

***The Disarticulate: Language, Disability, and the Narratives of Modernity.* By James Berger. New York: New York Univ. Press. 2014. ix, 299 pp. Cloth, \$79.00; paper, \$26.00.**

***Disability Rhetoric.* By Jay Timothy Dolmage. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press. 2014. xi, 349 pp. Cloth, \$39.95; e-book available.**

***Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race.* By Ellen Samuels. New York: New York Univ. Press. 2014. x, 263 pp. Cloth, \$79.00; paper, \$26.00.**

Much of the intellectual energy of current scholarship in disability studies arises from intersections with other fields, where new combinations bring out unexpected questions and reanimate familiar texts and problems. Three recent works offer sustained reflections on the benefits and challenges of intersectionality. James Berger's *The Disarticulate* examines figures of cognitive or linguistic impairment in literary texts extending from *Gilgamesh* to contemporary fiction by Don DeLillo, Paul Auster, and Jerzy Kosinski, with a particular focus on literary modernism. He refers to these figures as the "dys-/disarticulate," using the slash to signal their exclusion and silencing, as well as their association with pathology. Berger begins with the premise that catachresis is the basis of all language, meaning that, instead of being a marginal figure, the dys-/disarticulate is actually central to all communication.

Berger is particularly concerned with the intersection of disability and trauma studies. He claims these fields have suffered from mutual neglect: where disability studies has refused to address trauma, focusing instead on the deviant body's transgressive potential, trauma studies can be so totalizing that it loses sight of the agency and abilities of imperfect bodies and social formations. Where disability is unable to mourn, trauma studies is unable to stop mourning. And where disability studies resists metaphorizing the deviant body, trauma studies is premised on a theory of poesis that sees texts as symptomatic. For Berger, the dys-/disarticulate bridges the two fields since it represents both the figurative limits of the social-symbolic and the ethical dilemmas raised by actual physical and intellectual impairment. Of particular note is his incisive reading of Ahab's monomania as the product not of his disability in itself but as the symptom of his traumatization at the loss of his limb. To be sure, Berger's argument requires him to simplify varied and complex bodies of work. Since this book grows out of his original expertise in trauma studies, at times he relies on outdated works and paradigms to illustrate the limitations of disability studies. Nonetheless, *The Disarticulate* represents a wide-ranging, provocative, and often compelling attempt to create dialogue that is bound to have an impact on future work in each field.

Where *The Disarticulate* argues that disability studies should recognize trauma and loss, Jay Timothy Dolmage's *Disability Rhetoric* seeks what is generative and empowering about disabled bodies. Where Berger focuses on the breakdown or impossibility of genuine communication, Dolmage is invested in the capacity of language to make meaning. *Disability Rhetoric* makes an extended argument for the intersection of the two terms in its title. Dolmage urges rhetoric to attend to bodies, and disability studies to consider how discourse informs the experience of embodiment. He describes his methodology as *metis*, a term that connotes cunning, adaptive, and embodied intelligence, as well as the practice of forging something positive from the myriad possibilities opened up by disability. Readers of Berger's more cautionary bent may find Dolmage overly cheery when he insists on the potential strength, subversion, beauty, and agency of the disabled figure, while others will appreciate such affirmations as performing valuable cultural work.

Disability Rhetoric is flawed by its excesses: it is highly repetitive and introduces an abundance of Greek terms, many of which are never used or mentioned again. It also has considerable strengths, including its revisionist take on the ancient period where rhetoric got its start and where the field continues to be grounded. To counter the Platonic/Aristotelian canon that has disparaged and stigmatized disability, Dolmage introduces traditions that affirmed and welcomed disability, grounded in the myths of Tiresias, Hermaphrodite, and Hephaestus. Another valuable contribution is Dolmage's catalog of disability tropes. This section may feel elementary to readers already knowledgeable about the field, but it will be effective for teaching undergraduates and readers without prior exposure to disability studies.

The intersection that concerns Ellen Samuels's *Fantasies of Identification* is the convergence of disability, race, and gender. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Samuels argues, the United States experienced a crisis in its understanding and identification of individual bodies making up the body politic. In response, bodies were categorized through the use of biological markers that have stubbornly persisted even when disproved or undermined. Although often more explicitly about race and gender, fantasies of identification, Samuels shows, are frequently grounded in disability as "the trope and embodiment of true physical difference" (3).

In this smart and readable book, Samuels traces her subject from the nineteenth century into the early twenty-first, where it persists in debates over blood quantum, DNA testing, and disabled parking permits. Samuels offers insightful readings of disability in texts that have often been analyzed in terms of race and gender, like Ellen Craft's slave narrative, representations of the trial of Salomé Muller, Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* (1857), and Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins* (1894). In Samuels's analysis, disability serves as an anchor for bodily difference even as race and gender prove to be shifting and mutable. At the same time, she introduces the notion of the "disability con," which attests to a persistent and

abiding skepticism about the realness of disabled bodies. Thus American culture of this period, and the fantasies of identification it generates, are marked by a contradictory insistence on disability as the ultimate form of embodied difference and doubt about its definition and permanence.

The second half of the book moves to the present, where Samuels coins the term *biocertification* to describe the proliferation of official documents that seek to authenticate social identities through biological means. To illustrate this contradictory practice, she examines disabled parking permits, which are issued by all states, but with significant disparities in the rules regarding certification. Surveying websites set up to detect fraud, Samuels provides a fascinating window into popular beliefs about fraudulence and authenticity regarding disability.

Samuels's final examples concern the convoluted logic of using blood quantum and DNA testing to determine ability, gender, and racial identity. Drawing examples from disability and Native American history, Samuels shows how the same discourses were used to identify very different social and political subjects. The standards that measured competency of the "feble-minded" were also used to determine whether Native people qualified to own land to which they were entitled by blood. Samuels also considers how Native Americans have responded to these contradictions by celebrating alternative sources of identity, heritage, and community, making an intriguing comparison between these social understandings of "blood" and the social model of disability.

Ultimately all three works make an important contribution to current research in disability, literary, and cultural studies. Together they cover an expansive swath of literary history, while attesting to the value of thinking seriously and systematically about disability as it intersects with the fields of rhetoric, trauma studies, race, and gender studies. As with all good intersectional scholarship, they show how such dialogue can challenge and enrich the boundaries of each field.

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