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David Bolt

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Introduction

Literary Disability Studies in the UK

David Bolt

Centre for Disability Research, Lancaster University

It has been less than two years since the *Journal of Literary Disability* (JLD) was launched but much has happened in the emerging field during that short time. Consequently, by way of an introduction to this, the first issue under the new title *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* (JLCDS), I would like to reflect on some of the recent interdisciplinary progress. I am compelled to focus on the example with which I am most familiar—namely, the British academy—but have been assured by the rest of the board that comparable progress has been made internationally. Indeed, any of my colleagues could have provided a comparably optimistic introduction and those in the US, for example, could have provided something far more extensive. That said, we, the journal's readers, writers, reviewers, and editors, are by no means complacent. We are well aware that even in the US disability studies is still too frequently, if not generally, ignored in departments of literary and cultural studies. But with the support of Liverpool University Press (LUP), Project MUSE, and the Centre for Disability Research at Lancaster University, we will endeavour to ensure that the field of literary and cultural disability studies continues to expand across the academy.

When writing the introduction for the inaugural issue of the journal I made reference to the progress of literary disability studies in the UK. I was, therefore, bound to mention the University of Leeds, given the work of professors such as Colin Barnes and Mark Priestley, the development of the Disability Studies Archive UK and the Centre of Disability Studies, as well as the literary scholarship of Edward Larrissy and, a member of the journal's editorial board, Stuart Murray. Indeed, the latter of these literary scholars was contributing to the field in various ways—supervising the now-completed literary disability research projects of Clare Barker and Suzanne Ibbotson; teaching a literary and cultural disability studies module;¹ and working on *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination*, which was published last summer. While I would have argued, predictably perhaps, for still further endorsements of the interdisciplinarity of

1. This popular module, *States of Mind: Disability, Cognitive Impairment, and Exceptionality in Contemporary Culture*, has now been running for six years.

literary disability studies in the Department of English, my real concern was that the University of Leeds represented an exception to a perplexing rule of exclusion elsewhere in the British academy.

Since writing that introduction I am glad to say I have been made aware of other institutions in the British academy that are contributing to the progress of literary and cultural disability studies. Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), for example, agreed to host the launch of the journal at Emerging Fields: Developing a Cultural Disability Studies, the inaugural Conference of the Cultural Disability Studies Research Network, formed by Irene Rose, Rebecca Mallett, and Claire Molloy in 2007. The journal was represented at the event by Lucy Burke, Jane Goetzee, and Irene Rose. George McKay was the most prominent speaker and I was honoured to give the opening plenary presentation on the importance of literary disability studies as a response to literary representations of impairment and disability. Lucy Burke gave another plenary presentation about her work on the representation of Alzheimer's disease, samples of which can now be found in both the inaugural issue of the journal and her special issue *Representations of Cognitive Impairment*, which contains an essay about depictions of autism by Irene Rose that was also heralded at the conference. Furthermore, David Feeney presented an early version of the essay on blindness, aesthetics, and Irish drama that is included in the present issue.²

Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) must also be recognized as an exemplary institution in the British academy, given Lucy Burke's work as guest editor, author, and peer reviewer for the journal, not to mention Gavin Miller's contribution to *JLD* 2.1; the progressive approach of the Head of the Department of English Sue Zlosnik; and Dan Goodley's prolific work as professor of sociology and disability studies, a sample of which is likely to be included in a forthcoming issue. Indeed, last year's conference, *Theorising Culture and Disability: Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, was organized by the Research Institute of Health & Social Change and the English Research Institute at MMU in association with the journal. Accordingly, the international event included several papers that come under the rubric of literary disability studies, presented by Stuart Murray, Clare Barker, Irene Rose, and Lucy Burke, with whom I collaborated. Ria Cheyne reviews the event later in the issue, but I must seize this opportunity to thank Dan Goodley for turning my rather whimsical suggestion into a viable proposition.³ As well as everyone else at MMU who organized

2. The LJMU conference was also addressed by Eleanor Lisney, Pam Thomas, Debbie Jolly, Heather Hollins, Hannah Macpherson, Nicole Matthews, and Collette Conroy.

3. The success of the event has resulted in a special forum for the *Review of Disability Studies*, which I co-edit with Dan Goodley, Lucy Burke, Rebecca Mallett, and Rebecca Lawthorn.

the event, including Lucy Burke, Rebecca Lawthom, and David Brown, credit is due to Tom Coogan and Suzanne Ibbotson, who chaired the four panels, to those speakers whom I have not yet mentioned—namely, Brett Smith, Kateřina Kolářová, Rebecca Mallett, and Alison Wilde—and to LUP for bringing the day to a fittingly momentous end by launching Stuart Murray's series, *Representations: Health, Disability, Culture*.

Institutions that seem poised to similarly contribute to the literary and cultural disability studies movement in the British academy include the University of Leicester and the University of Teesside. At the University of Leicester Martin Halliwell is known for his work as Professor of American Studies and Director of the Centre for American Studies, and is now head of the English department. As well as being a member of the journal's editorial board, he is likely to be contributing to a forthcoming issue. He also supervised Tom Coogan's doctoral research project, a sample of which can be found in Michael Davidson's special issue *Disability and the Dialectic of Dependency*. The University of Teesside has recently started considering the literary representation of disability, thanks to Clare Barker, the *JLCDS* book reviews editor, guest editor, and member of the board whose work in the field also continues at the University of Leeds.

Indeed, the University of Leeds goes on contributing significantly to the literary and cultural disability studies movement in the British academy. Just last year the Leeds Humanities Research Institute organized an interdisciplinary conference, *Cultural Locations of Disability: Situating a Cultural Disability Studies*, which brought together a number of literary disability scholars. Stuart Murray gave the keynote address, which set the theoretical scene for the day, drawing on the seminal work of David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and Lennard Davis among others. Some of the literary disability scholars who followed were Ria Cheyne, Irene Rose, and Clare Barker, and I gave a talk about the publication of research papers in the emerging field.⁴ The conference was a credit to the organizers, Clare Barker and Suzanne Ibbotson, as was reflected in the fact that one of the delegates, the novelist Cheryl Moskowitz, was moved to write a favourable report for *Pathways*, the magazine for the Centre for Continuing Education at Sussex University, referring to a round table session—in which I was pleased to join Lucy Burke, Stuart Murray, and Mark Priestley—thus: “Their discussion, punctuated with lively contributions from the floor, further demonstrated for me what an alive and varied subject area this is, and the energy and passion with which current research in the area is being pursued” (par. 8). So thanks to the Centre of Disability Studies

4. Other speakers at the Leeds event included Terry Speake, Ruth Garbutt, and Yi-Ting Shih.

the University of Leeds has been setting an example for the British academy for many years and the School of English is now evidently following suit. As a matter of fact the university has recently hosted seminars with Lennard Davis and Robert McRuer, members of the *JLCDS* board who have articles in Michael Davidson's special issue *Disability and the Dialectic of Dependency*, and Margaret Price, who has an article in the present issue.

These examples of progress in the British academy are by no means definitive,⁵ nor are they representative, regrettably, but they do reveal a way forward that the journal is helping to pave, an exciting future for the emerging field of literary and cultural disability studies that has also been acknowledged in various ways by the BBC. For instance, in the season of Radio 4 programmes, *Care in the UK*, which ran throughout January 2008, Lucy Burke and I contributed to a feature that discussed some of the ways in which disability and social care were portrayed in literary works of the last century and beyond.⁶ More recently, Stuart Murray was interviewed about his new book for the BBC Radio 3 programme *Night Waves*, impressing both the interviewer Matthew Sweet and the other guest Simon Baron-Cohen with a critical approach to representations of autism such as that found in Mark Haddon's most popular novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Indeed, thanks to Lucy Burke, the English Research Institute at MMU is planning a major collaborative event with the BBC on Disability and Representation, *Present Difference*, which will take place later this year. Her aim is to bring together scholars, activists, writers, artists, and performers to explore the critical, theoretical, political, ethical, and aesthetic issues raised by notions of disability and representation.

5. Sheffield Hallam University certainly warrants a mention, thanks to the work of Rebecca Mallett and Ana María Sánchez, who are currently working on the conference, *Identity and Form in Twentieth and Twenty-first-century Literature*, 3–4 July, 2009. Also of note is the teaching of Ria Cheyne and Irene Rose at LJMU, as well as the research projects of Irene Rose at Manchester University, Georgina O'Brien Hill at the University of Chester, and Alexandra Tankard at Liverpool University, to name but a few.

6. Various programmes were involved in the season, including *Woman's Hour* and *Money Box Live*, but it was to the midday consumer-affairs programme *You and Yours* that Lucy Burke and I contributed. Among others, our fellow contributors were the television presenter and actor Tony Robinson, the radio and television disability correspondent Peter White, the writer and comedian Liz Carr, the broadcaster Ray Gosling, and the Care Minister Ivan Lewis: Robinson described the treatment of elderly people as one of the great social scandals of our time; White, whose mother lived with him prior to her death, considered the dilemma of whether or not elderly parents should be cared for by their children or on a residential basis; Carr shared her thoughts on being assessed for social care; Gosling argued that moving into sheltered accommodation was the best decision he ever made; and Lewis answered various questions in a live show to which we were both invited. Overall, then, the contributors were numerous and diverse in their approaches to the topic of social care and, a salient point for us, disabled people as well as carers were involved. That is to say, the season did not plummet into a paradoxical discussion about social care from which disabled people were excluded.

In citing the British academy I am shamelessly focusing on the example with which I am most familiar—and, yes, involved—but, as I say, I have received hundreds of messages from colleagues around the world who are associating interdisciplinary progress with the journal. A couple of years ago, for instance, Sharon Snyder, a co-author of the opening essay in the inaugural issue and one of the leading figures in literary and cultural disability studies, referred to the journal thus: “You’re undertaking ground-breaking scholarly work and community-building from academe with great tact. At a recent conference in Sydney, as well as at George Washington University in February, colleagues were all abuzz with enthusiasm for your considerate style, your careful peer-reviewing, and your generosity of spirit in continuing to include all interested parties. You have motivated many on this side of the pond, too.” This is an endorsement for us all, coming from a co-editor for the landmark book series *Corporealities: Discourses of Disability* (University of Michigan Press), Michael Davidson’s brilliant contribution to which is reviewed later in the present issue. Ellen Barton, speaking as a Professor in the Linguistics and Composition/Rhetoric Programs of the Department of English at Wayne State University, has remarked that the journal is “now drawing and publishing interdisciplinary submissions, thus having an effect on a variety of areas in the field of disability studies. It’s an outlet that is wider than its original scope, which is an impressive feat for a journal, especially a new one.” “The *Journal of Literary Disability* has been an invaluable tool in my classroom and beyond, a treasure trove of easily accessible work in an emerging field,” adds Petra Kupperts, Associate Professor of English, Theatre and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Chair of The University of Michigan Initiative for Disability Studies, and contributor, co-contributor, reviewer, and guest editor for the journal. This trilogy of comments is representative of the international response to the journal, which is why, as is surely apparent, I cannot express my own involvement without betraying a profound sense of pride.

I am confident that the current issue will be as well received as the special issues to which my distinguished overseas colleagues have referred, opening, as it does, with an essay that has already won Honourable Mention for the 2008 Irving K. Zola Award from the Society for Disability Studies. Reflecting the fact that this is a general issue, the essays are diverse in terms of both disability and literary form. Margaret Price considers the representation of psychosocial disabilities and the use of pronouns in literary autobiography. With reference to short fiction, Sara Hosey explores the way in which exceptional physicalities relate to received notions of freakery. Tammy Berberi provides a companion piece to an essay included in Jim Ferris’s special issue *Disability and/as Poetry*,

with a meticulous study of Tristan Corbière's work that reveals much about disability in late nineteenth-century France. Vaidehi Ramanathan exposes the problematics of a poststructuralist approach to the writing of, and about, people who have Alzheimer's disease. David Feeney explores questions of aesthetic pleasure with reference to the representation of blindness in twentieth-century Irish drama. Ria Cheyne reviews not only the MMU event, *Theorising Culture and Disability: Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, but also Michael Davidson's book *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body*. Finally, Douglas Biklen reviews Stuart Murray's *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination*, meaning that, thanks to our book reviews editor Clare Barker, consideration is given to two exemplary titles from two exemplary series.

In editing the numerous submissions from which this issue has derived I have been very fortunate to work with Ellen Barton, James Berger, Michael Bérubé, Lucy Burke, Johnson Cheu, Michael Davidson, Lennard Davis, Jim Ferris, Anne Finger, Richard Ingram, Jennifer James, Deborah Kent, Georgina Kleege, Robert McRuer, Madonne Miner, Mark Mossman, Catherine Prendergast, Carrie Sandahl, David Serlin, Tobin Siebers, Sharon Snyder, Ato Quayson, and John Wiltshire. Much credit is also due to Stephen Bolt, Nisha Bolt, and Jane Goetzee for their ongoing general help.

As this is the first issue in the new format, which consists of three issues per annum and is available to subscribers in print as well as online versions, I will close by outlining some of the recent changes. To appease everyone who has included *JLD* essays in course reading lists, I can confirm that the previous issues—namely, Jim Ferris's *Disability and/as Poetry*, Michael Davidson's *Disability and the Dialectic of Dependency*, and Lucy Burke's *Representations of Cognitive Impairment*—may all be accessed freely on the new website (www.jlcds.org). Also new to the journal is the affiliation with Lancaster University (known to many of us because of Carol Thomas's work in disability studies), which, following the success of three major international conferences in Disability Studies (2003, 2004, and 2006), launched the Centre for Disability Research at yet another successful event last year. I am very pleased to be involved in the centre's work on improving interdisciplinarity between disability studies and the humanities. Accordingly, although the journal will continue to focus primarily on the literary representation of disability, the title has changed to reflect the fact that cultural studies will now be added to the interdisciplinary mix. This additional dimension is the result of a multitude of influences, including Irene Rose and Claire Molloy's presentation at *Emerging Fields: Developing a Cultural Disability Studies*, the research interests of everyone on the editorial board, and the advice of Clare Hooper and Anthony Cond at LUP. We are now includ-

ing book reviews, about which authors, publishers, and potential reviewers are encouraged to contact Clare Barker. I will, of course, continue to encourage submissions for future general issues, but am particularly excited about the specials we have planned, including Petra Kuppers and James Overboe's *Deleuze, Disability and Difference*; Georgina Kleege's *Blindness and Literature*; and Clare Barker and Stuart Murray's *Disabling Postcolonialism*. Also in the pipeline are Catherine Prendergast and Elizabeth Donaldson's *Representing Disability and Emotion*, Tom Couser's *Human Conditions: Disability and Life Writing*, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell's *Surplus Labor, Hardt and Negri, Class Issues and Planet Slum*, and Brenda Brueggemann's *Deafness in Literature*. That is to say, the direction of the journal will continue to be influenced by the most prominent figures in the literary and cultural disability studies movement.⁷

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7. Special thanks are due to Clare Barker, Lucy Burke, and Jane Goetzee for reading this introduction prior to publication.

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