 1967. Horror. Central character experiences severe pain during her demonic pregnancy; secondary character who is blinded; minor character with missing fingers.
- McCaffrey, Anne. *The Ship Who Sang*. 1969. Science fiction. Heroine is born with severe impairments, is transformed into a cyborg spaceship.

- McDermid, Val. *The Torment of Others*. 2004. Crime, Tony Hill/Carol Jordan series. The killer brainwashes men with cognitive impairments into torturing and killing prostitutes.
- McMahon, Barbara. *One Stubborn Cowboy*. 1995. Romance. Hero is partially paralysed and scarred after a bull-riding accident.
- McMahon, Barbara. *Jewels of the Desert* duet (*Accidentally the Sheik's Wife*, 2010; *Marrying the Scarred Sheik*, 2010). Romance. Hero of *Marrying the Scarred Sheik* has extensive burn scars; he features as a secondary character in *Accidentally the Sheik's Wife*.
- Mallery, Susan. *Wife in Disguise*. 2002. Romance. Heroine limps and is scarred after an accident.
- Marshall, Lynne. *The Christmas Baby Bump*. 2010. Romance. Hero's younger brother has Down syndrome. Minor character with lupus.
- Martin, George R.R. *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (*A Game of Thrones*, 1996; *A Clash of Kings*, 1998; *A Storm of Swords*, 2000; *A Feast for Crows*, 2005; *A Dance with Dragons*, 2011). Fantasy. Numerous disabled characters in central, secondary, and minor roles.
- Masterton, Graham. *Unspeakable*. 2007. Horror. Heroine is deaf but a brilliant lip-reader; experiences significant prejudice.
- Masterton, Graham. *Blind Panic*. 2010. Horror. Much of the population of America is rendered blind; minor characters with asthma and arthritis.
- Masterton, Graham. *Fire Spirit*. 2010. Horror. Two characters have chromosomal disorders which allow them to hear characters talking from Hell.
- Masterton, Graham. *Petrified*. 2011. Horror. The novel's protagonist is recreating mythical beings with the aim of curing diseases and disabilities; secondary character with an eating disorder and another with a cognitive impairment.
- May, Peter. *The Lewis Man*. 2012. Crime. Central character has dementia; his younger brother was cognitively impaired.
- Medeiros, Teresa. *Yours Until Dawn*. 2004. Romance. Hero was scarred and blinded in the Battle of Trafalgar; heroine is his nurse.
- Michaels, Casey. *The Return of the Prodigal*. 2007. Romance. Hero has lost an arm at war, minor character whose tongue was cut out by the novel's villain.
- Miller, Julie. *In the Blink of an Eye*. 2002. Romance. Hero is blind and has facial scarring from chemical burns; heroine is a childhood friend called in to nurse him.
- Mirrlees, Hope. *Lud-in-the-Mist*. 1926. Fantasy. One character with a hunchback, minor characters with impairments.
- Monette, Sarah. *Mélusine*. 2005. Fantasy, first in Mélusine quartet. One protagonist has a visual impairment and is driven mad by magical means; both protagonists are scarred; a secondary character has a mobility impairment.
- Monroe, Lucy. *The Italian's Suitable Wife*. 2004. Romance. Hero uses a wheelchair after a spinal injury.
- Moon, Elizabeth. *Sporting Chance*. 1994. Science fiction, Serrano Legacy series. Focuses on one character's rehabilitation after an attack leaves her blind and paralysed.
- Moon, Elizabeth. *Rules of Engagement*. 1998. Serrano Legacy. Features a misogynist society where kidnapped women, including a central character, are surgically muted. Includes a secondary character with a cognitive impairment and a minor character who is an amputee.

- Moon, Elizabeth. *Change of Command*. 1999. Serrano Legacy. Extensive discussion of cognitive impairments. Faulty rejuvenation drugs have caused senility in those who took them; one character has physical and cognitive impairments after trauma.
- Moon, Elizabeth. *The Speed of Dark*. 2003. Science fiction. Explores the implications of a cure for autism.
- Moon, Elizabeth. *Command Decision*. 2007. Science fiction, Vatta's War series. Character is brain-injured after a brain-enhancing implant fails.
- Moorcock, Michael. *Behold the Man*. 1969. Science fiction. Protagonist time travels to the time of Christ, finding that the man named Jesus Christ is both physically and cognitively disabled.
- Morgan, Raye. *Beauty and the Reclusive Prince*. 2010. Romance. Hero has severe facial scarring.
- Nevill, Adam. *House of Small Shadows*. 2013. Horror. Protagonist has a history of mental illness including paranoia; numerous other disabled characters.
- Nichols, Elaine. *Cowgirl Be Mine*. 2001. Romance. Novel begins with the heroine being injured in a rodeo accident; her lower leg is amputated and she gets a prosthetic limb. Brief mention of hero's father being an amputee.
- O'Brien, Caragh. *Birthmarked*. 2010. Science fiction. Set in a future where a lack of genetic diversity has caused a huge increase in cases of haemophilia; protagonist has a badly scarred face.
- Padgett, Abigail. Bo Bradley series (*Child of Silence*, 1993; *Strawgirl*, 1994; *Turtle Baby*, 1995; *Moonbird Boy*, 1996; *The Dollmaker's Daughters*, 1997). Crime. Heroine is manic depressive. In *Child of Silence*, she works to protect a deaf child from killers. *Strawgirl* features a character with schizophrenia and another with a mutilated hand. *Moonbird Boy* features several secondary characters with mental health conditions. *The Dollmaker's Daughters* features a character who is blind in one eye.
- Paretsky, Sara. *Blacklist*. 2003. Crime, V.I. Warshawski series. Various secondary characters with age-related disabilities.
- Patrick, Den. Erebus trilogy (*The Boy With the Porcelain Blade*, 2014; *The Boy Who Wept Blood*, 2015; *The Girl on the Liar's Throne*, 2016). Fantasy. Ideas of deformity are central to the series; protagonists and a number of secondary characters are physically different from the norm.
- Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. 1976. Science fiction. Heroine is institutionalised for schizophrenia, her dead lover was visually impaired. Several secondary characters with mental health conditions.
- Quinn, Julia. *The Duke and I*. 2000. Romance, historical. Hero had a stammer as a child.
- Rice, Patricia. *Blue Clouds*. 1998. Romance, contemporary. Hero's son uses a wheelchair after a spinal injury. Minor characters include other disabled children and adults.
- Robinson, Fay. *A Man Like Mac*. 2000. Romance, contemporary. Hero is a paraplegic wheelchair athlete, numerous disabled secondary characters.
- Robinson, Peter. *Aftermath*. 2001. Crime, Inspector Banks series. Murderer ends up paralysed.
- Robinson, Peter. *Friend of the Devil*. 2007. Crime, Inspector Banks. One of the murder victims is quadriplegic.

- Rosenberg, Joel. *The Sleeping Dragon*. 1983. Fantasy, Guardians of the Flame series. A character with muscular dystrophy becomes a dwarf when he and his friends are transported into the world of a fantasy role-playing game.
- Sayers, Dorothy L. *Whose Body?* 1923. Crime, Lord Peter Wimsey series. Protagonist is still experiencing after-effects from war experiences (shell shock); villain is a doctor who is a nerve specialist.
- Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*. 1928. Crime, Wimsey. Traumatic after-effects of World War I foregrounded, one suspect is a former soldier suffering shell shock and after-effects of gas.
- Scalzi, John. *Old Man's War*. 2005. Science fiction, Old Man's War. New technologies allow for missing limbs to be grown back and disabilities to be cured.
- Scalzi, John. *Lock In*. 2014. Science fiction. Set in a future world where a significant proportion of people experience locked-in syndrome, but are enabled by technology to participate in society.
- Shayne, Maggie. *Darker Than Midnight*. 2005. Romance, Mordecai Young series. Hero has blackouts and memory loss and is wrongly institutionalised. Secondary character who believes her paranormal abilities are a sign of madness. Minor character with cognitive impairments.
- Slaughter, Karin. *Blindsighted*. 2001. Crime, first in Grant County series. Victim is blind, several discussions over whether her disability was a factor in targeting her. Secondary character with arms scarred from drug addiction and another missing an eye and a leg.
- Slaughter, Karin. Will Trent series (*Triptych*, 2006; *Fractured*, 2008; *Genesis* [US title *Undone*], 2009; *Broken*, 2010; *Criminal*, 2012.) Crime. Investigator Will Trent is scarred and has dyslexia. In *Triptych*, the perpetrator has a cognitively disabled son and a minor character is recovering from a stroke. In *Fractured* the kidnap victim has dyslexia, other victims have behavioural disorders and ADD, and one of the perpetrators has reading and writing difficulties that are key to solving the case. In *Genesis* Will's partner Faith is diagnosed with diabetes, victims have eating disorders, and one who survives is blinded. In *Broken*, one victim has a history of depression and another is cognitively impaired.
- Southwick, Teresa. *At the Millionaire's Request*. 2006. Romance. Hero's young son is brain-damaged after an accident; heroine is a speech language pathologist.
- Stabenow, Dana. Kate Shugak series (*A Cold Day for Murder*, 1992; *A Fatal Thaw*, 1993; nineteen other volumes to date). Crime. Protagonist has a scar on her throat and the same injury affects her speech; a secondary character is a lower-limb amputee.
- Stockham, Kay. *A Hero in the Making*. 2012. Romance. Hero is a wheelchair user, paralysed from the knees down after a sports accident. Numerous secondary and minor characters with impairments.
- Taylor, Jennifer. *The Husband She Needs*. 1999. Romance. Hero uses a wheelchair after a spinal injury.
- Templeton, Karen. *A Gift for All Seasons*. 2012. Romance. Hero is an Iraq war veteran with burn scars.
- Thane, RaeAnne. *A Cold Creek Reunion*. 2012. Romance. Heroine's daughter has Down syndrome.
- Thomson, Amy. *The Color of Distance*. 1995. Science fiction. Heroine's body is altered to allow her to survive on an alien planet.

- Thomson, Amy. *Through Alien Eyes*. 1999. Science fiction, sequel to *The Color of Distance*. Aliens heal human characters with impairments; also features a disabled alien character.
- Warren, Pat. *Under Sunny Skies*. 1992. Romance. Hero is scarred, in pain, and has difficulty walking; heroine diagnosed as dyslexic in the course of the novel.
- Whisenand, Val. *Molly Meets Her Match*. 1992. Romance. Hero is a wheelchair user, heroine trains assistance dogs for disabled people. Secondary characters with a range of disabilities appear briefly.
- Wilson, Gayle. *Echoes in the Dark*. 1995. Romance. Hero is visually impaired and scarred, heroine has amnesia.
- Winspear, Violet. *Dearest Demon*. 1975. Romance, contemporary. Hero is scarred, and plans to marry a woman disabled from polio.
- Wyndham, John. *The Day of the Triffids*. 1951. Science fiction. Most of the population of Earth is left blind after viewing lights in the sky.
- Wyndham, John. *The Chrysalids*. 1955. Science fiction. Set in a post-nuclear holocaust world where mutation is common.

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