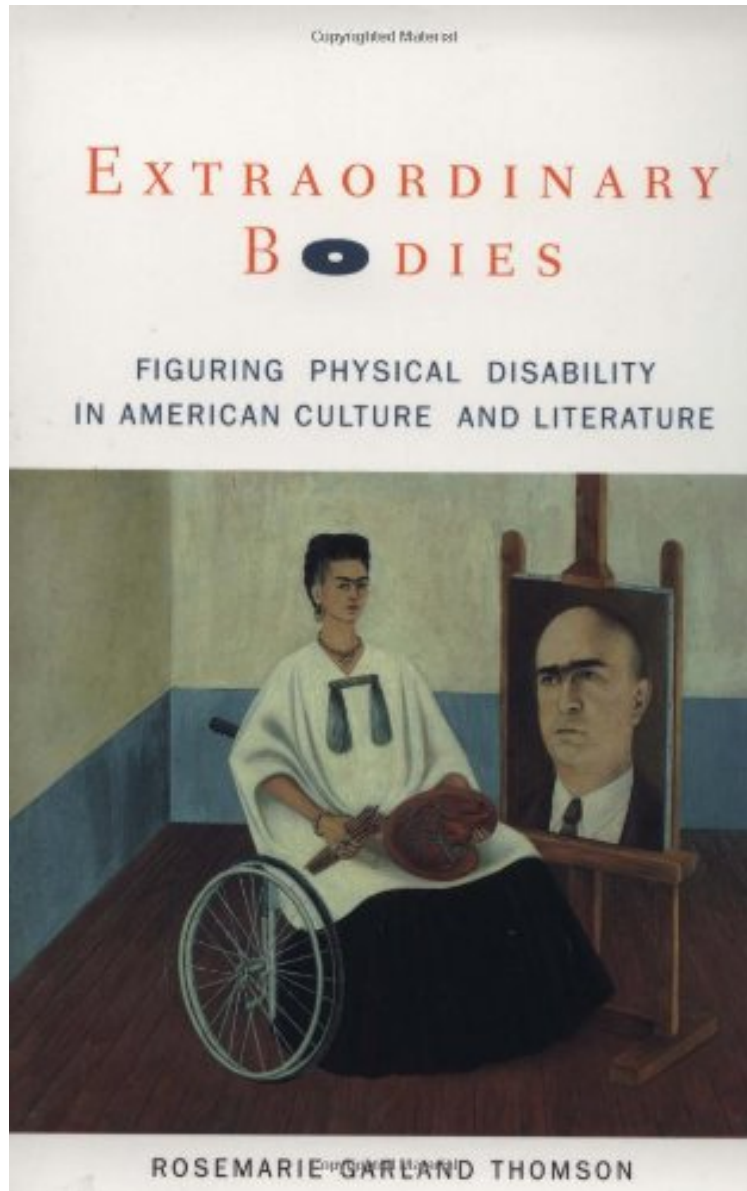


Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature

Rosemarie Garland Thomson

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Rosemarie Garland Thomson : Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Fantastic Example of the Intersectionality of Disability TheoryBy RDDIn "Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature", Rosemarie Garland Thomson works to alter the terms and expand our understanding of the cultural construction of bodies and identity by reframing disability as another culture-bound, physically justified difference to consider along with race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality. (pg. 5) Her work therefore builds upon the ideas of Michel Foucault and demonstrates in practice the materiality about which Judith Butler hypothesized in "Bodies That Matter". For a working definition of disability, Thomson writes, Disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do. (pg. 6) Thomson applies her analysis to three subjects: the freak show, romantic fiction of the nineteenth century, and the work of black women writers in the twentieth century. Focusing on the freak show, Thomson writes, The freak show is a spectacle, a cultural performance that gives primacy to visual apprehension in creating symbolic codes and institutionalizes the relationship between the spectacle and the spectators. In freak shows, the exhibited body became a text written in boldface to be deciphered according to the needs and desires of the onlookers. (pg. 60) The people on display reaffirmed normal by demonstrating its opposite. Thomson writes of Joice Heth, a performer in P.T. Barnums act, She becomes a freak not by virtue of her bodys uniqueness, but rather by displaying the stigmata of social devaluation. Indeed, Joice Heth is the direct antithesis of the able-bodied, white, male figure upon which the developing notion of the American normate was predicated. (pg. 59) Similarly, romantic fiction demonstrated the intersectional nature of gender and disability. Thomson argues, Benevolent maternalism not only restates the terms of liberal individualism, but also, by moving from sympathetic identification with the disabled figures to a distancing repudiation of them, ultimately dramatizes individualisms most vexing internal contradictions. (pg. 82) Accordingly, despite the desire to construct a rhetorical model of socially valued feminine selfhood, these novels could only modify the available, dominant script of the masculine liberal self, bending it toward the other-directedness and self-denial mandated by the female domestic role. (pg. 101) The novels confirmed the very beliefs they attempted to alter. Finally, Thomson writes, If the cultural work of nineteenth-century benevolent maternalism is introducing the body into politicized literary discourse, that work is continued by several twentieth-century African-American women writers who also used disabled figures in strategies of empowerment that recast benevolent maternalisms positive version of womanhood. (pg. 103) According to Thomson, the extraordinary bodies in the authors work demand accommodation, resist assimilation, and challenge the dominant norms that would efface distinctions such as racial, gender, and sexual differences and the marks of experience. (pg. 130). These novels fully demonstrate the analytical model of Thomsons work. Thomson concludes, The rhetorical thrust of this book, then, is to critique the politics of appearance that governs our interpretation of physical difference, to suggest that disability requires accommodation rather than compensation, and to shift our conception of disability from pathology to identity. (pg. 137) In that respect, she more than succeeds.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent background and analysisBy JesssseeThis book makes you think about yourself as a consciousness that lives inside a body. Our bodies vary in characteristics and ability, but the way that differently abled bodies have been constructed in literature has been mostly flat and without dimension. This book calls out examples that break this mold, and strives to encourage a culture where all people are described as people first, not just by what may make their bodies different than others.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Extraordinary bookBy CustomerThis is a comprehensive and well written book about issues facing those with physical disabilities. Very interesting to look at persons experiencing disability as a social issue, not a medical one. Well researched.

Inaugurates a new field of disability studies by framing disability as a minority discourse rather than a medical one, revising oppressive narratives and revealing liberatory ones. The book examines disabled figures in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*, in African-American novels by Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde, and in the popular cultural ritual of the freak show.

Provides complex answers to the puzzle of American images of disabilities from the nineteenth century to the present. This is a solid, useful book which all readers interested in the relationship between society and culture must read. A well-written and provocative beginning to a conversation about disability that is long overdue among scholars in literary and cultural studies. A well-written and provocative beginning to a conversation about disability that is long overdue among scholars in literary and cultural studies. From the Back Cover As the first major critical study to examine literary and cultural representations of physical disability, *Extraordinary Bodies* situates disability as a social construction, shifting it from a property of bodies to a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do. Rosemarie Garland Thomson examines disabled figures in sentimental novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*, African-American novels by Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde, and the popular cultural ritual of the freak show. About the Author Rosemarie Garland-Thomson is Professor of English at Emory University, where her fields of study are disability studies, American literature and culture, feminist theory, and bioethics. Her work develops the field of critical disability studies in the health

humanities, broadly understood, to bring forward disability access, inclusion and identity to communities inside and outside of the academy. She is the author of *Staring: How We Look* and the editor of *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*.