

ENGL W4917y
Topics in Literature and Society:

WRITING ON DISABILITY

Professor Christopher Baswell

Writings about disability and eccentric bodies, from Oedipus of the swollen foot to *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. Texts will cover a range of periods, including medieval narratives of miraculous cure, the hunchback king in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and a powerfully immobile and sexually magnetic woman in Trollope's *Barchester Towers*. While the course will focus on motor disability and bodily variety, students will be encouraged (and required in the Bibliographical exercise, see below) to seek out texts that address other issues such as blindness, deafness, or mental disability. Critical readings will be drawn from the emerging field of Disability Studies. Issues to be addressed will include, in addition, the great historical shift from notions of the "ideal" or heroic, to the "normal" body; the social construction of disability; the cripple as icon or agent; disabled identity and the return of the memoire.

Course Requirements:

- 2 shorter (6-8 page) papers, on an earlier and later text. (50%)
- Brief bibliographical exercise. Each student will identify a text not on the syllabus, and offer a brief argument (250-500 words) about why it should be. Several of the texts will be reproduced for reading in the last class meeting. (10%)
- 2 brief mid-terms, largely intended to keep students up with assigned reading. (20%)
- A take-home final. A choice among several essay topics that invite broad reflection on major issues in the course. (20%)

Course Books

- A copyright-legal course reader will be available.
- Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*
University of Michigan Press, 2000 \$23.95 paperback **ISBN-13:** 978-0472086269
- Lennard Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* (NB: Second Edition)
Routledge, 2006 \$44.95 paperback (Amazon) **ISBN-13:** 978-0415953344
- William Shakespeare, *Richard III*
(Signet Classic) \$5.95 **ISBN-13:** 978-0451526953
- Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*
Oxford's World Classics \$9.95 **ISBN-13:** 978-0192834324
- Sylvia Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind*
(Touchstone 2001) \$5.99 on Amazon **ISBN-10:** 0743224574
- Jean-Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*
Vintage \$10.36 on Amazon **ISBN-13:** 978-0375701214

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

WEEK 1

MEETING 1: Introduction: What is Disability Studies? Critical theory or social Movement? Can these two categories help each other? Who defines disability, for what ends?

MEETING 2:

Nancy Mairs, "On Being a Cripple" (course reader)

Leonard Kriegel, "Beloved Enemy: A Cripple in the City" (course reader)

In Ruth O'Brien, ed., *Voices from the Edge* (NY: Oxford, 2004), pp. 121 – 36.

Tobin Siebers, "Disability in Theory: From Social Construction to the New Realism of the Body," in Davis, *Reader*, pp. 173 – 84.

WEEK 2

Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*

Stiker, Ch. 3 "Western Antiquity: the Fear of the Gods," pp. 39 – 64.

Background reading: Tiresias, Hephaistos/Vulcan (course reader)

WEEK 3

MEETING 1: *Beowulf*, trans. Michael Alexander (Penguin, 2003), pp. 3 – 33
(course reader)

Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds., *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (U Toronto Press, 2003), Introduction, "Conceptualizing the Monstrous," pp. 1 – 27 (course reader)

MEETING 2: Gerald of Wales, *History and Topography of Ireland*, Book 2, trans. John O'Meara (Penguin), pp. 57 – 91 (course reader)

Rachel Adams, *Sideshow USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (U Chicago, 2001), 1, "Overture: Recovering Otis," pp. 1 – 24 (course reader)

WEEK 4

MEETING 1: The Life of St. Osith, trans. Jane Zatta, amended and annotated by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. *Papers on Language and Literature* 41, nos. 3-4, Special Issue (2005) (course reader).

Stiker, Ch. 2, "The Bible and Disability: The Cult of God"

MEETING 2: Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue, The Pardoner and Summoner; The Pardoner's Tale (course reader)

Erving Goffman, Selections from *Stigma*, in Davis, *Reader*, pp. 131 – 40.

Susan Sontag, "AIDS and its Metaphors," in Davis, *Reader*, pp. 153 – 60.

WEEK 5

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*

Shelley Tremain, "On the Government of Disability: Foucault, Power, and the Subject of Impairment," in Davis, *Reader*, pp. 185 – 97.

WEEK 6

FIRST PAPER DUE

Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, Book III, ch. 11, "Of Cripples"

At <http://www.aber.ac.uk/~jmcwww/Montaigne/essay105.html>

Francis Bacon, "Of Deformity" (course reader)

[? John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pages on changeling]

Stiker, Ch. 4 "The System(s) of Charity"

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, "Narrative Prosthesis and The Materiality of Metaphor," in Davis, *Reader*, pp. 205 – 16.

WEEK 7

MIDTERM 1

Alexander Pope, "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" and "The First Epistle of the First Book of Horace: To Lord Bolingbroke" (course reader)

Stiker, Ch. 5 "The Classical Centuries: The Chill"

Helen Deutsch, "Bolingbroke's Laugh: Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Bolingbroke* and the Rhetoric of Bodied Exemplarity," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 38 (2005): 137 – 61. (pdf file)

WEEK 8

Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*

Lennard J. Davis, "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century," in Davis, *Reader*, pp. 3 – 16.

WEEK 9

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL EXERCISE DUE

Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*

WEEK 10

Jean-Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*

James C. Wilson, "(Re)Writing the Genetic Body: Disability, Textuality, and the Human Genome Project," in Davis, *Reader*, pp. 67 – 78.

WEEK 11

Sylvia Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind*

WEEK 12

SECOND PAPER DUE

Documentary: "The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom?" directed by Adam Curtis, at www.freedocumentaries.org

WEEK 13

MIDTERM 2

Film: "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?"

Stiker, Ch. 6, "The Birth of Rehabilitation"

WEEK 14

Texts to be determined: selections from Bibliographical Exercise