

THE MYSTERY OF THE SITUATED BODY: FINDING STABILITY  
THROUGH NARRATIVES OF DISABILITY IN THE DETECTIVE GENRE

A Dissertation

by

ADRIENNE CHRISTINE FOREMAN

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Chair of Committee,	Anne Morey
Committee Members,	Sally Robinson
	Mary Ann O'Farrell
	Dan Humphrey
Head of Department,	Nancy Warren

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## ABSTRACT

The appearance, use, and philosophy of the disabled detective are latent even in early detective texts, such as in Arthur Conan Doyle's canonical Sherlock Holmes series. By philosophy, I am referring to both why the detective feels compelled to detect as well as the system of detection the detective uses and on which the text relies. Because the detective feels incompatible with the world around him (all of the detectives I analyze in this dissertation are men), he is driven to either fix himself, the world, or both. His systematic approach includes diagnosing problems through symptomatology and removing the deficient aspect. While the detective narrative's original framework assimilates bodies to medical and scientific discourses and norms in order to represent a stable social order, I argue that contemporary detective subgenres, including classical disability detective texts, hardboiled disability detective texts and postmodern disability detective texts, respond to this framework by making the portrayal of disability explicit by allocating it to the detective. The texts present disability as both a literary mechanism that uses disability to represent abstract metaphors (of hardship, of pity, of heroism) and a cultural construct in and of itself. I contend that the texts use disability to investigate what it means to be an individual and a member of society. Thus, I trace disability in detective fiction as it parallels the cultural move away from the autonomous individual and his participation in a stable social order and move towards the socially located agent and shifting situational values.

## DEDICATION

To all of the books and all of the people that made my world bigger.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional detective fiction presents a narrative in which the world is naturally stable and only threatened by moments of instability—such as in instances of crime. Even though episodes of instability occur again and again, the texts create a narrative that continuously resolves them. William V. Spanos explains that “the detective story has its source in the comforting certainty that an acute ‘eye,’ private or otherwise, can solve the crime with resounding finality by inferring causal relationships between clues which point to it” (150). In detective fiction, the totalizing narrative of the world is a “positive” one; an individual can observe the world and know truth. Spanos continues, “so the ‘form’ of the well-made positivistic universe is grounded in the equally comforting certainty that the scientist and/or psychoanalyst can solve the immediate problem” (150). But more than that, the world is *knowable*; the detective (an individual with the right knowledge and power) can know the world.

In order to solve mysteries, detective fiction focuses on physical clues, including the physicality of bodies not just of the victim, but also those of the detective, the criminals, and witnesses, including their clothes, musculature, wounds, skin color, and gender—and, of course, all of these are highly loaded with sociocultural meanings. These clues are tangible ways to posit answers about identity, and so the body is intrinsic to the mysteries. The mysteries are solved by defining the body, loading it with answers, and then presenting these determinations of the body as fixed in the body and in the texts.



Detective texts have increasingly replaced an emphasis upon the mystery of the process of the crime with an emphasis upon the mystery of identity, both the criminal's and the detective's. The process of the crime and the crime-solving substantiate the characters; they are texts, realized. One of the ways in which detective fiction developed from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that questions of character became more important than questions of plot. This is one of the reasons detective fiction has been a popular genre recently for narratives that focus on cultural identity. In the latter half of the twentieth century, there have been feminist, gay and lesbian, Latino/a, and African-American detective texts. Detective fiction can be a place to stabilize or destabilize the foundation of character and whether the mysteries (of the crime, of identity) can be pierced; the texts portray how we look at bodies, how that regard connects with identity, and whether larger answers can be drawn.

Recently, detective fiction has highlighted disempowered or marginalized people and their relationships with law and order. Disability detective fiction has developed as a popular subgenre within this larger field; these texts construct disability in connection with the ideology of detection. By situating disability in a genre that is stylistically interested in "solving" mysteries, mysteries that inevitably focus on bodies (dead or living), these texts tend to present disability as itself a mystery to be solved. I bring to criticism on detective fiction a survey and an analysis of the uses of the disabled body and disability in relation to developing ideologies of social order. In this dissertation, I first read Sherlock Holmes as a model of the positivist detective text and then show how disability is already latent in it. In the following chapters, I compare representations of disability in examples of recent 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century classical, hardboiled, and post-modern subgenres in order to

compare their cultural constructions of the body. Traditionally, classical detective fiction is predominantly British, while hardboiled detective fiction is predominantly American. But, contemporary subgenres have moved away from the already fuzzy separation along geographical lines. Although I analyze both classical and hardboiled subgenres, the trends I focus on in disability detective texts appear most prominently in American detective literature as of the 1990s. While these subgenres emerged diachronically in the history of detective literature, they exist currently as subgenres with contemporary texts fitting into each. The texts use a narrative of disability in order to make manifest bodily abnormality and normality first through positivism and then by complicating positivism with the concepts of subjectivity and embodied existence. In the traditional construction of detective fiction, the detective can identify other abnormalities because of his own abnormalities, which are read as superiorities. He can then fix or remove abnormalities and return the world to a normal and stable state. In varying degrees and in different ways, contemporary detective fiction subgenres adapt the original positivistic formulation, which relies on identifying abnormality, by paying attention to the contexts of the bodies of the detectives.

The body has been important to art and literature in a variety of ways as a symbol, inspiration, and subject. Texts such as the anthology *The Body and the Arts* explore concepts of embodiment, the tension between actual bodies and an ideal body, and the relationship between representations of the body and artists, just to name a few. Studies have recognized what an unusual device the body is in detective fiction. The crimes in detective texts most often present dead or violated bodies as an object of analysis. Bodies have been treated as clinical clues, as dirty byways, or as central foci that determine most of the story. *South Central Review* published a special issue about the body and detective literature. In it, Joy

Palmer's "Tracing Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Forensic Detective Fiction" explains how important the body has been for forensic fiction and asks whether this can be used as a way to represent feminist concepts of "the material and embodied realities of history" (68). For Palmer, forensic science offers one pathway to follow embodied realities, but, as Marla Harris points out in "Passing and Posing: The Japanese American Body in the Detective Fiction of Sujata Massey and Dale Furutani," detective fiction can also commodify bodies.

While the body of the victim may be more straightforwardly important, the body of the detective also plays a vital role in the texts. His or her presence and physical actions cause the plot development. His or her body interacts with that of the victim. And his or her continued appearance from volume to volume (many detectives appear in long-running series), also emphasizes physical presence. Similarly, the notorious character of the femme fatale in hardboiled detective texts includes another particularly emphasized body. Her character, by definition, must be attractive and overtly sexual.<sup>1</sup> The femme fatale often leads the detective into danger, where he becomes the injured body of focus, and an important feature in many hardboiled texts is the detective's involvement with the femme fatale's body. Although they are very interesting figures for critical analysis and feminism, femme fatales tend to be one-dimensional characters dominated by their physicality. In all of these characters—the victim, the detective, and the femme fatale—the body in large part defines identity and is at the center of the mystery.

Because contemporary detective fiction has explored identity as a topic, much of the contemporary literary criticism of detective fiction focuses on single categories of identity:

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<sup>1</sup> Some texts take it farther physically. In *The Dain Curse* (1929), Gabrielle Dain has small, pointed ears and teeth. She also uses drugs that affect her physically. The mystery in part is explained away through her biological body, using theories of phrenology, degeneration, and criminal anthropology.

gender (including works on feminism and masculinity studies), class, and race. These analyses range from histories of the development of cultural markers of identity to comparisons of social attitudes and ideologies. Analysis of disability within detective works has been largely absent in literary criticism. I analyze disability as a cultural marker of identity and use the texts' representations of disability to theorize cultural constructs of embodiment, mind/body dualism, visual consumption, and power exchange.

While the detective canon still consists primarily of white, middle class, able-bodied men, recent criticism on detective texts has paid attention to what representations of marginalized groups there are in the detective genre, including both representations of minor characters in the canonical texts as well as major characters in newer fiction that rewrites the tradition from different perspectives. Linda Mizejewski's feminist work *Hardboiled and High Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture* (2004) chronicles the historical progression of females in the detective genre. Stephen F. Soitos's *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction* (1996) and John Cullen Gruesser's "Chester Himes, 'He Knew,' and the History of African American Detective Fiction" (2010) are examples of new histories of race in the genre.

Along with historical and quantitative research on identity in detective fiction, there have also been investigations of sex, gender, and ethnicity that analyze how concepts employed within the texts (such as "masculinity" or "blackness") represent complicated social attitudes. In *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism, and Hard-boiled Detective Fiction* (1997), Jopi Nyman details how "hard-boiled fiction projects a fantasy of the autonomous and powerful masculine subject, a fantasy that is shown to be impossible to achieve but always aimed at in the world of the novels" (7). Alongside works focusing on

masculinity, critics have questioned how feminist detective fiction assumes a subject position defined by white masculinity and how this does and does not compromise the feminist project of the fiction. Manina Jones and Priscilla Walton argue in *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hardboiled Tradition* (1999) that contemporary women in detective fiction “writing along hard-boiled formal and stylistic lines...are at the same time challenging the gender boundaries demarcated in earlier male writers, and indeed, potentially undermining the very system of values on which the male hard-boiled tradition is founded” (7). Similar to Jones and Walton’s discussion of gender, Agustin Reyes-Torres, in “Coffin Ed Johnson, Grave Digger Jones, and Easy Rawlins: Black Skins and Black Psyches” (2010), asserts that African-American hardboiled detectives establish blackness as their modus operandi, positing that they denounce American society’s racism while using race as their main weapon. These ideas are important to my own work because the texts I analyze use the detective format to challenge notions of disability but from within an abled-bodied system.

My work references critical works on race, gender, and sex because of similarities in cultural identities and relationships between empowerment and disempowerment. Understanding representations of disability could provide new insights into how the body and deviance function culturally. However, it is essential that I recognize the differences for disability. In *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder observe that while disability is similar to gender, sexuality, and race as a “constructed category of discourse investment,” it is different because it is a “deviant” biology used as a discrediting feature, and it “serves as the material marker for inferiority itself” (3). They note that “physical or cognitive inferiority has historically

characterized the means by which bodies have been constructed as deviant” –i.e., femininity and hysteria, biological race, pathological homosexuality (2). Attributing inferiority to bodily causes is a prominent part of the detective narrative. In particular, this type of physical deviance appears in the representation of disability in contemporary texts, from the super(dis)abled detective to the insane villain and the “cripples” and “fools” who become easy targets.

Mitchell and Snyder point out how studies in race, gender, and ethnicity have investigated the dearth of images of each of these disempowered identities in literature in general. In contrast, there has not been a dearth of images of disability in literature. In European literary history as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, “disability served as a primary weapon in the artistic repertoire which sought to establish the ‘common people’ as an appropriate subject” (5). Mitchell and Snyder use the phrase “narrative prosthesis” to elucidate disability in the literary domain within a social context. Narrative prosthesis refers to “the pervasiveness of disability as a device of characterization in narrative art” (9). Additionally, narrative prosthesis “enables a contrast between the prosthetic leanings of mainstream discourses that would disguise or obliterate the evidence of physical and cognitive differences, and literary efforts that expose prosthesis as an artificial, and thus, resignifiable relation” (9).

Mitchell and Snyder’s work and Tobin Siebers’ *Disability Aesthetics* have analyzed how disability has been used in literature. Irving K. Zola has narrowed the focus on disability to a particular genre in his article “‘Any Distinguishing Features?’ The Portrayal of Disability in the Crime-Mystery Genre.” Fans and academics have also collected lists of

disabled detectives on websites such as “The Physically Disabled Detective.”<sup>2</sup> Despite these studies’ efforts to expand perspectives on detective fiction, there continues to be an absence of critical works analyzing disability and detective texts.

I analyze how the representations of characters with impairments can be used to analyze larger concepts of disability and body that operate outside the world of the detective text. This dissertation identifies the positivist criminology tendencies in modern detective fiction. Because of the positivist framework, disability is presented as visibly explicable and is used to reestablish control. One reason why detective fiction, in particular, depicts inferior bodies is because, with the rise of science in the nineteenth century, people began to look at the body, in addition to philosophy and religion, as a source of human behavior. The disciplines of phrenology and physiognomy were very popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and were referenced in the popular fiction of the period, including in the Sherlock Holmes series. Physiognomy is the assessment of a person’s outward characteristics to understand his character. Phrenology is the belief that human conduct could be understood by analyzing bumps on the head. These bumps indicate hypertrophy of different areas of the brain, and therefore which characteristics are dominant. Phrenologists were part of the scientific trend towards thinking of human behavior in neurological rather than philosophical or religious terms. Specifically, Cesare Lombroso incorporates the concepts of physiognomy and phrenology in his 1876 text *Criminal Man*. In it, he defines a born criminal as “an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals” (Introduction xxiv–xxv). In this frame, this type of criminal is not a person who commits crime but a criminal who is born inferior and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wright.edu/~martin.kich/DetbyProf/Disabled.htm>

animalistic. Lombroso and Holmes look for physical clues such as the size of the cranium and facial and bodily anomalies to identify the criminal type.

The Holmesian texts exist in a liminal space between the waning ideas of the criminal type and modern forensics' focus on the individual. According to Tom Gunning in "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," "the role of the modern detective did not correspond to the earlier 'physiologies' which subsumed criminals under ideal physical types. Identification, rather, relied on the absolute and ineradicable individuality (and unique culpability) of a specific criminal" (23). Arthur Conan Doyle uses the word "singular" in almost every one of the Holmes stories. Holmes frequently takes cases and pays attention to clues that are the most "singular." In 2002, Holmes was awarded the Royal Society of Chemistry honorary fellowship for his use of forensics; he is the first and only fictional character to have been so honored (McGourty). In general, detective fiction moves in the direction of forensics and singularity in which the detective diagnoses individual characteristics and then understands them through a system of norms. As Gunning explains, forensics, such as forensic photography and fingerprinting, inscribe "the deviant body with a socially defined individuality, an individuality which rested ultimately on its structural differentiation from all other recorded individual bodies...but the marks of this difference also had to be rationalized, made systematic, to allow comparisons and identifications" (34). While forensics including photography undermined the traditional ideas of the criminal type, "within the practice of criminology and detective fiction the photograph could also be used as a guarantor of identity and as a means of establishing guilt or innocence" (19). To have a visual record is to create a conclusive answer.



According to Gunning, in the use of forensics and photography, bodies are resolved in an “interplay between an articulated system of oppositional elements (the parts of the body chosen for specific measurement) and their actualization in specific individual bodies. Not only could the measurement and morphological description of the different bodily elements be cross-referenced but they could also be arranged against a curve of statistical norms” (31). The earlier typing system groups people according to similarities. This system tends to cast judgments about groups; certain groups are clearly superior and, thus, others are inferior. However, the individual system groups people according to perceived differences. There is a norm from which everything deviates. The texts present an able-bodied norm from which all disabled bodies deviate. In the indexical use of forensics, criminologists translate bodies into a series of signs, and disabled bodies are the most visible clues.

In each chapter of this dissertation, I analyze a visual text, either a detective film or a television show, alongside detective novels. As a visual text constructs concepts and subject matter differently than novels do, the visual representations of the detectives offer different constructions of disability. However, as Christian Metz explains cinema is “more perceptual than certain other arts according to the list of its sensory registers” (45). Thus cinema has a different relationship with perception and representation. Critics such as André Bazin have seen cinema as capable of being “mystical revelation, as ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ unfolding by right” (Metz 52). Correspondingly, as disability studies have pointed out, many common sayings rely on ableist language such as the phrase “I see” which means “I understand.” Seeing does not translate to understanding, and understanding can easily occur without sight

or seeing. In contemporary detective films, there is a combination of cinematic possibilities of visual perception of truth and a genre that rests on sensory perception of truth.

Historically, photography has been significant in shaping identity. Jonathan Crary declares that photography has reshaped “an entire territory on which signs and images, each effectively severed from a referent, circulate and proliferate” (14). People with disabilities have been historically fetishized through visual depictions and consumption. Disability studies activist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that clinical photography is in large part responsible for medicalizing the disabled, which reduces whole persons to mere pathologies. Garland-Thomson maintains that in these medical depictions, the disabled body is fetishized; therefore, no possible multidimensional nature of disabled subjects can occur. According to Ann Millett, in these medical frameworks, “the image’s ‘offering’ is an opportunity to gaze/stare at the amputee” (12). Along with clinical photography, photographs and visual depictions/performances of “freaks,” a la circuses and freak shows, also proliferated the social spectacle of and public looking at people with disabilities.

The ideal positivist detective becomes an entity like a camera. Since its invention, the camera has been used as a tool of medicine and of the gaze, and, it changed the cultural concept of identity itself. According to Millett, “One of the first uses of photography in the 19th century was for documentation of patients for medical records, education, and media publication” (18). So photography was first used for medical and identifying purposes, and the genre of medical photography is “one of the major photographic modes used to shape our modern notion of disability” (Thomson 336). As Millett states, “photography’s presumed depiction of objective reality equates the medium with scientific accuracy and medical precision” (18). Thus, the pathological diminution of disabled persons, through

photography and through the eye of the detective, has been considered accurate, precise, and objective.

Like photography, the history of representations of disability in literature has helped shape our modern notion of disability. There have been numerous representations of impairments and narrative uses of them in creative works. Mitchell and Snyder pursue disability “as a character-making trope in the writer’s and filmmaker’s arsenal, as a social category of deviance, as a symbolic vehicle for meaning making and cultural critique, and as an option in the narrative negation of disabled subjectivity” (1). Mitchell and Snyder point out that “the question is not whether disability is cause or symptom of, or distraction from, a disturbing behavioral trait, but whether its mystery can be pierced by the storyteller” (6). Because the “narrative of disability’s very unknowability [...] consolidates the need to tell a story about it” (Mitchell and Snyder 6), disability adds new perspective into detective fiction’s obsession with mysteries.

Disabled detectives appear across the history of detective literature—for example, Hercule Poirot has a severe limp from a war injury—but the function of disabilities has changed within contemporary texts. In the early Sherlock Holmes novels, I am deliberately anachronistically labeling Holmes using current concepts of disability, which are different from earlier concepts of “cripples” and “fools.” However, the portrayal of Sherlock Holmes has inspired the contemporary subgenre of the disabled detective. Additionally, disability has become a more central focus in contemporary texts. As Mitchell points out, in the history of literary depictions of disability, “while stories rely on the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions” (“Narrative” 16). While perhaps flawed in some of their representations of

disability, many of the texts I analyze take up some social and political dimensions of disability and persons with disabilities. There is currently a proliferation of disabled detective texts, including the popular television series Andy Breckman's *Monk* (2002). For these newer disabled detective texts, not only is the central detective impaired, but his disability greatly augments his detective abilities. His disability is central to the text and the detection.

### **Defining Disability**

Most of the texts I analyze present specific diagnoses of the characters' impairments; they talk about treatments, hospitalizations, and causes of the impairments and the resulting disabilities. The texts present characters' impairments and disabilities using the medical model of disability, which defines disability as resulting from a medical condition intrinsic to the individual's body. Managing disability is then understood as healing the illness from a clinical perspective and/or attempting to make the disabled person's body as "normal" as possible. In addition, many of the texts address how the characters' disabilities result in part from societal limitations and judgments. Because the contemporary texts present a combination of a medical and social framework for their portrayals of impairments and disabilities, I turn to one of the most pivotal codified definitions of disability in contemporary America in order to begin defining disability for this dissertation. The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) was a great achievement of civil rights for persons with disabilities, which Christopher Donoghue calls "a finely crafted piece of legislation that is not simply reflective of only one political ideology. Instead, it is a combination of various political schools of thought wrapped up into one piece of legislation" (202). The ADA defines a person with a disability as an individual with "a physical or mental impairment that

substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.” (“American”) I have included the full ADA Amendment Act of 2008’s Definition of Disability and Rules of Construction in Appendix A. (“ADA”). In these definitions, impairment is the condition of the person and disability is the resulting state caused by or in response to such an impairment.

In order to clarify that the characters are perceived as disabled in the texts, I argue that the disabled character is as follows:

- 1) A character with a physical or mental impairment.
- 2) A character whose major life activities are portrayed as limited because of the impairment and because of a conflict between the impairment and surrounding cultural norms. And,
- 3) A character that is perceived as impaired and limited in activities by other characters and/or the narration.

And yet the representation of disability in the texts is far more complex than merely “diagnosing” characters as impaired and disabled. How do the texts imagine disability? In “Disability Images and the Art of Theorizing Normality,” Tanya Titchkosky asks the reader to imagine disability, and she then states,

You made an image; maybe you chose to imagine a wheelchair, a missing limb...a roomful of activists...maybe even a character in a novel you just read... We never come to imagine and perceive disability ‘purely,’ we perceive disability through our cultural assumptions. While there is no one correct representation of disability, there are more or less typical

representations of embodied differences that *count* as disability in Western cultures (76).

Disability is not merely a given, a thing that exists that just needs to be correctly identified. Instead, disability is made between people; it is negotiated through culture. Titchkosky asserts that “Every image of disability is an image of culture” and defines disability as “an imagined form of embodiment, usually devalued, but always inhabited by culture” (77,78). Disabled bodies are visible bodies—bodies that disrupt but also allow for the existence of “normal.” As such, the representations of disabled bodies (those that are abnormal, inferior, and disempowered) in these detective texts make the cultural practices of defining the body and negotiating order visible. Furthermore, the texts suggest that society is better if disabled bodies are contained by making them productive and/or by removing them altogether.

The texts I analyze in this dissertation use a variety of impairments in their representations of disability, from physical impairments such as quadriplegia and narcolepsy, to mental disorders such as Tourette’s Syndrome, and general portrayals of “psychosis” or “craziness.” I have chosen texts that use both physical impairments and mental disorders in this dissertation because the texts present similar narratives of disability using both. However, there are differences in the narratives about the two.

Mental disorders are diagnosed using the DSM-IV (“Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), and physical impairments are diagnosed using the ICD (“International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems”). Physical impairments refer to impairments that can be identified through available mechanical tests, while mental disorders are diagnosed only by behavioral symptoms. Dan Stein, Katharine A. Phillips, Derek Bolton et al. provide a chart that “operationalizes the

DSM-IV definition of mental disorder, in the standard format used for the operationalization of clinical diagnoses” (1760). According to their chart, the DSM-IV defines a mental disorder as a “clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome,” that “is associated with present distress or disability (i.e. impairment in one or more important areas of functioning,” and that is a “manifestation of a behavioral, psychological, or biological dysfunction in the individual” (1765). Additionally, the DSM-IV emphasizes that “no definition adequately specifies precise boundaries of mental disorders,” and “it lacks a consistent operational definition” (1765). I have included their chart in full as Appendix B.

One of the key differences between physical impairments and mental disorders is that physical impairments are more quantifiably identifiable as they are diagnosed by specific tests. Additionally, mental disorder is an aggregative term that can include multiple impairments. The divisions between mental and physical disorders also result in a number of cultural situational differences such as difference in health coverage and difference in stigmatization.

The DSM and the American Psychiatric Association has long been the authority on the definition of mental disorder and the disorders themselves. However, the National Institute of Mental Health released a statement on April 29, 2013 withdrawing their support for the upcoming DSM-V. Thomas Insel, NIMH’s director states that the DSM’s weakness is “its lack of validity. Unlike our definitions of ischemic heart disease, lymphoma, or AIDS, the DSM diagnoses are based on a consensus about clusters of clinical symptoms, not any objective laboratory measure.” Insel, speaking for NIMH, supports defining mental disorders using “precision medicine,” which has been used to transform cancer diagnoses and

treatments. Insel suggests breaking down these separations between physical impairments and mental disorders that I have outlined.

Although many scientists and theorists argue that the division between mental and physical disorders is a false dichotomy, there are a number of reasons for the division, including the philosophical and theological conceptions of the mind/soul and body split that I'll discuss in Chapter II. In these conceptions, the mind and body are seen as fundamentally different; a body can be abnormal or inferior without the permanent "self" necessarily being diminished, which is not as true when it comes to mental disorders. Historically, many mental behaviors were understood as demonic possession, punishment from God, or moral weaknesses. Many scientists now believe that disorders have strong genetic, neurochemical, biological, and/or neuropsychiatric bases even if tests for them are not yet available.

The texts I discuss in general present a narrative of disability that encompasses both mental and physical impairments. They are both depicted as abnormalities that can be perceived on the body in order to understand the person. In addition, they are both used in order to stabilize social order. However, there are narrative differences between the two that can be seen from the Holmes stories onward. Physical impairments tend to be presented as overt; they do not need to be made visible because they are already visible. In contrast, the texts usually work to make the mental impairments apparent and observable. Responses from characters perceiving the person with a disability also differ depending on the visibility of the disorder.

In addition to recognizing slippage between mental and physical impairments in the texts as well as in this dissertation, it is also important to recognize the slippage between disabled and superabled. While the bodily abnormalities of the characters, the impairments



and disorders, are often characterized as sources of inferiority that limit the characters' life activities, beginning with the Sherlock Holmes canon the characters are frequently also superabled because of their abnormalities. They function differently, and some of their differences allow them to function better than the rest of "ordinary" society in specific ways. They are also frequently perceived as superior in certain aspects of their work and lives because of the superabilities. For example, Monk from the CBS show of the same name has severe OCD. He works as a consultant for the police department after he is discharged from the force following a nervous breakdown. In the show, he still has problems leaving his house and has a nurse who helps with day to day activity that he cannot complete. However, his OCD is also the cause of his obsessive attention to detail, which allows him to solve cases with better abilities than any other detective in the show. He is disabled and superabled at the same time. In a blog post titled "The Disabled and Superabled: A Conflation of Deviance," Karina points out that

Just as disabled bodies become marked as spectacles of physical deviation, so do the bodies of superheroes. In a culture that remains obstinately norm-oriented, it's no wonder that two models of physical form that seem to be so diametrically opposed still become subjected to the same rhetoric of looking as part of the social construction of their identities. (Karina)

Karina points out that characters who are diametrically opposed, disabled and superabled characters, are described using the same rhetoric. There are also instances where a character is both disabled and superabled, and both depictions use the same rhetoric. Scott Bukatman asserts that culture is as obsessively focused upon the body of the comic book superhero as upon the body of the disabled person. He points out that the superhero is frequently a

mutant: they are “an accident of birth, a freak of nature, or a consequence of technology run wild” (49). They have life activities that are limited because of their bodily abnormalities and are seen by others as limited and/or inferior. Constructions of characters as both disabled and superabled do reevaluate simplistic portrayals of persons with disabilities as monolithically inferior, incapable, and disabled. Yet, the characterizations of characters as disabled and superabled still negotiate the person based on an abled and normative paradigm; they are defined primarily by their dis/superabled characteristics. Additionally, these characters are spectacles of interest to the reader/audience only through their bodily abnormalities.

The superabled narrative relates also to the super-crip narrative that is a common stereotype in representations of persons with disabilities. The super-crip narrative portrays persons with disabilities as overcoming their afflictions in order to succeed triumphantly in one way or another. Articles about athletes with impairments frequently use this approach. Similarly, a *Time* magazine piece from 1988 about Stephen Hawking refers to him as “confined to a wheelchair, a virtual prisoner in his own body, but his intellect carries him to the far reaches of the universe” (Jaroff). As in the super/disabled conflation, such super-crip stereotypes rely on a normative benchmark of personhood.

The super-crip narrative plays off of the pity of disabled people and the fear of becoming disabled. In order to be considered “heroic super achievers” for completing normal activities such as living, breathing, and working, expectations for the person with disabilities must be very low. Joe Shapiro writes about a woman with polio, Cyndi Jones, who was picked to be the March of Dimes poster child at five years of age. She was lauded, praised, kissed by the mayor, and then an advertisement for polio vaccination came out with

two photographs; “One was of a young brother and sister, holding hands and joyfully skipping through a field. Over their picture was stamped: THIS. Next to them was a picture of Jones, leaning grimly on her braces, hair curled, decked out in one of her new party dresses. The caption over Jones’s picture said: NOT THIS” (13). In this narrative, the fear of becoming disabled is used as motivation for social change. The end hope is that rejecting Jones (choosing “NOT THIS”) will result in a world with less (perhaps no) polio and no people like Jones. Shapiro writes about how Jones hoped as a child that she would be “fixed” as well. Now, Jones refuses to think of her childhood polio as tragic. She would not take a cure even if it were available because according to Jones, “It’s the same thing as asking a black person would he change the color of his skin” (Shapiro 14). In the construction of the vaccine advertisement, the visual narrative fights polio by playing on the pity people feel about people with disabilities and the fear they have of themselves becoming disabled. The suggestion is that the world would be healthy if we removed the unhealthy disabled aspects.

The super-crip narrative and many other narratives of disability depict more about the culture creating the narratives than about the objects of the narrative. The super-crip narrative is often presented in comparison to the able-bodied speaker; i.e. “If that were me, I could not do it. I could not live like *that*.” The suggestion is that there is an optimal type of being that makes life worthwhile and that we are in control of our bodies as long as we are not disabled. In this dissertation, I combine disability studies with detective fiction in order to show how common cultural narratives of law and order function on the back of disabled bodies. Furthermore, I assert that an explicit use of detectives with disabilities makes the relationship between law and order and disability more transparent.

Detective literature presents a fantasy of answers and control. By emphasizing logic, science, and deductions, the genre obscures that it is a fantasy and portrays the goal of ordering the world as achievable. Most detective texts suggest that the superhero detective is someone the reader should try to emulate. We are asked to figure out the clues as he does—even when that is impossible. By moving the emphasis away from solving bodies and onto why such a solution is desirable, this dissertation exposes the fact that the detective genre responds to cultural fears about universal instability and lack of normalcy. The texts' representations of the detectives' disabilities make the body more visible in detective texts, and, thus, make the cultural process of defining, judging, and using the body more visible as well. When only the criminal or the victim is seen as disabled, cultural hierarchies are affirmed; he or she is a villain or a pitiable figure because of the disability. When the detective is disabled, the disability becomes a more complex aspect of identity and identification in the texts. By blurring the boundaries between the detective, the criminal, and the victim, the texts' shift their focus away from the person's label to the cultural process that has thus defined them. By analyzing the disabled detective, we can understand how bodies are ordered through a cultural process. The real mystery of detective fiction is a mystery without a tidy resolution: how are bodies situated as subjects and as objects in their cultural time and space?

I am combining an analysis of power and the process of detection in detective fiction with an analysis of the disabled detective in order to understand the embodiment of the private I/eye. As Paul Auster writes in one of his detective's stories, this private I/eye is the "letter 'I,' standing for 'investigative[:]' it was 'I' in the upper case, the tiny life bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer,

the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him” (Auster 8). Investigation, the self, and the body are all superimposed in the representation of the embodied detective. By presenting representations of being that are seen culturally as “wrong” or “abnormal,” the texts make visible previously obscured aspects of embodiment, independence, and identity. I argue that by focusing on disability in disability detective texts, we confront our own cultural fears of loss of power, loss of independence, and loss of certainty. Disability makes the narrative of law and order possible, but it also exposes its fictional nature.

### **Chapter Outlines**

In the second chapter, “Quantifying the Body: Positivism, Impairments, and Social Solutions in Sherlock Holmes,” I begin by looking at a British character, but one so intrinsically tied to the detective genre that he has become a universal figure. Of course, I write of Sherlock Holmes. I examine how, in Doyle’s oeuvre, Holmes’s mastery of logic, science, and medicine allows him to be the conduit of order. The texts demonstrate the current continuing cultural shift away from metaphysical and supernatural systems in favor of laws of nature. The Holmes series focuses on positivistic science and medicine to present a world that operates based on laws. Moreover, this world can be known and interacted with if these laws are understood. The texts represent a struggle to replace the supernatural moral authority that is slowly receding in the modern world with a reliable, trustworthy human authority. In order to present Holmes’s mastery of knowledge and the world as knowable, the texts continually depict processes of disruption and resolution. Such a process highlights the human’s role in order and nature both as subject and as object. The structure of disruption and resolution simultaneously satisfies the desire for control and exposes the

tenuous grasp a person has on control. The detective has to prove again and again that he can solve problems and that the world is functional. Moreover, the human body must represent and be understood through scientific order. In this Holmesian narrative, bodies are reduced to scientific signs, useful to Holmes only as clues. Thus, statistics and norms about bodies become an important basis against which impairments are identified and defined.

Impairments are those features that such statistics and norms configure as abnormal and/or detrimental. Thus, disabled bodies in Doyle's texts depict laws of nature.

Studying a recent adaptation of Holmes provides a unique opportunity to examine diachronic movements in one detective figure and constructions of disability alongside stylistic trends. I compare the BBC's television series *Sherlock* to the original. In contemporary Holmes adaptations, interest in bodies (and the people connected to them) has developed beyond the original canon's biological reductionism. *Sherlock* explicitly frames Holmes as diagnosed and disabled. Additionally, the show complicates behavior, questions medicine and science as an absolute authority, and blurs the moral boundary beyond healthy and unhealthy. Finally, I consider the visual component as this adaptation is a television show. In *Sherlock*, the detective's disability is part and parcel of how he detects, and both his disability and how he detects are identified and understood through visual representations.

In Chapter III, "Modern Science and Social Order: Disseminating Power in Jeffrey Deaver's Bone Collector Series" I turn to one of the most popular representations of contemporary classical detective fiction with a disabled detective, Deaver's Lincoln Rhyme novels. As contemporary detective literature is more influenced by modernism, even contemporary detective literature that follows the classical tradition moves away from universal truth and questions the positivistic order in which the genre is grounded. In the

first six sections of my chapter, I identify how Deaver's series updates the detective tradition through narratives of disability that negotiate social order. The detective is no longer an autonomous outside overseer but a participant in a larger social structure. Rhyme's personal life is more fully integrated into the plot as the series presents options for resolving Rhyme's disability. The conclusion about disability in the series, that his super-functioning mind supplants his broken body, relies on an ideology of mind/body separation that privileges the mind. Although the series still heavily favors the powers and authority of the detective, the series includes the perspectives of other characters in order to show Rhyme as an object and allows other characters to function as subjects in the texts. The series portrays the exchanges of power between characters, including the sexual relationship between Rhyme and Sachs where disability becomes sexualized. My last section turns to the film version of *The Bone Collector* in order to analyze how voyeurism functions both with the disabled body as an object and the detective as a subject, the one who views.

In classical detective texts, science and medicine act as arbiters of order. In both Sherlock Holmes and the Lincoln Rhyme series, the detective has specialized knowledge that allows him to diagnose and fix problems. These classical detective narratives establish their detectives as authorities because of their scientific knowledge, and their disabilities allow them to be better conduits of science. In contrast, the hardboiled subgenre uses a bootstrap narrative that prizes individuality and strength of character. Man's personal codes and moral strength should constitute his world. Thus, hardboiled texts use representations of disability in order to highlight the ability of the hardboiled detective. In "Hardboiled Bodies in a Broken World: Interdependence in the Hardboiled Disability Detective Texts," I analyze three contemporary hardboiled texts, Paul Tremblay's *The Little Sleep* (2009), Jonathan

Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn* (1999), and Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* (2000). I analyze how these texts adapt the original hardboiled conventions of the lone wolf, the violent world, and personal authority through disabled detectives. By focusing on how marginalized identity impacts the social position of the detective, these texts complicate the ideology of the autonomous rational man from the hardboiled genre.

While the second, third, and fourth chapters deal with detective fiction that all stems from and supports some version of a modern positivist narrative of the world in which the detective has a core identity and the world is knowable, Chapter V presents texts at odds with this tradition. I examine how the postmodern texts, Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987), Denis Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* (1991), and Carlos Brooks' *Quid Pro Quo* (2008), reject a knowable world and an autonomous individual. In order to portray the lack of inherent meaning in the world and to replace it with constructed narratives, these novels depict mentally unbalanced detectives who become literally lost by the end of the novel and replaced with stories. The novels use disability to represent a postmodern ideology that mourns the lack of the real and tries to regain control of a disordered world by presenting man as author of his own existence.



CHAPTER II  
QUANTIFYING THE BODY:  
POSITIVISM, IMPAIRMENTS, AND SOCIAL SOLUTIONS IN SHERLOCK  
HOLMES

In Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes oeuvre, the binary of physical normal versus abnormal defines the detective's relationship with the outside world. In the first part of this chapter, I establish the medicalization and scientific administration of the body (reducing bodies to medical and scientific systems that require intervention) of Sherlock Holmes and the bodies that figure into his detection. Furthermore, his mental abnormality is justified as it helps him be a master detective who provides a significant social function. I argue that Holmes's "scientific methodology" is a positivist approach, consisting of correctly observing bodies and other physical clues to resolve a problem and return the world (and himself) to "normal."<sup>3</sup> Doyle's texts participate in a cultural context in which science was on the rise. While nineteenth-century literature contained anti-science sentiments such as the perverse and unethical challenges to the Christian worldview represented by Doctors Frankenstein (1818), Jekyll (1886), and Moreau (1896), there was the countervailing sentiment that "the progress of science, with its attendant technological advances, contributed to a utilitarian confidence in the powers of man" (Van Dover "Lens" 8). In this canonical, influential detective series, the medical and scientific codification of abnormal bodies (i.e. the origins of disability) is used as both mark and cure of the criminal.

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<sup>3</sup>These problems range from the mundane such as lost items and questionable job ads to the criminal such as kidnap and murder.

In this way, science is taking over the position of arbiter of morality from religion, and people, defined earlier in the nineteenth-century as either morally good or bad, are now categorized as healthy or unhealthy by the new medico-criminal framework. The need to use intuitive absolutes coded as science (including absolutes about mental and physical norms) represents a struggle to transition into a modern world of science and authority that is not controlled by God but by man.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyze one of the most recent adaptations of Doyle's stories, the BBC television show *Sherlock*, to discuss how the adaptation makes latent features in the original series more overt. I analyze these Sherlock Holmes texts to establish how disability has been used as an integral tool to establish order in the detective genre. I offer this direct comparison between Doyle's original works and a current adaptation in order to ground the rest of my dissertation, which analyzes the current proliferation of disability detective texts that have developed their uses of narratives of (dis)ability in order to detect and fix problems in social order. The BBC's *Sherlock* intervenes in the Holmesian universe by defining the bodily abnormalities as disabilities and developing and shifting the original representations of disability and detection according to cultural contexts.

*Sherlock* appears in a significantly different cultural moment than the original series where science has lost some of its absolute authority. As science becomes more accepted, the idea that science is not perfect can be acknowledged without it undermining science altogether. Disability becomes understood as a concept beyond an abnormal/normal codification bodies, and *Sherlock* explores the culturally constructed situation of disability. In particular, the show simultaneously portrays little understanding of Sherlock as a person

with a disability and romanticizes him because of his disability. Furthermore, the show depicts how aspects in the development of science now threaten the established human-based authority (such as the threat artificial intelligence presents to humanity). Thus, in *Sherlock* disability is used not to establish absolute and practical scientific truths but to complicate positivistic science and critique heartless (or at least amoral) technology. Doyle's texts refer to Holmes as machine-like as well as god-like and inhumane. *Sherlock's* posthuman frame shifts Holmes's machine-like characteristics; Holmes is both more human and more technologically defined, questioning restrictions to the human body and human nature. However, the show also uses technology, specifically visual representations, in order to define and quantify Holmes. The show both upholds and critiques scientific applications and portrays science, and thus disability, as needing to be more attuned to its social and cultural influence. In this chapter, I establish how disability is used as a metaphor for problems and solutions of social order during the transition from religion to science in the nineteenth century and during the transition from a positivist to post-positivist world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

### **Separating Super from Natural:**

#### **Medical Processes and Scientific Authority**

Many scholars of Holmes, following in the footsteps of biographer Pierre Nordon, view him as a symbol for the Victorian reliance on rationality to ensure order.<sup>4</sup> Rosemary Jann, Anthony Giffone, Lesli J. Favor, and Audrey Jaffe analyze how Holmes serves “a comfortingly conservative function” because he defends the “Victorian status quo; his

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<sup>4</sup>See Christopher Clausen's “Sherlock Holmes, Order, and the late Victorian Mind,” James and John Kissane's “Sherlock Holmes and the Ritual of Reason.”

investigations reestablish constructions of identity that have been threatened by some malignant influence” (Barloon 33, Harris “Pathological” 448). The Sherlock Holmes canon solidifies social identities to resolve the threats of chaos, fragmentation, and change. While critics have explored various aspects of the construction of stable social identities in the texts, I specifically focus on how the texts normalize the body and label the process scientific and medical, which is one of the early ways contemporary culture has constructed disability. Although much work on Sherlock Holmes addresses medical themes and theories, Holmes’s temperament is more often than not examined in relation to other concepts such as empire, war, romance, and rationality. However, I argue that from Holmes onward there is a history of a representation of a disabled detective in detective fiction, so it is also important to establish that through this medical framework the text portrays Holmes as a mentally and physically abnormal person (in a negative and unhealthy way) and then to examine how such abnormality is used.

The detective genre began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century alongside numerous major medical advancements. The foundation of medical microbiology and the discovery of vaccination in 1796 led to the creation of numerous vaccines including smallpox (1798), rabies (1885), typhoid fever (1896), cholera (1896), and bubonic plague (1897) (Plotkin 5). The development of photography from the first photo etching in 1822 to George Eastman’s development of celluloid film in 1884 (Ackerman 45) also influenced medicine and forensics. Biographers and scholars have examined Arthur Conan Doyle’s medical training and how it has infused Holmes’s methodologies. In *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle*, Dr. Alvin Rodin closely examines Doyle’s medical career and demonstrates the influence of Sir Robert Christison, one of the founding fathers of toxicology, in the

Holmes stories. Martin Booth's biography *The Doctor and the Detective* also focuses on the way Doyle's medical background emerges in the Holmesian universe. Before the publication of the first Holmes story, Doyle wrote to one of his medical teachers, Dr. Joseph Bell, that "It is most certainly to you that I owe Sherlock Holmes...I do not think that his analytical work is in the least an exaggeration of some effects which I have seen you produce in the out-patient ward," and that he tried to build up a man around "the centre of deduction and inference and observation which I have heard you inculcate" (Liebow 172). Dr. Bell, a forensic pathologist, was one of the best-known instructors at the University of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. In "The Original Sherlock Holmes," Dr. Harold Emery Jones writes, that one day in class, Bell passed around a vial of liquid with an offensive odor to his classroom and asked his students to use their "Powers of Observation," as he called it, by tasting and smelling the liquid. Before passing it around, he announced that he should not ask of his students that which he is unwilling to do, and so he dipped his finger in and tasted it. After the students grimaced their way through the test, he laughed and scolded them for not having better powers of observation; they did not notice that he put his forefinger in the medicine and licked his middle finger (Jones 5). Doyle was deeply impressed and influenced by Bell's emphasis and demonstration of observation and diagnosis.

Although Holmes is defined in the series as a scientific and medical man, scholars such as Anna Neill question the supposed science behind Holmes's methodology, calling it "intuitive rather than rational, and as worthy an object of psychical investigation as are the strangest phenomena of the séance room" (611). Carlo Ginzburg and Anna Davin also call Holmes's methods "semiotic, conjectural, and sometimes divinatory" (26). Neill and

Ginzburg are right to point out the intuitive, pseudo-scientific, and mystical nature of Holmes's ability; however, the texts label him as rational and scientific.

In "Diagnosis and Detection: The Medical Iconography of Sherlock Holmes," Pasquale J. Accardo asserts that Holmes's intuitive methods are based on a misinterpretation of medical diagnostics. According to Maria Cairney, "Morally diseased individuals... represented a threat to the health of society and the social body and their movements and activities could be recorded, most fittingly, by medical policemen or scientific detectives. Criminals, crime, and the violence of late-Victorian urban life had become synonymous with disease" (64). However, disease or disability goes beyond the criminal. Whether or not Doyle's representation of science is considered accurate, he presents a medico-scientific worldview in which the investigation of human bodies and their ab/normality has shifted from the domain of the supernatural to that of science, and Holmes's own abnormality, of poles of lethargy and hyperactivity, is at the center of this worldview. According to Robert Paul, professor emeritus of theology, in *Whatever Happened to Sherlock Holmes?: Detective Fiction, Popular Theology, and Society*, the popularity of the detective fiction of Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, Holmes, and other such detectives represents how superstition is "on its way out" (10). The purpose of including science and medicine in the text is not to depict medical diagnoses or even deductive reasoning accurately but rather to establish a way to view the world as knowable, reliable, and controllable. Science and medicine are enmeshed with the social order in the Holmesian universe. The characters' bodies, including and perhaps most importantly Sherlock Holmes's, are constructed as social codes ratified by medical and scientific truths. Constructing bodies as social codes allows for

stable answers but also treats people as objects without considering their humanity and subjectivity.

### **Abnormally Active and Nervously Prostrate:**

#### **The Health and Treatment of Holmes**

Doyle constructs Holmes as mentally and physically abnormal; his abnormal nature is quite often medicalized. Holmes is perhaps best known for his logical reasoning and use of forensic skill, but I argue that Holmes's most essential personality trait as defined by the text is his "natural swing" in temperament. J.K. Van Dover in "From Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Thorndyke: Arguments for the Morality of Science" argues that "there is an obvious tension between the rigorous, rational discipline Holmes professes in 'the Science of Deduction and Analysis' and the addiction to irrational indulgences such as music (or narcotics) in his private life" and that these "bohemian extravagances were intended by Conan Doyle to be a humanizing balance to the presumed stringencies of the scientific method" (2). However, I disagree that this formula of "enough scientist, enough artist" makes Holmes a "hero of personality, not of methodology" (3). These "bohemian" qualities are in and of themselves subsumed in medical and scientific thinking. Holmes, like the other characters in the series, participates in a larger methodology of detection; he is an object of detection who the reader characterizes through bodily norms of race, class, and most dominantly, disability. The Bohemianism makes Holmes himself the subject of medical speculation and intervention.

The behavior that Van Dover organizes under the terms "bohemian" and "artist" is also presented in terms of periods of severe depression interspersed by periods of

hyperactivity.<sup>5</sup> Watson explains, “The swing of [Holmes’s] nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy...for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him” (“Red-Headed League” 243). Watson defines these behaviors, the swing between inactivity and energy, as Holmes’s *nature*. And his nature is linked with detection since during Holmes’s periods of energy he uses his brilliant reasoning power and investigation methods. Not only is Watson the voice of the text since he acts as a dependable narrator, but he is also a proficient doctor; therefore, he has medical authority when he observes Holmes’s behavior. At the beginning of “The Musgrave Ritual,” Watson explains that Holmes’s “outbursts of passionate energy when he performed the remarkable feats with which his name is associated were followed by reactions of lethargy during which he would lie about with his violin and his books, hardly moving save from the sofa to the table” (528). “Five Orange Pips” starts similarly with Holmes moodily working on record keeping before a case breaks his boredom. Watson dreads these “periods of inaction” because Holmes’s brain “was so abnormally active that it was dangerous to leave it without material upon which to work” (“Missing Three Quarter” 862). The text thus defines Holmes’s mental behavior as abnormal and makes clear that his abnormality affects his daily life and health.

Because most of the texts are constructed for the reader as Watson’s records, Holmes’s periods of hyperactivity are described more than his inactivity, as Watson is most

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<sup>5</sup> In part because of the contemporary proliferation of medical terminology in everyday language, and in part because Doyle uses descriptions and terms that themselves lean to current medical terminology, I use terms throughout that diagnose Holmes even though that is not my intention. His poles of behavior correlate to the current condition of bipolar disorder. I refer to his “abnormally active” periods as hyperactive or manic. Doyle did not diagnose Holmes with melancholy or mania (from 19th century definitions of such), or bipolar or autistic (contemporary terms), although a significant part of the second half of this chapter is an exploration of contemporary portrayals of Holmes in modern adaptations; the fans of those adaptations in fact deploy these diagnoses.



interested in reporting Holmes's casework (the result of the hyperactivity).<sup>6</sup> Also important to consider is that Holmes's hyperactivity has more use value for society than does his lethargy. Watson describes in *The Sign of Four* how Holmes "appeared to be in a state of nervous exaltation. [Watson had] never known him so brilliant" (171). Throughout the series, Holmes becomes engrossed in his cases, forgets to eat and goes "for days, and even for a week, without rest" ("Five Orange Pips" 304-5, "The Man with the Twisted Lip" 321). His changes are so drastic in these periods that they emerge in his physical appearance. In "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," Watson explains that when Sherlock Holmes is hot upon a scent, "his face flushed and darkened. His brows were drawn into two hard black lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely glitter. His face was bent downward, his shoulders bowed, his lips compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long, sinewy neck" (281). By presenting the ways in which his hyperactivity changes his physicality, the texts present his abnormality as severe and significant, making the mental and emotional coterminous with the physical.

As Watson dreads Holmes's lethargy and Holmes himself tries to stave off his "ennui," the text frames his lethargy as negative. Although more useful, even his mania is referenced in negative terms; when Holmes paces and talks to himself over such a long period in *The Sign of Four*, Mrs. Hudson, their housekeeper, worries about his health and asks Watson if Holmes needs "cooling medicine" (164). Although Watson reassures her, he admits to himself that he is also uneasy about Holmes's behavior. Holmes's hyperactivity results in health problems in the previously mentioned episode as Holmes becomes "worn

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<sup>6</sup>I am unsure whether Holmes is more active during cases because he takes them on during periods of hyperactivity or because the cases provoke his hyperactivity.

and haggard, with a little fleck of feverish color upon either cheek” (164). And in “The Reigate Puzzle,” Watson describes how Holmes’s “iron constitution” had previously been broken because of “his immense exertions in the spring of ‘87” (544). His mania has severe health consequences. Before the start of this new case, Watson found Holmes in the midst of the “blackest depression” where his accomplishments were “insufficient to rouse him from his nervous prostration” (545). In this instance, Doyle explicitly portrays Holmes as ill.

As a result of the ennui he feels, Holmes thinks of himself as in need of treatment. Because his mind “rebels at stagnation,” Holmes takes cocaine and morphine (*Sign* 108). Drug addiction has become well known as part of Sherlock Holmes’s characterization; however, only *The Sign of Four* mentions drug addiction in-depth and describes Holmes as an active user. Watson describes Holmes’s “sinewy forearms and wrist, all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks,” and he watches as Holmes “thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined armchair with a long sigh of satisfaction” (107). Watson expresses his disgust and worry about having witnessed this performance “three times a day for many months” (107). He finally broaches the subject with Holmes and warns him of the physical repercussions of cocaine. Holmes “suppose[s] that its influence is physically a bad one. [He] find[s] it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment” (*Sign* 108). In *The Sign of Four*, Holmes tells Watson that if Watson gives him a case, it will prevent him from taking another dose of cocaine, and in “The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter,” Watson says he “had gradually weaned [Holmes] from that

drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career” (862).<sup>7</sup> Thus, for treatment for his lethargy, Holmes replaces drugs with work, which he calls “the best antidote to sorrow” (“The Adventure of the Empty House” 671). Holmes says, “Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession” (*Sign* 108). The text refers specifically to detection and drugs as treatment only for his lethargy and frames both in medical and scientific terminology. Although his mania also has negative health repercussions, again, the usefulness of hyperactivity means drugs and detection focus his hyperactivity, but the texts (and society) do not want or need to abolish his hyperactivity; his impairments in this way provide a social benefit. Ultimately, the text suggests that detection makes life palatable for the disabled Holmes, implying that a person with an impairment can become functional through a career.

Holmes’s logical reasoning and tidy summations temporarily ameliorate his mental instability when he returns the world to order; however, the treatment never lasts and Holmes’s mind returns to its unbalanced state in the ordered world. Holmes’s disability requires someone else’s disability; he needs disorder to thrive, and continuously resolving disorder allows him to be a productive member of society. As an early example of the disabled detective, Holmes is both a representation of the threat of disorder and its resolution. On one hand, the process of vacillation between ordered and disordered suggests that there is no single natural state; on the other hand, the text still presents a sort of pretense

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<sup>7</sup>The text does not clarify how it threatened his career. It seems likely he could either not work while drugged or he did not need or want to work for stimulation because of the drugs.

by emphasizing the return to order as well as the desire for an unreachable equilibrium. This desire has repercussions for individuals. Holmes sums up the people, behavior, and the world at large with his belief that

while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. (*Sign* 175)

Holmes treats individuals and society as equations to be solved. In trying to solve the equation, Holmes must shun outliers, which includes Holmes himself. The series illustrates how his operations, as both a scientist and a man with impairments, secure the health of society at large.

From Holmes's personality to the cases he needs to solve, the abnormal is identified and resolved in order to "reassure readers of the reliability of such codes and to render logical the social order that they imply" (Jann 685). Holmes is an elite individual but still must again and again be defined as a functional piece of a stable social order. All of the uses of the abnormal in the Holmes series reify the normal even though it is often absent from the stories. According to Lennard J. Davis, "the word *normal* appeared in English only about 150 years ago...before the rise of the concept of normalcy, there appears not to have been a concept of normal; instead the regnant paradigm was one revolving around the world *ideal*" ("Bodies" 100). Unlike in the concept of the ideal body, where no one reaches the ideal, with the rise of statistics and the bell curve, "the majority of bodies fall under the main umbrella of the curve" of normal (101). Outliers are abnormal, which makes them interesting and useful for Holmes, but abnormality relies on the vast majority as belonging to the normal.

In “The Case for Identity: Sherlock Holmes and the Singular Find,” Jim Barloon explains how crucial the idea of individuality or singularity is to the Holmes myth. He argues that “Holmes uses the tools of science not to diminish or homogenize people, but to rescue them from those who would” (36). Barloon ostensibly acknowledges that Holmes “generally brings closure—and thus solace—by singling out the culprit and getting his man,” but concludes that to readers “who felt that they themselves were trivial, at least by the measure of scientists and the expanding universe, this singular truth provided some salving redemption” (43). What Barloon fails to consider is the relationship between singular identity and statistical, indexical norms. Tom Gunning explains that in Holmesian universe the deviant body is inscribed “with a socially defined individuality,” which “rested ultimately on its structural differentiation from all other recorded individual bodies [...]but the marks of this difference also had to be rationalized, made systematic, to allow comparisons and identifications” (34). The supposed “salving redemption” nonetheless trivializes individuals who do not fall into an acceptable position of normalcy and suggests that abnormal individuals must constantly struggle to achieve normalcy.

Holmes is himself presented as a human anomaly, who can then judge society from the outside. His mental status and his participation in society are connected. As part of his mental methods, Holmes believes in keeping his “mind entirely free from all impressions” (*Scarlet* 100). Furthermore, “detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner” (*Sign* 108). Watson refers to Holmes as inhumane on a number of occasions. In *The Sign of Four* when Holmes does not notice an attractive woman, Watson refers to him as an “automaton,—a calculating-machine!” (117). Holmes does not believe in romantic relationships because “love is an emotional thing, and

whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things. I should never marry myself, lest I bias my judgment” (*Sign of Four* 204-205). While Watson refers to Holmes’s mind as balanced, he then equates this “cold, precise but admirably balanced mind” to the inhuman and calls him “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen” (“A Scandal in Bohemia” 209). In “The Greek Interpreter,” Watson views Holmes as “a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was pre-eminent in intelligence” (595). The texts establish Holmes as a successful, almost god-like detective but a broken or unacceptable human, hence the focus throughout the texts on Holmes’s inability to relate to other people. His abnormality makes him a more functional detective. Thus, he as an individual has become subsumed by his societal function.

As an anomaly, Holmes is outside society, and must have a bridge to participate in society. And so we have Watson, whose predecessor in Poe’s Dupin series functions similarly. This early bromance has been a favorite of literary critics when analyzing Sherlock Holmes. Critics have questioned whether the couple has a homosexual or homoerotic relationship.<sup>8</sup> Watson has become such a premier example of the sidekick that other sidekicks are referenced as “Watsons.” As previously stated, the detective requires other people’s disability, which he either fixes or restrains (by putting the person in the proper social place, usually either with the family or the police). Watson is the first person that the stories show Holmes “reading” in order to determine facts about his life. In the first

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<sup>8</sup> See Joseph R.G. Demarco’s *A Study in Lavender: Queering Sherlock Holmes*, Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton’s *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature*, and Kayley Thomas’s “‘Bromance Is So Passé’: Robert Downey, Jr.’s Queer Paratexts” in *Sherlock Holmes for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

few pages of the first Sherlock Holmes text, the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson explains how he sustained wounds during war, why he has returned to London, and that he now must find a roommate to live with because his war pension does not provide enough money for him to live by himself.<sup>9</sup> Watson meets Holmes, and Watson's disability acts as both cause for the situation and a clue for Holmes. Upon first meeting Watson, Holmes perceives that Watson has been in Afghanistan. He later explains that he saw that Watson had "undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded?" (*Scarlet* 16). Holmes solves this first "mystery," and Watson also calls Holmes's ability to do this a "mystery" (*Scarlet* 9). Watson, quoting Alexander Pope, declares, "The proper study of mankind is man" (*Scarlet* 9). More appropriate for the Sherlock Holmes texts, the proper study of mankind is disabled man since they can expose an entire system. In the Holmesian universe, the medicalization of abnormal bodies constructs social and philosophical meaning.

The texts rarely focus on Watson's impairments after this introduction as the texts instead focus on Watson's functions in helping Holmes. He is the mediator; he narrates, he allows for explanations, and he humanizes Holmes. James Krasner states that Watson's "desire for a stable, predictable world is apparent throughout the stories in his descriptive technique. While Holmes is at work fixing and solidifying social identities, Watson must fix and solidify Holmes" (426). The characterization of the Watson and Holmes relationship, that Watson needs Holmes to be the brilliant detective and that Holmes needs Watson to

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<sup>9</sup> There is controversy over whether the text depicts Watson with two wounds, one in his arm and one in his leg, or if this is a textual mistake since the wounds are never mentioned together.

solidify him, has led many recent contemporary detective texts to assert that a disabled character needs an abled partner in order to function or to become whole. This is discussed in depth in Chapter III through an examination of Jeffrey Deaver's Lincoln Rhyme series, in which the symbiotic relationship between detective and sidekick complicates the idea of personal autonomy, but this narrative of disability also requires a resolution to disability—it is a problem that must be fixed.

### **Doctor, Judge, Detective:**

#### **Reading Physical Signs to Cure Social Ills**

As seen in the physical descriptions of Holmes's mental abnormality, Doyle's text creates a series of associations between inner and outer; the inner state of a person always has an outward manifestation that just needs to be correctly assessed in order to understand the entirety of the person. The outside reflects internal symptoms; Holmes's habits depict his inner self. For example, his lethargy is depicted when he plays the violin and shoots holes into his walls. During thinking sessions he frequently charges and recharges his pipe. In "The Red-headed League," Holmes refers to the problem in the case as "quite a three pipe problem" (241). Thus, pipe smoking indicates that an extended amount of time has passed with Holmes withdrawn into himself. Holmes's mind is made manifest through a series of symptoms that express inner states externally—the drugs, the bullets, the violin. Watson and the reader are thus trained to acquire Holmes's facility with symptomatology.

Furthermore, Holmes similarly sees into other people's problems by using their outer appearance to understand their inner states. Holmes tells Watson in "The Reigate Puzzle" to "look at their faces," and Watson notes their confession of guilt on their bodies; the



older man seemed numbed and dazed with a heavy, sullen expression upon his strongly-marked face. The son, on the other hand, had dropped all that jaunty, dashing style which had characterized him, and the ferocity of a dangerous wild beast gleamed in his dark eyes and distorted his handsome features. (556).

The text depends on physical symptoms in order that problems and solutions are embodied and easily concluded. The symptoms explained are usually negative bodily signs since these are the ones that Holmes is in some way trying to solve. These interactions between the inner and the outer and the consequent symptomatology are part of the medical framework seen throughout the series.

The texts use this medical framework in order to stabilize threats. Holmes participates in the portrayal of the medical narrative first because both his body and detection are superimposed onto each other. Second, through that layering, he becomes a doctor/judge because that is how he needs to function in order to suit his bodily needs and because that is what society needs of him. In many of the texts, Holmes conveys respect for Watson's work as a doctor, and the texts in general depict Watson as a medical authority. Doctors appear frequently throughout the oeuvre. They treat patients, provide Holmes with information, and work alongside him.<sup>10</sup> Holmes asserts, "When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge," and for Holmes, this is the highest of compliments ("The Adventure of the Speckled Band" 364). Holmes sees first-rate criminals like Moriarty as his only intellectual rivals. As a doctor, Watson studies people, uses logic, and corrects the incorrect. Holmes relates his work to Watson's work by

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<sup>10</sup> See the Sherlock Holmes mysteries "The Navel Treaty" and "The 'Gloria Scott.'" "

emphasizing the connection between observation and resolution in both the science of medicine and the science of investigation. In “Pathological Possibilities: Contagion and Empire in Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes Stories,” Susan Cannon Harris argues that “Holmes’s function is analogous to Watson’s in that he diagnoses, contains, and neutralizes the noxious agents he investigates” (447). Both Watson and Holmes work as “medico-criminal” experts (“Dying Detective” 388). They function as doctor-judges. Michel Foucault argues that these doctors decide “whether the subject analyzed has traits or forms of conduct that, in terms of criminality, make it probable that there will be a breach of the law in the strict sense” (*Abnormal* 38). With the focus on Watson as a medical man and Holmes as scientist, Doyle depicts the move from supernatural/God to medical/science. Social threats, previously defined as either good or bad by supernatural moral authority, are now labeled in terms of healthy and unhealthy. According to Cairney, “Conan Doyle forges a new associative link in the mind of the reader between disease ‘symptoms’ and criminal ‘symptoms’” (63). However, I argue that the text goes farther and links external symptoms and social codes to define entire individuals. This change from supernatural to science makes doctors/scientists social arbiters as well as medical men.

Although Watson is the actual doctor in the series, Holmes acts as a doctor, and his role as such shows how he can cure societal ills. Harris asserts that “The Adventure of the Dying Detective” “shows how protean the concept of disease became in Doyle’s fiction” (“Pathological” 448). In order to entrap a man trying to kill Holmes, Holmes pretends to have contracted an “Eastern” pathology. Holmes mentions “Tapanuli fever” and “black Formosa corruption” as examples of his knowledge of foreign pathologies through his researches (“Dying Detective” 388). Vaccinations were an important discovery in the

nineteenth-century, and Doyle's work uses Holmes's character to show that "diseases can be apprehended and safely incarcerated like human criminals" (Harris 448). Harris examines the relationship between empire and contagion as "Holmes has domesticated this 'primitive' poison and can now put it to work for the Empire" ("Pathological" 459). Moreover, Doyle uses poison and disease to show a scientific control over the world (and people/bodies). The textual focus on medical knowledge, including Watson and the other doctors as well as Holmes's scientific focus, emphasizes that the world can be understood and controlled with the right knowledge.

The text portrays both Holmes and Watson as scientists and medical men, but as Foucault argues, the role of the physician, specifically in the rise of the asylum, "is as a juridical and moral guarantee, not in the name of science.... For the medical enterprise is only a part of an enormous moral task that must be accomplished at the asylum, and which alone can ensure the cure of the insane" (*Madness* 270). Doyle's texts also slip between science/medicine and moral tasks. Holmes's work focuses on the logical process of reading bodies in order to express results. In this way, bodies, especially "abnormal" bodies of non-white, non-male, non-abled individuals, offer to Holmes "the illusion of grounding abstract knowledge in a bodily materiality" (Mitchell "Narrative Prosthesis" 29). Holmes's abnormality, his methodology defined as scientific, and the textual use of bodies as clues all enforce a stable social order and the concept of disability. According to Lisabeth During, because Holmes's "sensitive apparatus only works when immersed in the scene, flooded by its details, its curiosities, its specific collection of the trivial, the ridiculous, and the dramatic," his "success depends on fidelity to the detail, on leaving nothing out" (47). For Holmes and the text, everything about a person, from the trivial on, is permeated by a larger

social meaning. Although he, and the text, insists that Holmes's work (and thus detection itself) is science, specific, and grounded in fact, what the text actually shows is suppositions that form ontological truths.

In diagnosing the bodies involved in his cases, Holmes perpetuates established hierarchies and stereotypes. As Nancy Stepan argues, scientific inquiry works together with the detection of human "types" (their social codes). Jinny Huh explains that "during the late eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries, the hierarchization of different human types into species justified arguments for colonialism and slavery" (Huh 555). Holmes follows a similar process whereby he looks at a person and considers his or her type to resolve a problem. In "The Adventure of the Second Stain," Holmes reminds Watson to "think of [Lady Hilda Trelawney's] appearance... her manner, her suppressed excitement, her restlessness, her tenacity in asking questions. Remember that she comes of a caste who do not lightly show emotion... And you must have observed, Watson, how she maneuvered to have the light at her back. She did not wish us to read her expression" (911). Holmes believes that women's "most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hairpin or a curling tongs" (911). So, Holmes considers what should be physically "normal" or "abnormal" for a woman, and reaches a conclusion based on reading her body and considering this specific cultural framework (caste and gender). He uses established constructs of (ab)normality and reproduces them. The series uses both Holmes's body (his abnormal mind that is portrayed as a disability) as well as other bodily clues in order to deal with threats to the colonial and patriarchal order.

Stereotypes are frequently clues in Holmes's detection and in the building of his cases. Many of Holmes's cases feature stereotypes of foreigners, the savage Indian,

primitive and staunch Tonganese, rascally Gypsies, severe Germans, stupid country folk.<sup>11</sup> Holmes uses cultural stereotypes to understand motive and solve the case for his client.<sup>12</sup> Along with racial stereotypes, Holmes frequently makes gender stereotypes, as with Lady Hilda Trelawney. Holmes's belief that women are instinctual creatures close to nature helps him find stolen papers in "A Scandal in Bohemia." Because Irene Adler's home is under attack, she, as a nurturer/protector, looks towards the items she values most, and that gives away their location to Holmes.<sup>13</sup> Men do not escape Holmes's observation; however, they are not as often contextualized by their gender. There are examples of men acting effeminately (as defined by Victorian sensibilities) on which Holmes and the texts comment, and this speaks to both gender and sexual orientation constructs. These are also depictions of intersectionality, and Holmes explicitly takes advantages of this when he uses some combination of a person's gender, ethnicity, class, or more to explain a person because she is both a woman and a foreigner. While Holmes continually says he relies on unbiased observation, this method is anything but. During calls Holmes's work "pregnant observations" and argues that this "conjectural knowledge is practical, unsentimental, detailed, poly-glot, attentive to the senses. It trusts analogies and disbelieves in the 'absolute

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<sup>11</sup> See *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign of Four*, "Speckled Band," "Silver Blaze" and "Priory School," "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb," "The Adventure of the Golden Prince-Nez" as just a few examples.

<sup>12</sup> See further analyses of race, ethnicity, and detection in Jinny Huh's "Whispers of Norbury: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the Modernist Crisis of Racial (Un)Detection," Henry Cuninghame's "Sherlock Holmes and the Case of Race," and Ronald R. Thomas's "Revaluating Identity in the 1890s: The Rise of the New Imperialism and the Eyes of the New Detective."

<sup>13</sup> See Sheila Sullivan's "Hands across the Water, Crime Across the Sea: Gender, Imperialist History, and Arthur Conan Doyle's America," Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's "Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de siècle," and Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan's "'The Speckled Band': The Construction of Woman in a Popular Text of Empire" for further examinations on the portrayal of women and gender in Sherlock Holmes.

conception of the world” (49). Yet, the master detective creates order by using the body as a collection of signs, a cipher, in order to have “scientific” proof about other things, such as crime, motive, gender, and disability.

In both racial and gender stereotypes, Holmes (both the character and the text) describes interiority through exteriority. Minorities and women betray their peccadilloes in some type of physical performance; it is written on their faces or engrained in their movements. Another stereotype the text uses is “emotional maladies.” In many examples, characters’ physicality is summed up as “nerves,” “humours,” “hysteria” or “madness.” Their behavior is summed up so they or others around them can understand more about them or the situation. In some cases, actions are understood by labeling those specific actions hysterical, as when Watson describes the surprising behavior of a girl in “The Musgrave Ritual” as a “hysterical attack” because she “fell back against the wall with shriek after shriek of laughter...screaming and sobbing” (534). In this instance, Watson uses her actions to understand and categorize her. According to Foucault, the “madman’s body was regarded as the visible and solid presence of his disease” (*Madness* 159). These examples exemplify Foucault’s assertion here in that the characters’ physical features and behaviors establish not only the characters’ mental disorders but also the answers in the mystery. Characters other than Holmes and Watson categorize people based on madness as well. John Openshaw in “The Five Orange Pips” describes his uncle’s behavior. His uncle would “emerge in a sort of drunken frenzy...and tear about the garden with a revolver in his hand... When these hot fits were over, however, he would rush tumultuously in the door” (294). John does not describe his uncle as merely behaving drunkenly or madly in that moment; his uncle’s actions speak to what “lies at the roots of his soul” (294). Because the man had “odd fits,” when he is

found dead, the police and family blame his “eccentricity” and rule the matter a suicide. Although Holmes corrects this ruling and solves the murder, the body is still used to decide what is normal and abnormal (both mentally and physically).

The investigation at the center of many of the detective stories uses “madness” to explain a case’s resolution. In “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons,” Lestrade describes the Napoleonic statue thefts as “queer madness,” “eccentric,” and committed by a “dangerous homicidal lunatic” because he cannot fathom why anybody would steal or break Napoleon statues (809, 813). In “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches,” Holmes tries to explain a man’s behavior by contemplating whether “his wife is a lunatic” (436). Of course, Holmes is the exemplar of this pigeonhole method of viewing the world. Because the villain of the story wonders about his wife’s sanity, “he desires to keep the matter quiet for fear she should be taken to an asylum” (436). Although Holmes is actually drawing a conclusion about the villain and not the “lunatic” wife, he is still reaching that conclusion through assumptions about in/sanity.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps one of the reasons that the stories focus so heavily on madness is because Holmes and the series most desire *reason*, and, as Foucault argues, madness is unreason. By bringing madness under control, society can return (or at least pretend to return) to reason.

I have separated the above stereotypes about emotional “weakness/es” from the texts’ representation of “cripples” (a word the texts frequently use). But as previously discussed in the section on Holmes’s health, the texts present both emotional and physical “aberrations” as impairments and disabilities. Both are used to form a narrative of disability. However, the series seems to trust that “cripples” are already visually understood; so, while

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<sup>14</sup> Even Moriarty’s infamous villainy is explained as a “stain in his blood” (“The Final Problem” 645).

the stories must project madness onto the skin, they can already use being a “cripple” as physical evidence to solve cases or mark the characters as victim or as villain. Thus, the representations of physical disability, common throughout the oeuvre, are used to portray the body as a fixed sign for behavior and interactions. The wooden legged man is easily recognizable by witnesses in *The Sign of Four*, and another wooden legged man in “The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet” provides Holmes with an easy clue because of the distinct footprints he leaves in the dirt. A disfigured man appears in the “The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist,” and his disfigurement represents his odiousness, “more awful than ever now” (736). Two people with disabilities are portrayed in “The Adventure of the Golden Prince-Nez,” an almost blind woman, whose glasses give away that she is hidden in the house because Holmes reasons that she could not have moved outside of the house as blind as she is, and the man who hides her is “an invalid” whose deviation from his normally consistent routine caused by his paralysis shows that he is hiding someone. These are examples of the Holmesian pattern where the disabled body is reduced to a cipher; if we know the algorithm (what is normal and abnormal for the body) then we have an answer (for how the world works).

Not only does the text use disabled bodies as easy clues for Sherlock Holmes, but in the case of “The Crooked Man,” the main character, Harry Wood, is reduced to his physical features, which the text uses as a tool of symbolic justice. Wood is described as “deformed,” a “dreadful-looking creature,” and a “crippled wretch” (572). A woman sees him talking to a man shortly before he dies and gives Holmes these descriptions. Holmes has no problem finding such a unique man, and so Holmes and Watson go to his house to question him. Wood explains that the man died of apoplexy after the man’s eyes fell upon Wood. As



Wood describes, the “bare sight of me was like a bullet through his guilty heart” (577).

Although Wood means the man literally died of guilt after seeing the face of the man he had betrayed, the disfigurement of the man is used ironically in the narrative. He first scares people on the street, is recognizable enough to be easily tracked down, and then kills a man by revealing his disfigured face to him. Even though Holmes is needed in most cases to interpret disability, in this instance, the text frames disability as so gross an aberration that it can offer justice and resolution in and of itself.

Along with using disability to solve cases, Holmes can also accurately determine whether a person’s disability is real or not. In “The Resident Patient,” he correctly determines that a man’s cataplexy in Watson’s office is faked in order to distract Watson while the man and his son sneak into someone’s room. And in the “The Man with the Twisted Lip” Holmes correctly infers that the disabled mendicant is only pretending to be disabled and homeless in order to make easy money. He washes off the man’s painted on twisted lip, tells him not to do that again, and rights the world. So an abled person can pretend to be disabled and make a living; however, Holmes can tell the *truth* about his body and therefore his identity. According to Jaffe, “the anxiety about false beggary, like that about gentlemanliness, is also an anxiety about the theatricality of the social world, the susceptibility to manipulation of social identity” (101). In order to have a stable social order, the Holmesian universe needs to “distinguish ‘true’ identity from ‘false’” hence “making the ‘false beggar’ confess the ‘truth’ of his identity” (106). Jaffe complicates this argument by arguing that the story undermines the opposition between true and false “since ... Holmes reproduce[s] the system of representation [he] find[s] so troublesome” (106). Although Jaffe makes a good point, the logic of the stories implies that Holmes’s disguise would be found

false if people become as successful at Holmes's methodology as he is. Moreover, it even suggests that as long as we have Holmes-like people who are able to serve this social function then we do still have distinguishable true and false identities. And, of course, Holmes's privilege, his social position as an educated white man, offers him abilities and allowances otherwise not granted.

For Holmes, disabled people are easy to identify and explain. By amalgamating behaviors and people to some frame of pseudo-scientific positivism, Holmes can push the case and the world into a nice, reliable order. Rosemary Jann argues that the ideological work in Holmes is "performed by positivistic science, which could soothe such anxieties by rendering natural and self-evident the social order that generated them" (705). Consistently, both in Holmes and in his clues, the series supports social order through a medical framework and depictions of disabilities. Holmes is a detective because of his abnormality/skill, and his skill serves a social function. Holmes gets called "mad" because people rarely understand his behavior or actions.<sup>15</sup> Like the villains and victims that I've previously discussed, Holmes is also called mad by people who do not understand him and want a diagnosis to explain him. In the Holmesian universe, medical diagnosis of the body is a socio-cultural process that the text professes to be a stable factual order. In Doyle's texts, Holmes seems to be the case-study exemplar of how to use abnormality to be functional in society. He is an enforcer of the social order by which he is also defined. Holmes as a disabled detective serves as a metaphorical embodiment of the binary process between healthy and unhealthy, normal and abnormal. According to the concept of binary oppositions

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<sup>15</sup> See "The Resident Patient," "The Adventure of the Second Strain," and "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor."

as discussed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida, a concept is defined by its reciprocal binary term. As a dominant binary position, healthy exists when unhealthy is taken away. Holmes is depicted as making the unhealthy healthy over and over again; he is an unhealthy detective who creates a healthy social order. He treats his mania and depression and he solves cases. Thus, abnormality serves to make the normal. This formula in detective fiction can also be summed up through Sharon L. Snyder's discussion of the narrative formula of disability: "Difference demands display. Display demands difference" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 55). In order to stabilize the status quo and identities within it, differences among everything (people, actions, situations) must become those things' foundation. Because of this structure, the texts use troubling stereotypes (of people, cultures, gender, race, portrayals of "hysteria" such as nervousness, exhaustion, etc.) and people with disabilities because they represent "easy" clues both for Sherlock Holmes and the reader. Thus, the detective genre portrays people with impairments to sum up and control bodies in order to highlight scientific absolutes and human authority. In these texts, two of the most important parts of the detective genre, the great hero and the process of detection (observe, contextualize, conclude), are grounded in a narrative of disability.

### **Sympathy and the Sociopath:**

#### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Cultural Contexts in BBC's *Sherlock***

In the original Sherlock Holmes narratives, disability is a site for detection and for the development of a scientifically grounded morality. I now turn towards contemporary detective texts in the rest of the dissertation in order to explore how aspects from Holmes (the role of the detective, the science of detection, and the metaphorical use of disability) adapt to and reflect the concepts of disability, cultural norms, and the place of the individual

in society. In recent adaptations of Holmes, disability continues to be a personality quirk of the detective, adding “flavor” to his characterization, and the structures that define his disability depict overall rules about behavior and society. In Doyle’s universe, these are straightforward rules where the outer reflects the inner state, and there are clear, simple causal pathways. In the rest of this chapter, I compare Doyle’s texts to the recent reinvention of Sherlock Holmes in the BBC’s 2012 television series *Sherlock*. Such a comparison furthers the framework for the contemporary disability detective genre. In this section, not only am I establishing the explicit use of disability in *Sherlock*, but I am exploring how such representations of disability are used to present the resulting shifting cultural values: complicating and contextually situating causes of behavior, questioning medicine and science as an absolute authority, and blurring the moral boundary beyond healthy and unhealthy. Finally, I also analyze the visual component because this adaptation is a television show. The detective’s disability is part and parcel of how he detects, and both are identified and understood through visual representations. These visual representations allow the detective and his disability to be identified and understood.

Sherlock Holmes has been wildly influential in popular culture and the detective genre. There has only been one Sherlock Holmes novel authorized by the Sherlock Holmes estate—Anthony Horowitz’s *The House of Silk* (2011). However, Peter Ridgway Watt explains that “[s]ince 1944, the literature on Holmes has increased enormously and so have collections, anthologies and indexes....The most recent bibliographical index, *The Universal Sherlock Holmes*, lists nearly 25,000 publications” (1). Some novels such as Cay Van Ash’s *Ten Years Beyond Baker Street* (1984) continue after Doyle’s texts end. Novels such as Mary Russell’s *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* (1994) or Neil Gaiman’s “A Study in Emerald”

set Holmes during a different time period or space. Others such as Carole Nelson Douglas's series *The Irene Adler Mysteries* develop other characters from the original. While numerous, none of these written texts—plays, pastiches, and parodies—are as famous or familiar to people as specific film and television adaptations.<sup>16</sup>

Sherlock Holmes is an extremely popular figure in film and television. The *Guinness World Records* has consistently listed Sherlock Holmes as the “most portrayed movie character” with 75 actors playing the part in over 211 films. Basil Rathbone appeared in fourteen films between 1939 and 1946. The first two took place during the Victorian era, but the rest were updated to modern times. His Holmes is elegant, sharp, and serious, and Nigel Bruce played Watson as bumbling and foolish (a trait that stuck for many later adaptations—a fact that speaks of the popularity of these film adaptations). The first of these films, *Hound of the Baskervilles* contains a direct reference to Holmes's drug use in the last line of the film, “Watson, the needle.”

In contrast to Rathbone's elegance, Jeremy Brett emphasizes Holmes's hyperactivity in the Granada television films from 1984 to 1994. Brett wanted to bring more passion to the role and was noted for his lavish hand gestures and unusual “violent” laugh. His portrayal makes Holmes very active; he frequently jumps around the room and throws himself on the floor to look closely at clues. According to Terry Manners' *The Man Who Became Sherlock Holmes - The Tortured Mind of Jeremy Brett*, “Holmes's obsessive and depressive personality fascinated and frightened Brett. In many ways Holmes's personality resembled the actor's own, with outbursts of passionate energy followed by periods of lethargy... Brett

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<sup>16</sup> Save perhaps, at one point in time, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, if one is to consider that a Holmes pastiche or adaptation.

started dreaming about Holmes, and the dreams turned into nightmare” (121). Terry Manners’ biography has been criticized for being a fairly fictionalized account, but Brett’s manic depression and fascination with Sherlock Holmes have been recorded by others including David Stuart Davies in *Bending the Willow: Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes*. Along with the BBC version, two other recent popular adaptations include Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) starring Robert Downey Jr., and the CBS version of Sherlock Holmes, *Elementary* (2013), starring Jonny Lee Miller as Holmes and Lucy Liu as Watson. Robert Downey Jr.’s version of Holmes emphasizes his drug addiction and strange behavior, but with far less explicit discussion about disability than the BBC version. In addition to the gender switch of Watson, the CBS version departs in other ways from the original story. Liu plays a surgeon turned sober companion who has been hired by Holmes’s father. Holmes is a former Scotland Yard consultant and recovering addict fresh out of rehabilitation and now wants to resume his previous job as a consulting detective for the NYPD. The show addresses Holmes’s drug addiction, and future critical work could consider the show’s use of disability, in particular, how Watson is a medically trained companion hired specifically to address Holmes’s disease.

The BBC’s *Sherlock* sets the show in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but draws from many aspects of the original stories. Benedict Cumberbatch plays Sherlock Holmes, and Martin Freeman plays John Watson. Unlike the Jeremy Brett series that matches most episodes directly to its namesake short story, *Sherlock* uses the original texts as somewhat relaxed inspiration. For instance, in the first episode, “A Study in Pink,” the mystery is completely different from the mystery of *Scarlet*, or any other Doyle mystery, but many small details from *Scarlet* are still included. Most episodes contain many allusions to Doyle’s original work. In the original, the

friend who introduces Watson to Holmes describes Holmes's unusual behavior, including his experiments on bruise formation where he beats dead bodies to then study them. In the episode, the first shot of Holmes is as he beats a dead body in a lab with a riding crop while a lab attendant listens to Holmes explain about the formation of bruises.

This first scene is crucial in the setup of Holmes's character in the show. The close-up of the attendant's grimacing face as Holmes acts emphasizes his emotionless behavior and his lack of concern for social or ethical niceties. Holmes's strange behavior is also pointed out by Watson in their first conversation. In "A Study in Pink," after Holmes quizzes him about flatmate issues such as noise and smoking, Watson asks, "Is that it? ... We've only just met and we're going to go and look at a flat?" Sherlock asks what the problem is, and Watson responds "We don't know a thing about each other. I don't know where we're meeting. I don't even know your name." Watson addresses social etiquette and "commonsense" behavior, but Sherlock responds

I know you're an Army doctor and you've been invalidated home from Afghanistan. You've got a brother worried about you but you won't go to him for help because you don't approve of him, possibly because he's an alcoholic more likely because he recently walked out on his wife. And I know your therapist thinks your limp's psychosomatic. Quite correctly, I'm afraid. That's enough to be going on with, don't you think?

Conversation be damned—it is unimportant for Holmes to hear from Watson about Watson. All Holmes needs to know, he has already observed. Holmes then leaves with no explanation. In his first introductory scenes, the show demonstrates that Sherlock Holmes does not pay attention to social etiquette.

As I've discussed, seeds of disability are in the original Doyle texts, but *Sherlock* heightens them. As the show continues to focus on Holmes's strange behavior, he is diagnosed early on. Holmes drags Watson to their first crime scene, which he then investigates before rushing off without Watson. When Watson asks a police officer if Holmes is coming back, the officer replies "Doesn't look like it" then continues with unsolicited advice, "But you're not his friend... He doesn't have friends. ...Bit of advice then, stay away from that guy" ("Pink"). Watson asks why. The officer explains that Holmes gets off on the crime. He explains, "The weirder the crime the more he gets off... One day just showing up won't be enough. One day we'll be standing around a body and it'll be Sherlock Holmes that put it there. Why would he do that? Because he's a psychopath. Psychopaths get bored" ("Pink"). So within the first fifteen minutes of the series, a character labels Holmes as a psychopath, reaches conclusions about his future behavior, and tries to warn Watson away from him. The show presents both the use (explanation and understanding) and harm (negative social response) of the label of disability; Holmes acts this way because he is a psychopath, and therefore, he is bad and unsafe for human consumption. At the next crime scene investigation, when a different cop calls Holmes a "psychopath." Holmes corrects him: "I'm not a psychopath, Anderson. I'm a high functioning sociopath, do your research." As Holmes's voice is an authority in the show, the audience is asked to believe Holmes's self-diagnosis. Although Holmes never defines what this means and how he has determined it, the show sums Holmes up through mental disorder labels.

Sociopathic personality or sociopathy is referred to by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as "antisocial personality disorder" and by the World Health



Organization's International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health

Problems as a "dissocial personality disorder" (F60.2) characterized by

- (a) callous unconcern for the feelings of others;
- (b) gross and persistent attitude of irresponsibility and disregard for social norms, rules and obligations;
- (c) incapacity to maintain enduring relationships, though having no difficulty in establishing them;
- (d) very low tolerance to frustration and a low threshold for discharge of aggression, including violence;
- (e) incapacity to experience guilt or to profit from experience, particularly punishment;
- (f) marked proneness to blame others, or to offer plausible rationalizations, for the behaviour that has brought the patient into conflict with society. (159)

Examples of the characteristics of dissocial personality disorders appear throughout the show, in particular (a), (b), and (f). For example, in "The Great Game," Watson asks Holmes if he cares for the lives at stake in their investigation. Holmes asks, "Will caring about them save them?" When Watson responds in the negative, Holmes says "Then I'll continue not to make that mistake." He looks at feelings and emotions as mistaken because they will not help him in his investigation. There is perhaps an underlying thread that Holmes's ultimate desire is to save human lives, which could be construed as an ultimate concern for others; however, Watson is clearly upset at his callousness. Overall, the show presents ambivalence about his callousness. On the one hand, Holmes's reasoning is persuasive, but, on the other, the show presents Watson's discomfort as reasonable. And in other scenes, Holmes shows

little to no concern for human life. In “A Scandal in Belgravia,” Holmes watches a group of people at a morgue and turns to his brother, Mycroft, and remarks, “Look at them. They all care so much. Do you ever wonder if there is something wrong with us?” The implicit assumption in this question is that he and his brother do not care about other people. His brother responds, “All lives end. All hearts are broken. Caring is not an advantage, Sherlock.” Presumably, Mycroft either means an advantage in life or in solving cases. The two seem fairly synonymous for Holmes (perhaps for both of them). Although occasionally it seems like Holmes is making a *choice* to be unconcerned with others’ feelings, there are other moments that suggest that Holmes is incapable of actually understanding concern. In “The Hounds of Baskerville,” Watson explains to Holmes that a man couldn’t bring himself to kill a dog.<sup>17</sup> Holmes says, “I see,” but Watson refuses, “No you don’t.” Holmes asks, “Sentiment?” and Watson confirms. Sentiment is something Holmes only understands through knowledge, not experience. Although there will be further examples of different characteristics from ISC-DRHR’s F60.2 as I continue to discuss scenes in the show, I am not interested in diagnosing Holmes myself. I am interested in the fact that the show makes Holmes’s disability explicit by diagnosing his impairment and portraying the cultural repercussions of impairment.

Even after Holmes’s self-diagnosis of sociopathy, others’ diagnoses of Holmes continue. In the fifth episode, Lestrade and Watson discuss how Holmes is secretly pleased to see all of their faces back together. Lestrade begins by saying it “appeals to his... his...”

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<sup>17</sup> The show is titled “The Hounds of Baskerville.” The novel is titled *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

and Watson finishes, “Asperger’s?” (“Hounds”).<sup>18</sup> Again, the text does not expand on how they define Asperger’s, but its inclusion could be responding to the argument of sociopathy versus Asperger’s in the fan community.<sup>19</sup> The show could also be resisting diagnosis by offering more than one. His abnormality (either sociopathy, Asperger’s, or both) is both a lack (in social skills and health) and a benefit (his superior skills come in part from his lack of empathy). The show leaves Holmes’s specific diagnosis up in the air, neither settling on nor defining sociopathy or Asperger’s. Instead of exploring real and/or specific impairments, the show focuses on a more general narrative of disability; it does not matter what medical impairment Holmes has, as long as it is clear that he is labeled disabled—abnormal and marked as such both inside and out.

Holmes frequently refers to himself as unusually superior compared to an average person. When Watson teases him about not knowing everyday information about the solar system, Holmes defends himself, stating “Ordinary people fill their heads with all kinds of rubbish and that makes it hard to get to the stuff that matters... All that matters to me is the work. Without that, my brain rots” (“The Great Game”). And after he drugs Watson in “The Hounds of Baskerville,” he explains, “I knew what effect it had on a superior mind [his own]. So I needed to try it on an average one.” Holmes frequently labels himself as not ordinary, both better than but isolated from “ordinary” and “average” people. So, as with the original texts, *Sherlock* presents Holmes’s mental abnormality as in part a positive and productive aspect of Holmes. In Doyle’s series, however, Holmes becomes an enforcer of

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<sup>18</sup> Asperger’s is being pulled out of the DSM-V.

<sup>19</sup> For just a few examples, see *Reel Life with Jane* article “Does Sherlock Holmes have Asperger Syndrome?,” *AspBlogosphere*’s article “BBC’s *Sherlock*, Asperger’s Syndrome and Sociopathy,” and *SociopathWorld*’s article “BBC’s Sherlock Holmes.”

the social order by which he is defined and uses a system that relies on not only classifying but encompassing people based on their perceived differences from a set of norms. In the BBC adaptation, the exploration of Holmes's character includes a diagnosis of disability and an exploration of his disabilities' negative social and health cost, although very little consideration is given to the socio-cultural causes of disability as is true of most literary representations of disability.

Even though he is framed as superior, Sherlock Holmes's disability (having been diagnosed) is treated (and seemingly must be treated) through drugs and work as in Doyle's texts. Holmes's drug addiction references nicotine alone in the form of cigarettes and patches instead of cocaine and morphine as well. In "A Study in Pink," he refers to a "three patch problem" and shows Watson the nicotine patches on his arm, a clear reference to the three pipe problem in the original. In "The Hounds of Baskerville," a bored Holmes begs Watson for cigarettes until a client brings Holmes a new investigation at which point he tells Watson he doesn't "need those anymore, [he's] going to Dartmoor." So as in the originals, Holmes self-medicates his boredom and his mind, which "races out of control."

Although Holmes's behavior is not explicitly explained as moving between poles of hyperactivity and lethargy, it is heavily implied in the show in scenes such as "A Study in Pink" when Watson walks in on Holmes shooting the wall of their flat as he yells "Bored! [shot] Bored! [shot] Bored!"<sup>20</sup> And "The Blind Banker" has a scene very similar to one I mentioned earlier from Doyle's "304" where Holmes explains, "[I] [d]on't eat when I'm working. Digesting slows me down." In the "The Great Game," Holmes exhibits a callousness that could be an example of sociopathic behavior but also demonstrates how

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<sup>20</sup> Watson describes this very behavior in Doyle's "The Musgrave Ritual."

Sherlock needs investigation to treat his boredom. Holmes looks out of the window and says, “Look at that Mrs. Hudson. Quiet. Calm. Peaceful. Isn’t it hateful?” She comforts him; “Oh I’m sure something will turn up, Sherlock. A nice murder, that’ll cheer you up.” And he declares, “Can’t come too soon.” Along with these scenes, both Cumberbatch’s characterization and the show’s camera work emphasize Holmes’s quick and rapid movements; Holmes appears hyper consistently throughout the show.

Both the original and the show represent Watson’s impairment. However, the show more deeply explores his impairment as disability—that is, how Watson’s physical impairment interacts with his life (including his mental state) and the society in which he lives. The first episode, “A Study in Pink,” begins like *A Study in Scarlet* with Watson and his history in the military. In comparison to the very brief consideration of Watson’s war wounds in the original, Watson’s military experience and disability are far more emphasized in “Pink.” The episode begins with Watson waking up screaming because of combat nightmares. The shots of an empty room with neutral colors emphasize his state of mind. The next scene shows Watson speaking with a psychiatrist who says, “John, you’re a soldier. It’s going to take you a while to adjust to civilian life. And writing a blog about everything that happens to you will honestly help you.” Watson needs help. In both of these scenes, the camera lingers on Watson’s cane and his empty blog, both representing his shell-shocked condition. In Doyle’s texts, Watson’s war wound is a physical representation that allows Holmes to determine the facts of Watson’s background. The show uses Watson’s war wounds as a manifestation of not only his time at war but also his current psychological state of mind and his inability to fit into society. This different treatment of Watson’s situation is but one example of the show’s turn towards more complex portrayals of the relationship

between outcomes (e.g. Watson's war wounds) and causes (e.g. physical, psychological, cultural).

### **“Harry Is Short for Harriett”:**

#### **Complicating Causes of Behavior**

One simple example that demonstrates that the show recognizes the importance of cultural norms and assumptions in Holmes's process of abduction (that Doyle erroneously labeled as deductive) is when Watson corrects Holmes about his conclusions about Watson's phone.<sup>21</sup> In the first demonstration/explanation of his process, Holmes concludes that it had belonged to his alcoholic brother who gave it to Watson because it had been a gift from his romantic partner and they had recently split up. Watson tells him he is mostly right, but that “Harry” is “Harriett”—his sister who is in a lesbian relationship. Holmes erroneously relies on the cultural norm of heterosexual relationships and gendered names. *Sherlock* complicates Holmes's deduction. Similarly, the show complicates Holmes's impairment by emphasizing the cultural aspects of disability.<sup>22</sup> The series consciously critiques the reliance on stereotypes in the original and makes the point that cultural assumptions (or abductive reasoning) may result in far from logically certain conclusions.

Although the show establishes certain of Holmes's characteristics as part of his sociopathy, it frames much of his behavior as abnormal because it is socially inappropriate. In “Pink,” Holmes jumps up and down with a big grin about a new suicide. He yells, “Oh,

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<sup>21</sup> Deductive reasoning starts with a specific rule and then proceeds to guaranteed conclusions. If the first rule is correct then the conclusions must also be correct. In contrast, abductive reasoning uses observations to guess the likeliest solutions.

<sup>22</sup> A similar episode occurs in “The Great Game” when Holmes misreads Molly's boyfriend as gay when in all actuality, the boyfriend is Moriarty pretending to play gay by wearing “gay signifiers.” Holmes's cultural assumptions lead him, in this instance as well, to erroneous assumptions.

it's Christmas, Mrs. Hudson." She scolds him to be decent, but Holmes replies, "Who cares about decent? The game, Mrs. Hudson, is on!" Social etiquette be damned; Holmes has no qualms with acting how he wants. Sometimes he is even unaware of existing social dictates, such as when he walks into their Baker Street flat in "The Hounds of Baskerville" covered in blood and holding a giant harpoon. This references Doyle's "The Adventures of Black Peter" where Watson questions Holmes about carrying a spear (no mention of Holmes being covered in blood) around London. In Doyle's version, Holmes reassures Watson and tells him that he just drove to the butchers and back. In the show, the camera pans Holmes from feet to head, carefully presenting his blood splattered, spear wielding image while Watson asks "You went on the tube like that?" Missing the point of the question, Holmes responds, "None of the cabs would take me." Unlike in the original, Holmes does indeed go about England like that (and the "that" is far more inappropriate). The sequence also suggests that society is dysfunctional since no-one stops Holmes. Whether Holmes understands social etiquette and rejects it for his own desires and rules or he is simply unaware of what is or is not socially appropriate is unclear; however, one of the main running themes of the show is the characterization of Holmes as socially inappropriate to a detrimental extent.

The show combines Holmes's callousness, his disregard for social convention, and his extreme focus on his work to create constant inter-character strife between Holmes and many of the people he encounters. Unlike Doyle's stories, whose plots are always focused on an investigation, *Sherlock's* plot emphasizes the personal relationships. The episode "Scandal in Belgravia," for example, is predominantly focused on Holmes's relationship with Irene Adler over and beyond the story's focus on a terrorist plot. As in Doyle's text, the BBC show devotes considerable attention to Watson as Holmes's only friend. Because

Mycroft tells Watson that Holmes considers Mycroft to be his archenemy, Watson tells Holmes that “people don’t have archenemies in real life.” In response, Holmes asks what “real people have then in their real lives,” and Watson says “Friends? People they know, people they like, people they don’t like... Girlfriends, boyfriends.” Holmes responds that he is “mired... married to [his] work” (“Pink”). And so *Sherlock* delves into the trials and tribulations of how Holmes, diagnosed and disabled, functions around other people. The two aspects of interpersonal relationships on which the show consistently focuses are how thoughtless Holmes is to “the little people” around him and how Watson and Holmes save each other from their own disabilities.

Holmes’s interpersonal strife involves mostly the police, clients, and the morgue attendant, Molly. Although Holmes and Lestrade have an antagonistic relationship at the beginning of the show, they grow closer as the episodes pass (this is also the case in the original; however, Holmes and Lestrade are closer by the second series of the BBC version than they ever are in Doyle’s series). Along with portraying similar tensions between professional and private detection as Doyle’s text does, the BBC show also suggests that one of the reasons policemen dislike Holmes is because he makes public their mistakes. The first interaction the show presents between the police and Holmes is when Holmes texts everyone at a televised report that what the police are saying is wrong. He also outs two police officers for having an affair with each other. The police are given more justification for their fear and dislike of Holmes than they are in the original texts. And the show emphasizes that Holmes treats the policemen badly both because he has no ability to conform to notions of social appropriateness and because he is responding to their poor treatment of him.



Similarly, Holmes treats the clients who come to him with contempt. In “A Scandal in Belgravia,” Holmes and Watson interview a series of clients. Holmes turns most of them down for being uninteresting or solves their problems immediately. Holmes insults them, telling the first that his story is “Boring!” After the second interviewee admits she believes her husband is having an affair, Holmes ends the interview by stating “Yes.” The next he orders to “Leave!” Along with these one-word responses, the *mise-en-scène* also depicts Holmes’s disregard for the prospective clients. In the fifth interview, as he walks past the clients, they disappear until he decides their story is “interesting” and thus when he steps back, they reappear. This suggests that they only exist to him when they are interesting and not as humans in their own right. *Sherlock* more aggressively frames Holmes as a socially stunted person who treats almost everyone around him poorly.

Along with minor characters that Holmes encounters during his interactions, the other main recipient of Holmes’s callous treatment is the character of Molly Hooper, morgue attendant. She dates Moriarty in “The Great Game” and has a crush on Holmes throughout the majority of the series. He is usually oblivious to her feelings for him but once in a while he seems to realize that her actions reflect a crush. In the introductory episode, Holmes observes that she seems to have put on lipstick since the last time he saw her. By pointing it out and reducing it to an observation on her unusual behavior, Holmes embarrasses her so she removes it. In response, Holmes tells her that she should have left it on because “it was a big improvement. Your mouth’s too small now.” In “A Scandal in Belgravia,” he sees Molly and a Christmas gift she is carrying and explains that the gift must be for someone special like a boyfriend because of the care with which it was wrapped and argues that she must be compensating for “her mouth and the size of her breasts.” When Holmes checks the tag and

discovers it is a present for him, she responds, “You always say such horrible things. Every time. Always.” He apologizes and asks for forgiveness, but the sympathy in the scene resides with Molly. Although Doyle’s original texts occasionally mention Holmes’s poor treatment of women (based on his belief that they are irrational and lesser beings), *Sherlock* adds a prominent character as a target for such poor treatment.<sup>23</sup> Again, this highlights Holmes’s lack of social skills. Unlike in the original, his poor treatment of Molly is caused not simply by sexist beliefs but also by an inability to understand flirtation or romance. The show develops Holmes’s social interactions and how his disability informs them far more than the original does. By developing Holmes’s social interactions, the show emphasizes that being an abnormal detective has more complex implications both for Holmes and the society he helps sort out.

In Doyle’s works, disability (and race, gender, and class, in various combinations) are not framed as cultural interactions. In general, they are observable and identifiable signs of an underlying reality; that is, blindness, deafness, hysteria represent victimization, villainy, and impropriety. Even Holmes’s disability represents his heroic status and social purpose. Although the original series does present Holmes as occasionally cruel, insensitive, and socially awkward, the series does not link these incidents to a diagnosis. Yet Holmes’s diagnoses in *Sherlock*—psychopathy, sociopathy, Asperger’s—(two of which are personality disorders and the other is characterized by delays in the development of both socialization and communication) are directly linked to Holmes’s social interactions. Furthermore, these interactions, grounded by the show in disability and diagnoses, are presented not as

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<sup>23</sup> Doyle uses Watson as narrator to rebuke Holmes for his poor opinion of women, and meeting Irene Adler makes Holmes revise his opinion to a degree because he has in her met a woman worthy of admiration.

biological absolutes but products of differing and shifting values. Furthermore, the detailed focus on these interactions can open up analyses of reactions to disabilities.

The series' focus on Holmes's treatment of people represents a two-fold narrative about behavioral disabilities. The first narrative is a lack of sympathy for Holmes's poor relationship with people. In general, the show depicts the people he interacts with as his "victims" because of his disability. One of the few interactions where the show portrays Holmes as being treated poorly because of his differences is in the second episode, "The Blind Banker." An old university acquaintance of Holmes hires him and spends the interview teasing Holmes about his "thing," his "trick." He tells Watson, "We hated him" and later reminds Holmes, "I hired you to do a job. Don't get sidetracked." This one segment is sympathetic to Holmes; he has been treated poorly because of his differences. However, in other scenes, the show blames Holmes for his bad behavior and poor etiquette with little sympathy for his condition. When he and Molly interact, the show depicts her as the marginalized character within their relationship, in part because of her gender. This reproduces common cultural frames—women are passive or victims and people with disabilities need to be the ones who adapt to an abled world or else they are "rude." And in these depictions, Holmes *is* the actor, whose behavior is affecting another person. Such an interaction broaches the question of what is the best or worst social ethics in these cases. Should a man with a behavioral disorder curb (if he can) what is his most comfortable behavior in favor of a woman's feelings of shame? Moreover, the show genders each character's social inability. Molly's social ineptness in her interactions with other characters including Moriarty and Holmes is gendered. She is meek, gawky, and moony. Directly

contrasting her feminine awkwardness, Holmes is too caustic, abrupt, and aggressive—all masculine traits. Cultural expectations about social ability are clearly gendered.

However, the show also portrays Holmes as charming in his callousness.<sup>24</sup> In this second reaction to disability, to a certain extent, he represents the “honest” things that people want to say but know they should not because of social norms. He comes off as likable because of his brutal honesty, and, as a result, the audience is allowed to envy Holmes, because his disability permits him to get away with behavior that people fantasize about. In this way, the show romanticizes Holmes’s disability.

Most of the show romanticizes Holmes’s diagnosis and conflates his sociopathy, his lack of emotions, and his logical acumen. In a simplification, this means that Sherlock Holmes’s sociopathy is his superpower; he does not let superfluous emotions get in the way of his logical, brilliant deductions. Just as in Doyle’s texts, Holmes prizes logic over emotions; however, the show also problematizes this binary. The H.O.U.N.D episode explores Holmes’s state of mind and questions his already-diagnosed disability. In response to a drug, which is administered through a fog he walks through, Holmes breaks down because of the intensity of the fear the drug triggers. He says, “Look at me, I’m afraid John. Afraid. Always been able to keep myself distant. To force myself from feelings. But look you see my body’s betraying me. Interesting, yes? Emotions. Grit on the lens. Fly in the ointment.” Holmes suggests here that he has intentionally created his unfeeling status. He creates a very firm mind and body split where his mind is rational and his body, emotional. After Watson tries to reassure him, Holmes insists that there is nothing wrong with him. In

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to remember that Holmes is also a man, the gender far more likely to be admired for aggressive behavior (such as callousness).

order to prove his stability, he reads, presumably correctly, a couple sitting nearby. He says, “I use my senses, John, unlike some people. So you see, I’m fine. In fact, I’ve never been better. So you can just leave. Me. Alone.” This scene offers a conflicting representation of his sociopathy. Perhaps he pretends throughout the series to be unemotional, and his usual lack of emotion is a personally enforced response to fear and a need for control. In this scene, Holmes uses his skills and methodology to prove that he is in control. This scene suggests that in general Holmes fears that his emotions could betray him, so he distances himself from them. He deflects what he perceives as his flaws onto the “abnormalities” that he perceives about the couple. The show makes the connection between Holmes’s ability to control others and his in/ability to control himself explicit here; the episode makes clear that when he does not feel in control of himself (lethargy or fear), he needs to sum up and then presumably fix other situations. The show, far more than Doyle’s texts, suggests that Holmes’s disability and the need for his methodology is indicative of deeper and more complex issues, both personal and social. Moreover, Holmes is still able to make brilliant deductions even when his emotions are raging; he does not have to be unemotional to be a brilliant detective.

As this scene questions either the legitimacy of Holmes’s disability or suggests that impairments might have more complex personal and cultural roots, the show also expands the portrayal and conception of disability through the relationship between Watson and Holmes. In the BBC’s *Sherlock*, Mycroft makes the astute observation that the “doctor fellow... He could be the making of [his] brother. Or make him worse than ever.” The show implies that they save each other from their disability. Holmes gives back purpose to Watson’s life, enabling him to recover from his psychosomatic injury. When Mycroft meets

Watson, he tells him, “You’re under stress right now and your hand is perfectly steady. You’re not haunted by the war, Dr. Watson, you miss it... Most people blunder around this city and all they see are streets and shops and cars. When you walk with Sherlock Holmes, you see the battlefield” (“Pink”). And shortly after, Holmes tricks Watson into leaving his cane in a restaurant and chasing a clue through the streets of London. Watson is, from this point forward, no longer disabled.

Watson, on the other hand, teaches Holmes how to have emotions and feelings for another person. After they argue in “The Hounds of Baskerville,” Holmes pushes Watson away and asserts that he does not have any friends. The next morning, he apologizes to Watson and says, “I don’t have friends. I’ve just got one.” And it is through Watson that the audience gets to actually connect on an emotional level with Holmes. Their interactions provide levity for the show as a whole and Holmes’s behavior, as in the following exchange where Watson teases Holmes, instead of treating him like a god on a shrine. In “The Blind Banker,” Holmes says to Watson,

“I need to ask some advice.”

“What? Sorry”

“You heard me perfectly; I’m not saying it again.”

“You need advice?”

Watson also complains and jokes about Holmes’s assumptions and behavior. In the same episode, Holmes tells Watson that he doubts he could have remembered a crime scene with such detail because “Average human memory on visual matters is only 62% accurate,” and Watson dryly responds that he’d taken a photograph of it. Holmes looks embarrassed at the erroneous assumptions he made. And again in that episode, Watson complains about how

Holmes is ignoring him inside a home. He mocks, “No, I’m Sherlock Holmes, and I always work alone because no one else can compete with my massive intellect.” And yet, Holmes is inside the home being strangled calling “John” for help. The show sets up these situations as warm and inviting; in effect, they humanize Holmes. Although their close relationship further explores the dynamics of characters with disabilities and clearly portrays positive, human interactions between the two, the suggestion that disability is psychosomatic in the case of Watson and easily “fixed” in both Holmes and Watson projects an erroneous and condescending narrative about disability.

In the original texts Watson is in awe of Holmes’s “magical” abilities; this hero-worship feeds into the text’s use of disability as metaphor for heroism. As in the original, in many scenes throughout the show, Watson is overwhelmingly impressed with Holmes’s abilities. Not only do some of the above examples show Watson’s criticism of Holmes’s superiority, but Holmes also tells Watson not to make him into a hero. At first, Watson constantly murmurs positive exclamations as in “Pink” where he proclaims, “That’s fantastic!” Holmes asks him if he knows that he does that out loud. Watson apologizes and says he’ll shut up, but Holmes reassures him, “it’s... fine.” The show jokingly parodies the hero worship from the original. And yet, the show does not leave this simply on the note of hero-worship. While the original texts paint Holmes as almost non-human, Holmes specifically tells Watson in “The Great Game,” “Don’t make people into heroes, John. Heroes don’t exist, and if they did I wouldn’t be one of them.” Unlike the Doyle texts, the show refuses to leave Holmes on a pedestal as the hero.

Even though there is the romantic rectification of Watson and Holmes’s disability, the show also uses disability to show that there are no simple answers: Holmes thinks and

behaves differently than other people and thus frequently offends and insults the people around him. He treats people poorly, and they treat him poorly in a cycle of awkwardness. His disability might be biological or culturally induced or some mixture of both. Disability can be something to be disliked, as when Holmes is frequently portrayed in an unsympathetic light; disability is also something to be admired, however, because Holmes's ability to reject constricting social codes is, at least in part, enviable. Through disability, the show portrays how behavior cannot be reduced to easy, objective facts, and the representation of behavior also usually involves the concept of normal and how that involves and affects complex cultural interactions.

### **The Hand that Wields:**

#### **Considering Morality in Science and Detection**

As I explored in the first part of this chapter, Doyle portrays a medico-scientific framework for Holmes and the Holmesian universe. Previous adaptations have consequently emphasized medicine and science. For example, Jeremy Brett's series uses numerous framing shots of beakers, microscopes, liquids in vials, etc. that are clearly supposed to represent SCIENCE! in order to portray Holmes's science background and root his work in scientific theory, and frame his intuition as science. Presumably, when Holmes has a problem, he turns to forensic science to solve mysteries such as in the episode "Shoscombe Old Place" when he mentions the angle and trajectory of bullet holes to demonstrate where the person who shot the gun was standing. Medico-science is portrayed as an ultimate authority that the show can wield without actually grounding the specifics in anything; note that in the show he never actually measures the bullet hole or calculates the trajectory. Holmes is actually interchangeable here with science. He can wield the terminology and



“perform” science in part because of the authority that it has and in part because he is machine-like himself. The fictional depiction of Holmes couples the organic and the mechanical, the natural and the crafted, which evokes the contemporary figure of the cyborg. These differences in the portrayal of science and technology represent transformations in humanism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

By depicting the displacement of religious authority with the rise of scientific positivism, Doyle’s texts respond to the scientific milieu of the time. Comparatively, *Sherlock* adapts the Holmesian world to a different cultural context surrounding science. BBC’s *Sherlock* is aimed at a global audience that is heavily dominated by US and UK viewers. Along with the rise of movements that dislike or deny certain aspects of science, including the conservative movement, environmental skepticism (climate change), and creationism in the US and UK, the popularity of science education is also on the decline. In “Student Opinion in England about Science and Technology,” Edgar W. Jenkins analyzes the widespread decline in “popularity of the physical sciences as subjects of advanced degree” in the industrialized world (59). In general, positivism has also been amended by postpositivism (or postempiricism). Postmodern theorists and other literary intellectuals have troubled science’s absolute authority. Although the character of Sherlock is still framed as a positivist thinker, the show’s plot presents medicine, science, and technology as pervasive, powerful, and amoral. In contrast to the original texts’ portrayal of science as a way to access truth and achieve a stable society, *Sherlock*’s ambivalent representation focuses on the manner in which science is used.

*Sherlock*’s episode “The Hounds of Baskerville” deeply questions the medico-legal structure as it was represented in the original Doyle novel. In the original *The Hound of the*

*Baskervilles*, the setting is an old Victorian estate and the hellhound is a dog covered in phosphorous that is used by an individual to kill off the other Baskervilles so he can come into an inheritance. So the case suggests problems of inheritance and ownership. In the BBC episode, the setting is a modern government science facility and the hellhound is the product of an experimental drug.<sup>25</sup> The hound is H.O.U.N.D., a secret military project to create a weapon. Thus, the man terrorized by the hound, Henry Knight, is actually a victim of government control. Science's authority is either diminished or usurped because it is in league with the government, which has specific (and questionable) motivations. Knight, who has begun to believe he is insane, discovers that the government is artificially inducing his insanity and then using disability against him to silence him.<sup>26</sup> Robbie B. H. Goh asserts that "what the ending of *Hound* [the short story] suggests is the designification of the physical presence of the criminal within capitalism's inherently alienating and abstracting processes" (111). He analyzes Victorian inheritance law and the portrayal of capitalism in the original text, but the BBC's episode depicts science's inherently "alienating and abstracting processes" and its relationship to impairment. The military, or at least one rogue military agent whose scientific work had been at one time sanctioned by the government, is guilty of murder and attempted murder. Science can clearly be used for immoral ends.

Furthermore, the show makes clear that Knight is being driven insane by the new cutting edge scientific experiment because his insanity would make him valueless and not credible to society. Thus, the show suggests that medicine and science can be used

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<sup>25</sup> There is also an actual dog, but as Holmes shows in the scene where he drugs Watson, the dog does not even have to be there to induce the response of terror and insanity in Watson.

<sup>26</sup> They do not want him to go to the authorities about his father being killed by one of the main leads in the original H.O.U.N.D. project.

maliciously to induce impairment and wield social control.<sup>27</sup> In *Sherlock*, medicine and science are still used in order to sum people up; Holmes is diagnosed in order for people to understand him and learn rules about how they can and should deal with him. However, through an exploration of Knight's impairment, the show presents a different cultural relationship to science than is seen in Doyle's work. In the original texts, science is shorthand for proof, truth, and positive solutions. In the show, no longer does Holmes present the blue liquid to Watson after an unexplained scientific experiment to prove the mystery's resolution; instead, Holmes investigates science's culpability in the mystery. Instead of trying to support the growing authority of science, the show suggests that science *is* prevalent and powerful, no longer just in the hands of the detective and considers possible negative consequences of science's application. The show makes clear, using Knight as one example, that society, in the name of science, is willing to disable characters. The moral signifiers of Doyle's texts are also blurred here. Knight, the unhealthy character, is moral, while the scientist, never defined as insane or unhealthy, commits the immoral acts.

And it is Sherlock Holmes, a disabled man, who rights this wrong of society and science. Knight has been disempowered, but Holmes, in part because of his differences, is empowered—his differences, viewed and defined as impairment and disability, also enables him. Holmes is an anarchic figure who opposes governmental power. As Knight serves as a foil for Holmes, power and control are emphasized as major differences between the two disabled characters. And yet, society must grant Holmes power in order for him to act, and the show emphasizes that such willingness is capricious in “The Reichenbach Fall.” In this

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<sup>27</sup> While critiquing the socio-cultural use of and reaction to both science and insanity in this instance, the show still relies on an ablest structure of norming where Knight's sanity is a normal state that the drug artificially alters to abnormal.

episode, Moriarty publically accuses Holmes of master-minding the crimes of all the cases that he has solved. For example, Moriarty explains that in the case of the kidnapped boy that Holmes solved, he solved it because he kidnapped the boy in the first place, not because he had better skills and abilities than everyone else. The public and many of the cops with whom Holmes works are easily persuaded by Moriarty's accusations. Holmes must go on the run, quit working for the police or his brother, and ask for help from Molly in order to fake his own death. After his apparent suicide, newspapers run articles about the "fake genius" and "fraudulent detective." People can better understand and contain Holmes if they redefine his abnormalities as criminal; he is not (or is not merely) a genius but is instead pathologically manipulative and sadistic.<sup>28</sup> Holmes is here again dis-abled by society. Because his cognitive, mental, and emotional behaviors are defined as pathological, he cannot function normally in society; people refuse to hire him or interact socially with him.

The show is unwilling to label Holmes an evil man, but it does complicate Holmes's morality. *Sherlock* interrogates Holmes's gleeful pleasure at detection and the original framework of "observe, contextualize, and conclude," which relies on fixing people according to mental and physical norms. In the H.O.U.N.D. episode, Holmes experiments on Watson as the government's rogue agent does on Knight. The episodes, "A Study in Pink," "The Great Game," and "The Reichenbach Fall" draw even closer comparisons between Holmes and the villains. Doyle's original texts state that Holmes's closest peer is Moriarty. The show exaggerates this theme; there is something disturbing and morally questionable

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<sup>28</sup> In the scene between Moriarty and Holmes right before Holmes apparently commits suicide, Holmes is actually standing on a building that says "Pathological" as it is a government pathology building.

about Holmes's view of crime-solving, and crime in general, as a game. The show questions not only Holmes's involvement in the game but how he participates in it.

The episode "The Great Game" is entirely focused on Holmes's questionable involvement in this "great game." Moriarty has set up criminal situations where he holds people hostage until Holmes can figure out separate mysteries to Moriarty's satisfaction; once Holmes figures out the mystery, Moriarty lets his hostage go. After the show begins with Holmes's dissatisfaction that he has no wonderful murder to make his day, the show emphasizes Holmes's happiness in participating in Moriarty's horrific and immoral game. In contrast to Holmes's glee, the victims are horrified, their voices shake, and they beg for help. The show specifically juxtaposes these two aspects; directly after a victim begs, the show cuts to Holmes grinning, followed by Holmes sitting in a café as he anticipates the next call, the next crime. Furthermore, Moriarty's words as spoken through a victim's mouth explain that "I like to watch you dance." Not only does this represent Moriarty's desire, but the audience's as well. Holmes's fans love to see him perform; we wait gleefully from episode to episode, from story to story, for the next crime and Holmes's role in it. His performance is fascinating in part because it is a freakish spectacle, a spectacle that persons with disabilities have often traditionally provided, such as in freak shows, science demonstrations and fictional narratives including folktales and the grotesque. These scenes in "The Great Game" (as well as similar scenes in "The Reichenbach Fall" where Holmes is forcibly paraded around in front of the camera for the—at times sadistic—enjoyment of the media consumers in the show itself) remind the audience of their own participation in Holmes's 'dance.' And Holmes's enjoyment in the mysteries also has personal and painful repercussions for Holmes as Moriarty holds Watson hostage and threatens to kill him at the end of the episode. The

show criticizes both Holmes's and the audience's participation in this morbid, criminal story. The victim declares, "You enjoy this, don't you?" And clearly the underlying message is that both Holmes and the audience are to be reprimanded for their enjoyment.

Holmes's methodology and the detective's disability are actually the core of the first mystery in "Pink." In the episode, a cab driver kidnaps people and forces them to choose between pills. They take one, and he takes the other. Only one is poisoned so if they choose correctly, then they'll live. He also threatens to shoot them if they attempt to leave. None of the victims chooses correctly, and they all die of "suicide." This entire situation is an artificial game following the same rules as Holmes's "observe, contextualize, and conclude" methodology, and through this device, the show questions the methodology. At the end of the episode, the cabbie invites Holmes to come with him or offers to turn himself in.

Holmes, more interested in solving the mystery than arresting the criminal, goes with the cabbie. The cabbie then presents to Holmes the same situation. The cabbie makes it very explicit that he and Holmes are similar, and the game he plays is like the games Holmes plays. The cabbie describes Sherlock as a "proper genius" because his work is the "science of deduction." He continues, "Between you and me sitting here, why can't people think? Don't it make you mad. Why can't people just think?" Thus, the cabbie makes the same complaint that Holmes makes about people: they need to deduce like he does. Holmes suggests that it is merely a game of chance, but the cabbie corrects him, "I've played four times, and I'm alive." The implication being that it must not be chance since he has won all four times. He says, "It's not chance, Mr. Holmes. It's chess." Holmes correctly observes that the cabbie is pointing out similarities between himself and Holmes, and Holmes states, "Oh I see. So you're a proper genius too." Not only does the show draw direct connections

between Holmes and the cabbie, but it presents a fairly straightforward criticism of Holmes's own process.

The cabbie suggests that it is actually the general public, not Holmes, who is in need of treatment. He says that "Together, we take our medicine," but really he *pretends* to take medicine while the public actually takes it. The show recreates the healthy/unhealthy moral distinction from the original works; the "sick" cabbie, framed as such by the show both literally as suffering from cancer and metaphorically as a lunatic villain, has turned the medical diagnosis onto the population at large; it is not he and Holmes who are sick but rather everyone else. The treatment for everyone else is death, and the treatment for himself (and Sherlock) is the game of chess that fixes the world. Although the show clearly presents the cabbie's solution to the problems of the world as immoral and wrong and Holmes's as more appropriate, the process itself is questioned in *Sherlock*.

The situation of the cabbie and Sherlock pits two people who believe in the same methodology against each other. Holmes correctly reads the cabbie's situation. The cabbie is an estranged father who was diagnosed with a terminal illness three years ago. When the cabbie offers the choice between "walk or gun," Holmes chooses the gun because he has already recognized it as a toy. And yet, they both realize that the game is not really finished. Holmes must "play the game" and pick the correct pill. However, before they take the pills together, Watson shoots the cabbie from outside the room in another building. As a result, Holmes is left without confirmation that his methodology will work and sustain his life. His anger and terror is clear as he grabs the man as he lies dying and shouts, "Was I right? I was, wasn't I? Did I get it right?" He then slaps the man, and only then asks who the cabbie's sponsor is. His choice of questions shows that knowing his methodology is correct is more

important than the mystery's unanswered question. One difference between Holmes and the cabbie is that he is killing in order to get money for his kids from a "serial killer sponsor." The cabbie does it for money, but Holmes plays chess neither for love of people nor for money. The show offers a more sympathetic reason for the cabbie's chess game, depicts the methodology as incredibly negative, and leaves Holmes without the reassurance that he won, that his methodology is correct. Instead, deduction, the "chess game," is only a treatment for Holmes's boredom. In this way, the episode not only destabilizes the core of disability, the medical norming process, from the original series but also Holmes's treatment and his methodology.

The show also complicates the consideration of morality. The cabbie makes decisions that are personally moral to him. He wants to protect his children and provide for them a future. However, what is moral for him personally is immoral on a larger scale, no matter how he wants to define it. And what might be immoral for Holmes personally, that he gleefully celebrates a murder because he can play his "game," has moral benefits for society at large. In addition, Holmes has people around him, Watson and Mrs. Hudson to temper his personal moral ambiguity and serve as moral compasses. For Sherlock and the show as a whole, what separates good and bad morality is not what is healthy or unhealthy, but how moral actions serve both individuals and society.

### **Consuming Sherlock Holmes:**

#### **Mapping and the Visual Process of Detection**

One key aspect that has been prevalent in the detective genre since Dupin and Holmes is the reliance on vision in gaining knowledge. Detectives look in order to solve. With the proliferation of television and film, the detective genre's reliance on vision, visual



consumption, and visual symbols has become realized and magnified.<sup>29</sup> In “Pink,” Watson asks Holmes how he knows that Watson had been in military action in either Afghanistan or Iraq. Holmes responds, “I didn’t know, I saw. Your haircut, the way you hold yourself says military.” Classically positivist, Holmes uses the information he gained from sensory experience, specifically vision, in order to conclude authoritatively.

Along with the character of Holmes, the show’s narration also relies on the concept of seeing means understanding. As Holmes explains about seeing information, the show fades into a flashback in order to depict Holmes’s visual process. The scene first frames Holmes looking up and sideways at Watson as he walks in, cut to a quick zoom into a mid-frame shot of Watson and presumably his hair, and cut to a quick pan of Watson’s stance cut back to Holmes still with his head turned looking at Watson. As he continues his examination of Watson, the show portrays close ups of the clues of which Holmes speaks: Watson’s cane, phone, and then hand. Again, the show cuts back and forth between Holmes looking and Watson being looked at. Not only do scenes like this, which happen frequently in the series, emphasize the visual nature of detection, but the visual depiction of Holmes’s clue reading also bridges the gulf between the viewer and the detective in ways that the original did not.

In order to emphasize the difference in regards to the depiction of the detection process between the original series and the BBC adaptation, I compare two similar sequences from *Scarlet* to “Pink.” In *Scarlet*, Watson explains that in the corner of the room “there was scrawled in blood-red letters a single word—RACHE” (25). After Holmes hears a theory from Lestrade, that Rache is an unfinished spelling of Rachel and they therefore

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<sup>29</sup> Even here, by using “magnify” I use a visual metaphor to call attention to the visual nature.

need to be looking for a “Rachel,” he investigates the rest of the room, and only upon leaving does he tell Lestrade, “‘Rache’ is the German word for ‘revenge;’ don’t lose your time looking for Miss Rachel” (27). “Pink” plays with the original and depicts Holmes’s thought process in far more detail. As Holmes studies the body and the word “Rache” scratched into the wood floor, white text that reads “Rache German (n.) revenge” appears one letter at a time as if typed onto the screen. As the scene cuts to Holmes staring at the body, the type flips as if the script is coming from Holmes, i.e. the audience is looking at him as he “reads” the information from the scene in front of him. The text is a visual demonstration of his internal thought process. He shakes his head, and the letters explode and disappear. “Rache” then appears overlaid in the scratches, and a last letter spins until finally “l” is left spelling “Rachel.” Holmes understands that she was scratching out “Rachel.” This depicts Holmes’s consideration of and final decision about what Rache spells. Unlike in the original, *Sherlock* allows the audience more complete access to Holmes’s head and how he uses the information he receives to reach conclusions.

The Rache scene continues; when he looks at the woman’s jewelry including a necklace and a bracelet, the text says “clean.” When he then looks at her wedding ring, the script says “dirty.” Although this could hint at the comparison Holmes is making between her clean, well cared for jewelry and her dirty, not cared for wedding ring, the show makes the portrayal of Holmes’s thoughts clear when “dirty” is replaced with “unhappily married 10+ years.” The clues and conclusions continue to appear as overlaid text in the scene. In scenes such as this, occasionally Holmes explains his thought process and his conclusions verbally to Watson and the other people around him. In other instances, only the show’s audience is privy to his processes and insights through visual cinematic techniques such as

overlaid text and the thought maps. Maps have a long history, but their use, coverage, and accuracy has expanded greatly with developments in modern science and technology.

Instead of being limited to earth and navigation, maps chart human beings in brain mapping and DNA mapping. Such symbolic and visual representations are tools used to understand human functions better. By presenting Holmes's thought process as a map, the show offers the viewer a better understanding of Holmes.

The visual representations of Holmes's thinking invokes other modern representations of thought maps from cyborg characters in science fiction films, such as the Terminator series, the *TRON* films, *RoboCop*, the Borg in a variety of *Star Trek* television shows and films, and *Judge Dredd*. All of the thought map representations in these films are representations of the interior processes of cyborgs, characters that are part human organism and part machine. In cyborgs, the boundaries between man and machine have been blurred. Holmes functions as a cyborg figure; he is capable of advanced scientific and technological processes, interacts with the world through (techno)logic, and is in need of translation for the viewer. Holmes as a cyborg figure has interesting theoretical implications in contemporary culture. Donna Haraway says the cyborg "is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity," which can make "very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual entity, or body" (516, 533). Sherlock can be interpreted as a posthuman figure whose machine-like abilities push the boundaries of the human, the body, and the individual. And contemporary audiences are allowed to identify with him in a way that Doyle's texts prevented specifically because of how the show uses thought maps and text to demonstrate his (techno)logical interior.

In the original, during the investigation, Doyle rarely allows the reader to participate with Holmes; instead, Watson and the readers observe as Holmes has epiphanies without revealing what the epiphanies are about. I compare the specific examples of “The Adventure of the Dancing Men” and “The Blind Banker” to show the difference in the portrayal of process and identification between the original and this adaptation. Both the story and the episode involve Holmes deciphering ciphers. Holmes is portrayed cracking the code by Watson who

watched [Holmes] as he covered sheet after sheet of paper with figures and letters, so completely absorbed in his task that he had evidently forgotten my presence. Sometimes he was making progress and whistled and sang at his work; sometimes he was puzzled, and would sit for long spells with a furrowed brow and a vacant eye. Finally he sprang from his chair with a cry of satisfaction... (“The Adventure of the Dancing Men” 712)

Like most of Doyle’s stories, the text reveals little until Holmes explains everything in detail at the end of the story. He thanks Watson (and thus the text thanks the readers) for his (their) patience then details his process:

The first message submitted to me was so short that it was impossible for me to do more than to say, with some confidence, that the symbol XXX stood for E. As you are aware, E is the most common letter in the English alphabet, and it predominates to so marked an extent that even in a short sentence one would expect to find it most often. Out of fifteen symbols in the first message, four were the same, so it was reasonable to set this down as E.  
(720)

Only when the mystery is solved does Holmes allow Watson and the reader to understand his process.

In the original Holmes then, there is no way to understand the investigation as it occurs; instead, Holmes explains *at* Watson and the readers at the end of cases. The audience is kept at a distance; they are not allowed to identify with Holmes, and Holmes is able to explain his process and his investigation in his own terms. No matter how many times Watson says that what Holmes does seems so simple after Holmes explains it to him, no matter how many times Holmes says it is “elementary,” the texts actually block the reader from being able to do what Holmes does. Doyle deemphasizes interiority and emphasizes Holmes’s special abilities. In “Watson Falls Asleep: Narrative Frustration and Sherlock Holmes,” Krasner explains how since the stories disallow Watson and the reader from participating in Holmes’s detecting, Watson substitutes the outer for the inner (again returning to this relationship of the inner and outer that I discussed earlier). Because Watson cannot access Holmes’s thought process in progress, he “portrays Holmes almost entirely from without” and with a “materialistic representational response” (425). Frustrated with his limited access to Holmes’s interiority, he fills this space by consuming his exterior (i.e. staring at and detailing Holmes’s body and his movements).

In contrast, in “The Blind Banker,” Holmes and Watson investigate deaths that involve yellow spray-painted ciphers near the bodies. After Watson points out the same ciphers in a store in Chinatown, Holmes realizes that these numbers are “an ancient number system. Hang Zhou—these days only street traders use them.” As they look at the numbers at a stand, Watson decodes that one of the ciphers they have seen most often is “15.” And Holmes identifies a horizontal line as “1.” As they look over all of the ciphers later in the

episode, many of them appear with the same white text from “Pink” translating the Hang Zhou numbers. Holmes examines the ciphers trying to translate the rest of them and solve the entire mystery. Unlike his practice in “Dancing Men,” Holmes talks out loud and Watson, as well as the viewer, can hear his thoughts. He approaches another woman for help with the code. She explains, “All the smugglers know it. It’s based upon a book” before they are interrupted by the murderer. Holmes explains, “So the numbers are references... specific pages and specific words on those pages,” and he realizes that the book has to be one to which the people who are involved in the smuggling and who have turned up dead have easy access, so he pulls down a dictionary and a bible. Neither fits. After yelling at Watson about finding the book, he walks into the street to catch a taxi, and he runs into a couple, sending their tourist book flying. The scene follows Holmes as he bends over to pick it up and hands it back to them. Moments later, the scene cuts to another couple holding the same tourist book, then cuts back to Holmes as he looks at them, and then cuts to flashbacks of the book at all of the crime scenes. The show closely follows Holmes in every step as he works through clues and portrays in detail how he figured it out. Holmes, the clues, and the mysteries are accessible in *Sherlock*.

As in the stories, much of this relationship is still based on a conflation between outer and inner; in the show Holmes’s inner work is portrayed through outer visual representations. However, the episode “The Blind Banker,” and *Sherlock* in general, allows Watson and the reader to be more closely identified with Holmes and his internal process through visual identification. In this way, the show presents Holmes to be understood objectively through visual representations of his internal process, instead of subjectively

through his own voice (or even through Watson's voice), and Holmes is not given as much room to explain his detection, and therefore himself, as in Doyle's texts.

The cinematic techniques that the show utilizes in order to project Holmes's process visually include the overlaid script as I've discussed above, camera framing, slow motion, and the externalized representations of the visual maps as Holmes sees them in his head. The camera framing and the slow motion are fairly common film techniques that are used in films for dramatic effect and/or in order for the audience to participate more fully in the character's experience. The externalized texts and maps are unusual; they are also the devices that most directly allow the audience to understand Holmes's mind. Through these visual representations of Holmes's detective thought process, the audience is given visual insight into Holmes through a representation of his abnormal mental process—the same mental process that the show frames as disability. In this way, the audience is being invited to experience disability. Although the films I will discuss later focus on the visually stigmatized body of disabled persons, Holmes's physical, external body is not the focus in these visual frames, but his mental process is still portrayed as visually as possible. Through the depiction of his difference, his abnormal mind, Holmes is still seen, and to be seen is to be understood.

These visual depictions of Holmes's mind are extensions of the original's scientific positivism since they represent conclusions based on sensory experience, even though the series in general complicates scientific positivism. Along with the audience being led to make conclusions based on the show's objective visual depictions, Holmes is able to make assertions and summaries based on visual and sensory observations alone (that the audience then in turn understands visually). In "A Scandal in Belgravia," after seeing Irene Adler

naked, Holmes is able to deduce the code for her safe—her measurements—after he sees her pointedly looking down at her body. That Holmes is able to get her measurements down to the inch through only visual inspection frames him again as a cyborg. This scene juxtaposes biology with technology and aesthetics with science. Even if the show complicates bodily norms and scientific rules, these are a few examples of how bodies are still understood and quantifiable through visual depictions that the show constructs as objective.

Because of the reliance on objective, visual depictions, disability becomes more quantifiable. If the show suggests that seeing is understanding at the same time the show visualizes Holmes's thought process that it also labels disabled, then the show projects the idea that disability can be quantified and understood. That is, *this* is what disability looks like. Like Holmes, the audience can observe and conclude about bodies. Although the show has moved beyond more simplistic divisions between normal and abnormal or healthy and unhealthy, disability is still universalized and the role that subjectivity and perception plays in disability is deemphasized.

Through Holmes and the victims and villains he investigates, the original Holmesian series presents an ideology based on first, scientific positivism and medical authority in which people are reduced to indexical, norming categorizations of their bodies and second, the way in which these bodies then function in a larger social order. Holmes's abnormality is channeled into his detective work so that he can provide a social function. Yet the narrative frustration and lack of identification between Holmes and the reader disallows a false equivalency between individuals, including abled and disabled persons. Such a narrative of continuously returning to a stable social order simultaneously incites anxiety by reminding the reader that stable social order and control must be fought for, and it exists only by



creating and punishing disability (and other such “anomalies”). Through the development of representations of disability, in contrast, *Sherlock* presents shifting cultural values in which science has lost a certain amount of automatic authority; bodies, including disabled bodies, are more culturally contextualized; and binaries, such as those between hero and villain, are complicated. While knowledge is presented as understood through visual terminology in Doyle’s work, *Sherlock* as a visual adaptation emphasizes this visual and exterior summary and consumption. Through these visual summaries, the more available identification between Holmes and the audience universalizes individuals and disability despite their differences and the roles subjectivity and perception play.

CHAPTER III  
MODERN SCIENCE AND SOCIAL ORDER:  
DISSEMINATING POWER IN JEFFREY DEAVER'S BONE COLLECTOR  
SERIES

Lincoln Rhyme, who appears in Jeffrey Deaver's detective series, is arguably one of the most famous of the new disabled detectives. Rhyme is a C4 quadriplegic forensic criminologist who works on criminal cases along with his partner/lover, Amelia Sachs. Throughout the first four books, along with solving forensic cases, Rhyme grapples first with the impulse to commit suicide and then with whether to have an experimental surgery to try to cure his paralysis. Unlike the Sherlock Holmes series, this series makes disability explicit. The text details Rhyme's quadriplegia, including how his body functions and what his recovery and treatment have been like since his impairment. Furthermore, the series focuses on Rhyme's struggles with his impairment and disability including job issues, having a caregiver/aide, how people respond to him, his lack of social and physical power, and the adaptations to his lifestyle he has made since the accident. The series gives voice to certain disability issues and considers how disability is formed from cultural perceptions about the social positions and functions of people's with disabilities. The series gives Rhyme's disabled life meaning by offering him supplements to fill his "broken" world, including a romantic and work partner and a return to his career.

The series relies on separations between mental and physical disabilities that I observed in Holmes's narratives, and the novels still privilege the power, authority, and narrative capacity of the detective. In addition, forensics, trace evidence, and criminal

profiling not only affect how disability is perceived but also shift narratives of the body from external categorization (e.g. pseudo-sciences such as phrenology, social aesthetic rules such as ugly laws, superstitions based on appearances) to deeper scientific “truths.” In Holmes, through the frame of nineteenth and early twentieth century scientific and medical classification, human differences are pathological; Jeffrey Deaver’s series relies on some of the original disabling practices of the detective genre, but it also reflects a shift wherein bodies are understood primarily through social location, what Peter Berger calls “a socially constructed province of meaning” (Berger and Luckmann 24-25).

The Lincoln Rhyme series consists of nine novels; the first, *The Bone Collector* was published in 1997 and the last, *The Burning Wire*, was published in 2010. I have narrowed my focus to the first four novels because they introduce the characters and the disability issues. *The Bone Collector* includes the plotline in which Rhyme considers suicide and the next three, *The Coffin Dancer* (1999), *The Empty Chair* (2000), and *The Stone Monkey* (2002) follow Rhyme through his quest to reduce his paralysis through dangerous, experimental surgeries.<sup>30</sup> *The Bone Collector* introduces us to the main cast of characters and the history of Rhyme’s disability. During an investigation of a cop killer, a building collapses on Rhyme, crushing his C4 vertebrae and leaving him a quadriplegic. Before his accident, Rhyme is one of the leading forensic experts in the country, and the texts explore his disability and his return to forensics.

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<sup>30</sup> I cite these novels hereafter as “BC,” “CD,” “EC,” and “SM.”

## **Boundaries of the Body:**

### **Presenting Disability and Questioning Bodily Autonomy**

Rhyme's body is at the center of the plots of Deaver's series. Although Holmes's body jumped, stabbed, and moved through the mysteries of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, the detective's body slowly receded to the background in Golden Age detective series. John Scaggs explains that Golden Age novels include much "armchair detection" where the detective "solves a crime through a process of logical deduction, or ratiocination, from the evidence that is presented to him or her by others" (21). The body is rendered unimportant, eclipsed by his or her consciousness or mind. In contrast, Rhyme's body plays a prominent role in many aspects of Deaver's series, both in the mystery and also in the personal plots, which explore what the body is and what relationship it has to social order. Because his body is disabled, it is still presented as secondary to his mind.

Unlike Doyle, who presents Holmes's abnormality in medical terms but never addresses it as a disability or presents it as an explicit theme, Deaver presents Rhyme as definitively disabled, and the texts consistently investigate impairment and disability as major plot lines. When describing his disability, the texts delve into graphic detail about his body and what it has undergone. *The Bone Collector* details what Rhyme undergoes in the year following the accident (all of which occurs before the mystery begins):

[a] month of skull traction: tongs gripping holes drilled into his head and pulling his spine straight. Twelve weeks of the halo device—the plastic bib and steel scaffolding around his head to keep the neck immobile. To keep his lungs pumping, a larger ventilator for a year then a phrenic nerve stimulator. The catheters. The surgery. The paralytic ileus, the stress ulcers, hypotension

and bradycardia, bedsores turning into decubitus' ulcers, contractures as the muscle tissue began to shrink and threatened to steal away the precious mobility of his finger, the infuriating phantom of pain (45).

The text includes a significant amount of medical terminology and a medical focus on his body; thus, Rhyme's impairment is medically defined and authenticated. Similarly, the texts emphasize the things he can still achieve "normally." The beginning of *The Coffin Dancer* describes Rhyme as "a C4 quad who could sigh, cough, and shout like a sailor" (38). The structure of this description reminds the reader specifically of the things he can do like an abled person. Following in the pattern of Doyle's Holmes series and the medical model of disability, the series uses scientific and medical details to authenticate and sum up bodies.

While certain totalizing rules about the body from the Holmes series have been rejected as pseudoscience, the underlying foundation—that behavior and biology can be understood through scientific reduction—still exists in many detective texts.<sup>31</sup> These scientific reductions have several different rhetorical functions in narratives about disability. "Proving" impairment validates but also rejects experiences. Recognition has been important to people with illnesses and impairments, and many groups fight for medical recognition (e.g. people have been petitioning to have Body Integrity Identity Disorder recognized as a category for the upcoming DSM-5). Similarly, diagnoses categorize behavior, which can both stigmatize and empower people. If diagnosed, aside from hopefully receiving better medical treatment, a person might be empowered to educate themselves about their condition or circumstances. In addition, diagnoses can help provide legal protection and offer cultural shorthand to quickly communicate information. In contrast, a lack of diagnosis

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<sup>31</sup> Although rejected, phrenology has been influential to modern psychiatry and neuroscience.

can mean less support from medical or insurance providers, and society in general can be skeptical about an individual's symptoms. There are current controversies about whether a variety of illnesses (e.g. ADHD, Fibromyalgia, Restless Leg Syndrome, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder) are psychosomatic (even outright fictional) or certifiable diseases.

Medical frameworks also narrow the scope of what disability is. In Thomas S. Szasz's "The Myth of Mental Illness," he argues that "Our adversaries are not demons, witches, fate, or mental illness. We have no enemy whom we can fight, exorcise, or dispel by 'cure.' What we do have are *problems in living*—whether these be biologic, economic, political, or sociopsychological" (118). While I find Szasz's derision of the term "mental illness" to be overly simplistic, he does make a valid claim about how such a medical summary of the body covers up other aspects of disability, but he also points out that the corollary to this myth of disability is "that social intercourse would be harmonious, satisfying, and secure the basis of a 'good life' were it not for the disrupting influences of mental illness or 'psychopathology'" (118). Many common narratives about disability frame impairments as always being a bad, abnormal aspect of life that disrupts the good and normal. Moreover, these narratives overlook how disability is not just a physical or biological phenomena but a cultural, social, and linguistic one. Through a medical explanation of Rhyme's disability, Deaver presents an exploration of bodies. When examining these texts, it is important to consider that disabled bodies are the bodies that must be authenticated. The abled body is implicitly understood to be authentic. In such a presentation, the disabled body is what needs to be explained, but, through this explanation, what constitutes the abled body is implicitly delineated. And thus, by presenting a medically defined disabled body, all bodies are subsumed within a medical framework.

Although the series defines the body within a medical framework, the major themes of the novels and the structure of the narrative combine to explore a broader conception of what the body is and how culture is involved in its construction. The texts portray how Rhyme uses unusual avenues to make his internal desires external. Rhyme struggles to make a transition to using electronic devices designed to assist people with mobility issues. The texts use these struggles to present conversations about disability and supplementation of/to the body. The series describes various actual technologies that Rhyme can or does use including the “black ECU control sitting by Rhyme’s finger, hard-wired to another controller, sprouting conduit and cables, which ran to the computer and a wall panel,” his “air-fluidized support [Clinitron] bed [that] contained nearly a ton of silicone-coated glass beads,” “infrared above [his] eyebrow” to make phone calls,” microphone to voice-recognition software on a “lightning-fast” computer, Storm Arrow wheelchair with “sip-and-pull controller” (BC 35, 44, 92, CD 22, 36). Rhyme has a hard time deciding whether he wants to use these devices because there are “too many fucking wires” (BC 92). According to one of Rhyme’s previous therapists, “a quad’s life is wires” (BC 35). Rhyme’s response to the wires portrays a belief in an authentic, natural body; wires are artificial and external, and he does not want to depend on them. The therapist’s words blur these boundaries; wires are now part of a new body. In addition to offering examples of a disabled person’s embodiment, the film at least implicitly suggests that these devices are not somehow unique to quads or disabled people: all people use devices external to the body. Rhyme’s new devices are extensions of the scientific apparatus familiar to him from earlier in his career before he was paralyzed. Rhyme can be seen as a cyborg figure, like Holmes in *Sherlock*

from Chapter II, who represents how there can be fluidity about what constitutes a person's body. Rhyme uses these devices to interact with the world and in his detective work.

In considering Rhyme and the construction of his body, the text focuses on Rhyme's subjective opinions about his disability and other people's perceptions of his disability. In thinking about himself and his disability, Rhyme frequently uses "crip" language, and this language is an important way, in which he defines his body. For example, when Sachs talks about a friend "who was challenged," he cuts her off and corrects her, "You mean he was a *crip*" (BC 275). He refers to language similar to Sachs' as "the tyranny of euphemism" (BC 50). Similar to Holmes, Rhyme dislikes what he considers to be useless tact, such as when people avoid referring to his disability. His blunt language presents a personal stance on disability by asserting that some descriptions of disability are correct. His discussion of a crip community also presents his participation in a social identity of disability. Along with taking Sachs to task for her euphemistic language, he also complains about abled people like detective Dellray who act as if "paralysis [i]s a club and they crash[] the party with jokes, nods, winks. You know I love you, man, 'cause I'm makin' funna you" (BC 205). Rhyme objects to being overly tactful and also being too familiar with an identity not your own; both are erroneous constructions of disability. Rhyme and other crips have the right to define the language they use for themselves and their community; they construct the language that relates to their bodies because of their experiences.

Although Rhyme asserts a crip identity and participates with the crip community, he struggles with his disability. One of the narratives that is presented throughout the texts is that being disabled is alien and inferior. As Rhyme spent a majority of his life as a non-paralyzed person, he struggles with his new body and sees disability in general an inferior



identity. A few times in the first novel, when people either see Rhyme or hear about his current work, they exclaim that they thought he was dead (*BC* 77, 116). Even though he does not die, these comments represent a metaphorical death for Rhyme; he is an entirely different person now. People also point out how different Rhyme is based on before and after the accident, such as when Sellitto laughs when he finds that Rhyme does not watch the news now because before Rhyme was “the SOB [who] read four papers a day and recorded the local news to watch when he got home” (*BC* 35). The narration and Rhyme’s dialogue also present a pre-accident and post-accident Rhyme. The narration describes how “In the old days, before his accident, you couldn’t beat Rhyme if he didn’t want to get beat. And you couldn’t fool him either. Now, Rhyme was a busted toy. It was a sad thing what could happen to a man, how you could die and still be alive” (*BC* 245). These references to “the old days” and “now” represent his inability to accept himself as he is. It is reasonable and realistic that a character might experience such troubled and negative reactions to his disability and to himself as a disabled person, and the text emphasizes that these are Rhyme’s feelings about himself and not an objective truth.

Theorists and activists in disability studies have emphasized how the categories and positions of dis/ability are unstable. People’s bodies change continuously throughout their lives. Some disability activists use the term “Temporarily Abled Persons” or “TAP” to replace “abled person” in order to emphasize that most people will be disabled at some point in their lives. Despite this, Lennard Davis asserts that “what people fear is that disability is the identity one may become part of but didn’t want” (*Bending* 4). Deaver’s texts realistically represent this fear, by presenting a person with a disability as a “busted toy” and a “walking dead man.” Such representations nonetheless reproduce a damaging narrative of

disability. How are people ever to look at disability as anything but alien and inferior if these are the narratives that get reproduced again and again in popular culture discourses?

Deaver's narrative of disability presents two monolithic identity categories: abled and disabled. As Davis points out, such categorizations use a "humanistic model" that attempts to make all identities equal to "the dominant, often white, male, 'normal' subject" (*Bending* 30). Deaver's texts rely in many ways on this humanistic model that presents a narrative of a normal, better body and an abnormal, inferior one. The series couches Rhyme's disability in a humanistic model that relies on medical authentication but also moves beyond the original detective frame in order to bring in conversations about how the concept of disability is built and transmitted through cultural avenues as well. The series begins with boundaries of the body that have been previously established in the detective genre but pushes those boundaries by considering how Rhyme and others should respond to his disability, by recognizing the context and voice of the objects of his study (the criminals and the victims), and by analyzing power relations between able and disabled persons.

### **Trying to Resolve Disability:**

#### **Suicide, Surgery, and Substitutes**

Because one of the major ongoing themes throughout the series is Rhyme's unhappiness with his disability, the series frames disability as something to be resolved. As is consistent with disability detective texts, the disability is one of the, if not *the*, central mysteries of the texts. Rhyme has given up on life and blames his impairment and disability; he has stopped wanting anything to be cleaned, rarely wants to be dressed and instead lies around in "the same clothes for a week—polka-dotted pajamas, god-awful ugly" with "dirty-looking three days' growth of black beard" (*BC* 27). He also does not want to socialize and

is angry when Thom, his nurse and assistant, lets people in to see him. He has let his subscriptions lapse and rarely engages in old interests anymore, and his “next big project is killing [him]self” (BC 47). He thinks of death as “his soul’s desire... what he’d dreamed of every day for the past year” (BC 53). Disability is used to explore the questions of what makes life meaningful and enjoyable, but this suicide project also considers the concept of disability itself by asking about body autonomy and the ethics surrounding assisted suicide.

In *The Bone Collector*, Rhyme searches for a doctor who is willing to help him with assisted suicide. He describes his embodied existence when he talks about “the agony he felt in his neck and shoulders... phantom pain...exhaustion...from the daily struggle to do, well, everything” (BC 59). He also worries that dysreflexia will cause a stroke that will exacerbate his paralysis. He can move his neck and shoulders a limited amount and one finger a few millimeters. He mourns the loss of the rest of his movement and believes he could not deal with more loss of movement. Rhyme has previously considered the Gene Harrod approach of suicide by fire and has attempted to starve himself to death. Now, in the first novel, he meets with Dr. Berger from pro-euthanasia organization The Lethe Society. Although The Lethe Society is fictional, there are pro-euthanasia groups such as Dignitas, Dignity in Dying, and Exit International that provide support (monetary, political, psychological, and physical) for people with a terminal illness or severe physical and mental illnesses considering euthanasia. Berger could loosely be based on Dr. Jack Kevorkian or Dr. Philip Nitschke, founder of Exit International, who became the first physician in the world to administer legal and lethal euthanasia (Fickling 831). Kevorkian is mentioned in *The Stone Monkey*, and these references in the series address relevant social disability conversations. Even though Rhyme is profoundly disabled, he can still imagine more loss. The novel is

inviting the reader to think about loss, but it does so from a frame that assumes that disability is the product of loss.

Some disability activists such as Alison Davis and disability rights group such as Not Dead Yet argue that “the supposed ‘right to die’ is a subterfuge for what is really a ‘duty to die’ because society prefers not to provide appropriate support to help us to *live* with dignity, but prefers the cheaper option of killing” (Davis). The first part of the Lincoln Rhyme series presents different aspects of the conversation between disability studies and anti-euthanasia positions and right-to-die arguments, including topics covered by Dick Sobsey and Gregor Wolbring’s A Background Paper Prepared for The Premier’s Council on The Status of Persons with Disabilities, such as

individual autonomy, the right to privacy, and the right to control one’s own body have been presented as arguments in favor of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, [and] counter-arguments suggesting that proposed assisted-suicide provisions would put many people’s lives in jeopardy. (Sobsey 1)

Not only does this demonstrate how many disability topics Deaver’s series explicitly addresses but how power and social opinion play important factors in the debate on assisted suicide. *The Bone Collector* depicts Rhyme as desiring to end his life because he does not feel that he has reasons to live and because he is frustrated he does not have the power, either physically or legally, to do it. He wants to die because he cannot kill himself.

While interviewing Rhyme, Dr. Berger makes it very clear that there are specific guidelines for who makes a good candidate for The Lethe Society, in other words, for who should want to live or not. He asks Rhyme if he lives on disability. Rhyme replies, “Some. I’ve also done consulting for the police and the FBI. After the accident... the construction

company that was doing the excavating settled for three million. They swore there was no liability but there's apparently a rule of law that a quadriplegic automatically wins any lawsuits against construction companies" (BC 49). Dr. Berger also asks about Rhyme's life and work. Dr. Berger and the Lethe Society clearly have criteria about who would understandably want to die (put another way- who deserves to live) based on money, societal worth, and social normalcy. Rhyme carefully considers his answers because he does not want to present any "reason" to live. He sums up activities he has been encouraged to try:

Take a big, clean, smooth piece of paper and write down all the reasons why I should kill myself. And then take another big, clean smooth piece of paper and write all the reasons why I shouldn't. Words like *productive, useful, interesting, challenging* come to mind. Big words. Ten-dollar words. They don't mean shit to me. Besides, I couldn't pick up a fucking pencil to save my soul. (BC 50)

For Rhyme, his disability—not being able to pick up a pencil—means his life is not worth living. Ironically, and appropriately for disability studies, Rhyme hits on one theoretical reason why he perceives his life is not worth living. When people address him, they use abled metaphors, such as picking up a pencil and writing things down: such metaphors marginalize persons with disabilities and overlook and disempower disabled embodiment. The text depicts a rather complex narrative of bodies. Not only is there a biological frame (i.e. Rhyme considers how his body can and cannot move), but there is also a cultural frame (i.e. such a consideration of his disability and his worth is based in part on other people's assumptions about movement norms).

While *The Bone Collector* brings up the disability politics of euthanasia, it seems either conflicted about or uninterested in taking a pro- or anti- euthanasia stance. Dr. Berger is portrayed as suspect throughout the novel. Sachs says she does not like “the look of the doctor at all. You could see one big fucking ego in his compact, athletic frame, his evasive eyes” (BC 386). Even Rhyme, who thinks of Berger as his salvation, mocks the doctor’s euphemistic language, as when Berger wishes him a “peaceful self-deliverance” (418). The novel suggests near its end that he might be the murderer. Although the novel leaves the reader with a negative impression of Berger, the twist ending reveals that it is the “pro-life doctor,” Dr. Taylor, who is the murderer. Throughout *The Bone Collector*, Dr. Taylor checks in on Rhyme and continually presents him with pro-life arguments. He tells Sachs that Rhyme needs friends and purpose (BC 303). However, when he comes to kill Rhyme, he explains that he has only posed as Rhyme’s doctor (he is in fact a doctor) in order to convince Rhyme that Rhyme wants to live so that torturing and murdering him will be that much more satisfying.<sup>32</sup> Because the anti-euthanasia doctor is actually the villain, the novel seems to take a position on the right-to-death side, but the novel clearly also offers many reasons for understanding Rhyme’s life as meaningful, productive, and worthwhile. The novel redefines criminality to encompass the detective, whose job it is not merely to solve crimes but also to prevent the action of evil in the world.

By the end of the first novel, Rhyme has decided not to pursue assisted suicide, but through the next several books in the series, he searches for surgeries that will correct some of his impairment. Rhyme believes that the chance to move more of his upper body is worth

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<sup>32</sup> He blames Rhyme for the death of his wife and children because in a case Rhyme had worked years ago, Rhyme missed finding a perp hidden at a scene, he signed off on the scene, permitting the perp to escape and kill Taylor’s family later.

the risk of his life. Sachs tries to persuade him out of these experimental and dangerous surgeries because she wants Rhyme as he is and because she does not want him to risk his life, but Rhyme perseveres. By the beginning of *The Coffin Dancer*, for Rhyme, life as disabled is better than no life at all, but life as an abled person (or closer to this norm) is still more valuable than life as a disabled person.

Unlike early detective texts, *The Bone Collector* series portrays an explicitly disabled character as detective and takes questions about the body and disability as main themes even beyond the ways in which contemporary Sherlock Holmes adaptations do. As a major part of the ongoing plot, the disabled Rhyme becomes a productive member of society again. Reproducing the paradigm that began in Sherlock Holmes, then, the text depicts how being a productive member of society compensates for a person's impairments or abnormalities. Consistently throughout the series, the process of detection interrupts Rhyme's focus on suicide or surgeries. In the first part of *The Bone Collector*, while Rhyme is waiting for Dr. Berger to arrive, the detectives Sellitto and Peretti bring Rhyme an important case with which they are struggling. After Dr. Berger arrives, Rhyme keeps glancing at the files the cops brought even though he has already refused to help. According to the narration, "several things nagged Rhyme...the fiber for one...the newspaper scraps and the fiber—all clustered together" (BC 51). The mysteries of the case provide him with exactly what he is avoiding with Dr. Berger, "purpose." If he cannot fix his life and his disability, then he can fix life in a broader way. After taking on the case he realizes that he is "once again doing what he love[s]" and unlike the "past three and a half years" the "passing minutes had not lain like hot, unbearable weights on his soul" (BC 243). As with Holmes, detection offers the person with a disability a way to participate in society both despite and

through his impairment. Detection offers Rhyme a way to solve problems in society and become a functional, productive member of society. To drive home that he is worthwhile, detectives offer him a new case at the very end of *The Bone Collector*, at which point he finally decides not to commit assisted suicide, and they say “the secretary general and the mayor both’ve asked for you. SAC Perkins too. And there’ll be a call from the White House, if you need any more persuading” (422-423). Rhyme must be valuable if such important people are asking for him. A person’s worth is grounded in function and purpose. Purpose might be an important part of life in general, but texts that focus on disability suggest that purpose can replace the thing or things that are missing in a disabled person’s life.

By the end of the first novel, Rhyme values himself again because he is again a detective, and his feelings about his disability improve through the series; however, this improvement rests on a continued division between Rhyme’s mind and his body. He is no longer contemplating suicide in the second novel, but he stills thinks of his limbs as “his cruelest enemies and he’d spent desperate energy trying to force them to do what he wanted. But they’d won, no contest, and stayed as still as wood” (*CD* 31). At the end of the first novel, the antagonist tells him that he “didn’t use to be this good... You missed a lot back then,” insinuating that Rhyme misses less now (*BC* 406). By the end of the fourth novel in the series, *The Stone Monkey*, Rhyme stops looking for surgeries in part because he believes that being paralyzed, and therefore being more focused, makes him a better detective.<sup>33</sup>

Rhyme relates his detective work to his disability. In *The Bone Collector*, Rhyme references

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<sup>33</sup> He reaches this conclusion in part because of conversations he has with a Chinese character about Chinese philosophy, specifically Lao Tzu and Confucius, and living “at the center of his being” (325). Future analysis of the novel could discuss the Orientalist stereotypes of the mystic shaman that this invokes and how that correlates to the depiction of an ablest “American” viewpoint. That kind of Zen acceptance (latent in Lao Tzu and Taoism) is Rhyme’s best hope for improvement.



“an infuriating itch—the curse of all quads—though in this case it was an intellectual itch. The kind that had plagued Rhyme all of his life” (53). Rhyme collapses the itches that plague quads because they can never reach them with the metaphorical intellectual itch that is unrelated to quadriplegia. He is no worse off, and his disability functions like his detective work. The itch is a reminder that something is not-quite-right (in his body and in the world). Rhyme can resolve the itch that comes from the not quite right through his detective work. For Rhyme, detection is both disability and salvation from disability, both the itch and the scratch.

### **Dividing Lines:**

#### **The Artificial Separation Between Mind and Body**

Although the text rejects thinking of Rhyme’s disability in only negative terms by presenting how Rhyme’s quadriplegia helps his detection, it relies on an artificial separation between mind and body. Rhyme thinks of himself as “betrayed by his own body” (CD 55). One of the killers in *The Coffin Dancer* sees Rhyme for the first time and knows it is the “crippled” man who is Rhyme because “it would take an extraordinary man to catch him. Someone who [isn’t] distracted by everyday life. Someone whose essence [is] his mind” (287). The texts split Rhyme’s nonfunctioning disabled body from his exceptional functioning mind. This frame is very similar to the super crip narrative. Rhyme does not grin and look at life with a positive outlook despite his disability, a common aspect of the super crip narrative, but he does achieve great things despite his broken body. These narratives imply that “overcoming” disability is a matter of individual will or talent and thus accommodations are unnecessary. Because Rhyme solves most mysteries from his bed, this type of disability detective narrative asks whether sense data matters at all. In contrast to the

hardboiled detective who has to go out and get beaten up, this classical detective returns to earlier armchair narratives without the class gentility.

The Cartesian mind/body split elides or simplifies embodiment issues and questions the connection between cultural (mental) and material (physical). Entire fields of philosophy focus on dualism and there are many discussions both for and against dualism. In *History of the Mind-Body Problem*, Tim Crane and Sarah Patterson explain that many philosophers agree this is an important problem but “many offer very different interpretations of what the problem is” (1). Is it a problem of causality where the issue is that the causal relationships between mental and bodily phenomena have not been worked out? Or is it an explanatory one where mental phenomena need to be explained in a way consistent with the world and science? Some assert that the separation between the mind and the body causes the problem (to some this means everything is physical), while others argue that it is because people think of the world only through physicality that mental phenomena is poorly conceived (shame on us for thinking everything is physical). John Searle claims that the problem has already been cleared up as “mental phenomena are caused by neurophysiological processes in the brain and are themselves features of the brain” (1). Even if the question of mind/body dualism has such a neat solution (repudiating dualism, a solution that many still reject), the narrative persists: consciousness is separate from, even if tied to, physicality.

Through the lens of disability studies, it becomes apparent that there are several problems with mind/body dualism that the series evokes. The question of the dependent relationship between the mind and the body affects the discussion of mental and physical disabilities. In Chapter II, I separate mental and physical disabilities as described in Doyle’s works because they were treated in the text differently. Separating them from each other

must have an impact on how we construct them. If hierarchical structures are built about mind/body dualism, then hierarchies about disability emerge, including whether physical disabilities are worse or better than mental disabilities. Andrea Nicki in “The Abused Mind: Feminist Theory, Psychiatric Disability” articulates how “in a society based on mind-body dualism and other hierarchical dualistic conceptions... people with physical and mental disabilities are forced to conceive of their struggles to some extent according to a norm of value-hierarchical thinking” and that the mind has been “valued over and against the devalued body” (91). Such hierarchical thinking appears in the Rhyme series’ narrative of disability.

The detective genre portrays a social order in which the detective’s mental processes keep society organized. The series privileges physical disabilities as less personally and socially damaging. By privileging physical disabilities, the texts focus on the concept of disability as occurring on the level of the individual. When the series portrays people with mental disabilities, such as in *The Empty Chair* and *The Coffin Dancer*, they are victims who cannot control themselves, are less capable of functioning in the world, and are more dependent on others than is Rhyme. Rhyme is still in control, and the goal is for Rhyme to be able to function as autonomously as possible. A person with a functioning mind can be a subject. Rhyme’s impairment is portrayed as manageable, since the functioning consciousness can compensate for a broken body. The texts suggest that it is impossible to compensate for a broken mind. In this way, the texts depict people with mental impairments as more disabled according to a medical model of disability since they cannot compensate mentally for the decrease or loss of their “capacity to meet personal, social, or occupational demands or statutory or regulatory requirements because of an impairment” (“American”

15). In such a structure, complex societal involvement in the construction of disability is overlooked. So one way the series resolves disability is by merely shifting the line of disability.

While the novels emphasize that Rhyme's mind makes up his usefulness and worth because he can think better, process faster, solve cases with his thoughts alone, he is paradoxically more embodied because of his impairment. The novel details some of the physical procedures Thom helps Rhyme with including "catheter and K-Y jelly four times a day," massages, and muscle stimulation. Rarely do novels spend time explaining able bodied people's bowel and urinary functions or stretches in the middle of the day. In the narration, Rhyme thinks,

At times it's easy to neglect the body, to forget we even *have* bodies—times like these, when lives are at stake and we have to step out of our physical beings and keep working, working, working. We have to go far beyond our normal limitations. But Lincoln Rhyme had a body that wouldn't tolerate neglect. Bedsores could lead to sepsis and blood poisoning. Fluid in the lungs, to pneumonia. Didn't catheterize the bladder? Didn't massage the bowels to encourage a movement? (CD 142-3).

Rhyme's terminology of "physical beings" and "normal limitations" norms the body and focuses on his mind; working allows him to forget his body (until of course his disabled body reminds him again that he is broken). The quotation also implies that abled people do not have bodies that need to be cared for, although they actually do. Culture, as demonstrated in the quotation, has constructed disability by ignoring cultural involvement in the process of bodies; the conversation has been reduced to "bodies that are abled function"

instead of also considering that what “function” means is defined by cultural norms favoring “abled” bodies. Furthermore, the series constructs the significance of detection here since “lives are at stake.” As I’ve argued, detective fiction has always projected the idea that the detective proves his worth through his social usefulness. In this quotation, Rhyme can reduce himself to only his mind and ignore his “broken” body by focusing instead on the importance of others and social health. This correlates to the trope in detective fiction in which detection is so all consuming that the detective sacrifices personal health for social health.

Apart from *The Bone Collector*, many of the conflicts within the plots of the series are battles of wits—the mind of the detective against the mind of the criminal. However, at the end of *The Bone Collector*, Rhyme uses his body to take down the killer. First, he pretends to have a seizure in order to get the killer closer, then he bites the criminal’s jugular “down to the bone” and his jaw gains in strength “as if the spirits of all the dead muscles throughout his body had risen to his jaw” (411). He can hold his breath for a long time because he worked to regain lung-power after his impairment, and finally he does not react when the killer stabs him in response because it is “pain that incapacitates and pain was one thing to which Lincoln Rhyme was immune” (411). In this scene, the text focuses on who Rhyme is because of his disability—he has powerful lungs and no pain response. However, the text also glorifies what movement Rhyme has. If Rhyme had not had the neck movement and lung power then he could not have been the hero who saves himself. In such a fictional narrative then, it is his abled body aspects that give him the “right” to live. After the series shows that Rhyme’s body can still function, it becomes far more interested in his mental work.

Mind and body are separated more in Deaver's texts than in Doyle's. The Holmesian associations between inner and outer that I discuss earlier actually present a more fluid relationship between the mind and the body. External symptoms depict internal characteristics, and thus, the body—or evidence produced by the body—manifests mental processes. In most of the Holmes stories, the villain is unimportant, de-emphasized, and the mystery is how to understand the relationship between the mind and the body (how does Holmes's mind understand the evidence of the body). In the Rhyme series, the conflict in the mystery relies on an antagonism between minds in which the mind of the villain battles the mind of the detective. The conflict between Holmes and Moriarty, a minor part of the original series, hints of this development, which is favored in many contemporary Holmes adaptations. When working properly, the body is just a background for actual conflict that only occurs between minds. Rhyme's disabled body interferes with his mind's superior work, except in the few instances when it saves him. For example, his bowel movements interfere with his desire to continue working.

The hierarchy and separation between mind and body can also be seen in the development of the relationship between the detective and the sidekick. In the Holmesian universe, Watson can be understood as serving physical functions for Holmes's mind: he helps Holmes function better socially and performs "menial" tasks as the sidekick. The Watson figure also provides insight into the exceptional, abnormal mind of the detective for the reader. Similarly, Sachs stands as an abled point of identification for the presumed able-bodied reader, and by making the Watson character in the Rhyme novels a woman, the relationship between detective and sidekick proffers a heterosexual bond. The text presents Rhyme as gaining a physical self and fortifying his mind by partnering with a female

apprentice, Sachs. Because Rhyme feels an “ambiguous kinship between them,” he turns her into his physical body against her wishes.

*The Bone Collector* introduces Sachs when she arrives at the first crime scene. As first responder, she secures the scene by stopping a train in its tracks. Although her boss reprimands her for taking such extreme measures, Rhyme admires her audacity and willingness to do whatever is needed to preserve the scene. He orders her to join his merry band of investigators and walk the scene for him while he, through a headset, instructs her. Before Sachs becomes part of Rhyme’s work, she is about to be moved to a desk job in Public Affairs. *The Bone Collector* makes it clear that although she uses her arthritis as a pretext for asking for a desk job, she really wants it because she has given up on her life, as has Rhyme but to a lesser degree. Sachs has withdrawn from social interactions, she finds no satisfaction in her job anymore, and she is generally very unhappy. Most of her unhappiness stems from a controversy involving her ex-boyfriend. Prior to the start of the series, he was a corrupt undercover police officer who has been arrested for his crimes. Although he tries to protect her by denying the importance of their relationship in interviews, she is nonetheless caught up in the controversy. In *The Bone Collector*, she feels betrayed by his lies and illegal activities.

Although she is supposed to transfer to Public Affairs, she unwillingly begins to work for Rhyme because he and her superiors insist she help him. While Rhyme’s mind performs most of the activity needed to solve the case, it needs to be supplemented by grunt work on location. After Sachs works a few crime scenes for him, Rhyme tells her “You’re my legs *and* my eyes” (BC 193). She recognizes that he is treating her as a body to order around. The novel comes very close to making him her literal mind since she walks most

crime scenes with him in her ear through a headset telling her what to do with her body—walk this way, pick this up, look that way. When he and the text allow her to have a mind, he is still in charge and tells her how to think, how to process information, and how to make decisions.

When she accuses him of the very reduction that I ascribe to the series, that she is only a body, he explains, “I work scenes differently than most criminologists. I needed somebody without any preconceived ideas. But I also needed somebody with a mind of her own” (BC 249). What he means is that he needs someone smart enough to understand the orders he gives and with made of good enough clay that he can mold her into a replica of himself. Although, in this instance, he ascribes characteristics of the mind to her, he does so only so she will become his bodily vessel. In this aspect of their relationship, he is the father, and she is the progeny. Although she rejects their arrangement at first, she begins to admire his mind and thus to accept his superiority. The text demonstrates that he, like Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion*, gains in status and pride because he is so good that he can make someone else the best. He can create the next, better version of himself, but he is still the originator and patriarch in this structure. Sachs reminds him of himself, he loves her outguessing him, and demonstrates fatherly pride when she achieves success as a detective. This balance is sensitive in the series as he still remains the mind in their relationship. In *The Coffin Dancer*, she thinks, “Rhyme was the best criminalist in New York, maybe the country. Sachs aspired, but she’d never match him at that. But shooting—like driving fast—was one of *her* gifts” (110). Because she cannot match his mental gifts, she falls back on her physical abilities.



Throughout much of the series, Sachs frequently disagrees with Rhyme's blunt, so-called "objective" tactics such as forcing a victim to take off her clothes at the scene so they can take them as evidence or asking the victim to walk the scene with Sachs immediately after being rescued. Sachs stands as the binary subjective and feminine perspective to Rhyme's objective and masculine one. Not only does Rhyme usually win the power battles between them, he looks "forward to a real knock-down, drag-out" because "people rarely take the gloves off when they fight with a cripple" (BC 122). By fighting with him, she soothes the emasculation he feels because of his disability. The series offers their relationship as a way to fortify his disabled manhood and complete his life. Rhyme's mental prowess in his detective work and the physical replacement that Sachs provides for Rhyme's disabled body serve as the series' ultimate resolution of the contradictions engendered by disability. I further discuss their relationship in terms of power, gender, and sex later in this chapter.

### **Challenging Authority:**

#### **Opening up Perspectives in the Detective Narrative**

Deaver's series, having developed from the early detective canon, more inclusively integrates the body and character of the detective into the plot. Rhyme's body is something to be solved, similar to how he uses other people's bodies in order to solve cases. While generally Holmes works outside of society to bestow order, Rhyme is one part of the social order that reproduces and enforces itself from within. The text portrays this different perspective about order both through the integration of Rhyme in the plot and through its style of narration. Unlike in earlier traditional detective texts, other characters in Deaver's work are fully developed and interact with the world of the series. While early detective texts include the focalization of characters other than the detective or the narrator (such as

Watson), the focalization of minor characters is minimal. However, in the Deaver series as well as other contemporary detective texts, the reader is invited to relate to other characters besides the detective and the sidekick. All of the Rhyme novels are told through omniscient third person narration and the internal focalization of multiple characters. Offering more in-depth perspectives from more characters reduces the absolute authority of the detective and reminds the reader that the detective is an object in the world in which he lives.

An early detective text that plays with questions regarding which character provides narrative information is Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in which the twist ending reveals that the narrator, Dr. James Sheppard, is the murderer. Focalization is particularly important as he narrates the murder and the investigation without revealing his guilt. Emanuela Gutkowski explains that because of the narrative play, the reader of the short story "ends with a lesson to be kept in mind when listening to sellers of words, which today could be traders, politicians, or false prophets. The truth can be under our eyes, but at the same time covered by the many blankets of verbal astuteness" (60). Gutkowski asserts that truth exists and is discoverable; Christie's and Deaver's texts agree. The internal focalization is usually from Rhyme, but it also appears from Sachs, the detectives that work around the pair, the villain and his or her victims. These various focalizations in Deaver's series present a consistent story that ultimately leads to the discovery of a truth about the central mystery. But they present different conceptions and opinions about Rhyme's disability and ethics instead of privileging the detective as an absolute authority through narrative constraints. Manfred Jahn in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* defines focalization as "the perspectival restriction and orientation of narrative information relative to somebody's (usually a character's) perception, imagination, knowledge, or point

of view” (173). Many of Deaver’s texts are in free indirect style where it is sometimes unclear if a description is from the narrator (i.e. zero focalization) or if it is focalization from a character (for instance, does the reader see Rhyme because he is described by the narrator or by Dellray as he walks into the room?). This is important if a reader is trying to judge accurately the authority, accuracy, and dependability of descriptions. If the narrator is reliable but certain characters are less so, then the identity of the person who is transmitting information about Rhyme’s disability or the ethics of his work changes how we view the information. The multiple perspectives and the free indirect style deny absolute authority and provide a more complex view of the mystery as well as the society in which the mysteries take place.

By offering other character’s focalizations of Rhyme’s disability, the series addresses the complex and dispersed ways in which disability is constructed. When Sellitto, a police detective who has worked with him, sees Rhyme, the narration explains that not only does Rhyme look different, but that Sellitto reacts to “the visceral aroma surrounding the creature Lincoln Rhyme now was” (*BC* 31). Sellitto cannot keep his train of thought because of “the sight of disposable adult diapers” (31). Although the narration explains that some of his shock occurs because of Rhyme’s considerable change, the language such as “visceral aroma,” “creature,” and “adult diapers” connect Sellitto’s shock to observations derived from Rhyme’s disability. The use of the word “creature” dehumanizes Rhyme. Presumably, these passages depict Sellitto’s feelings through subjective narration from his internal focalization rather than an intrinsic truth through objective narration. Deaver’s narration is consistently reliable, which means that the reader would be asked to consider Rhyme to be a creature because of his disability if this information were relayed through the

narrator. However, because the information is being focalized through Sellitto, the reader is given the choice of identifying with Sellitto's reaction or judging him for his thoughts instead of accepting his view of Rhyme. Rhyme dislikes his body in much of the series, but he never thinks of himself as a creature, never mentions his aroma or his diapers. Like Rhyme's own representation of himself as a broken toy, other focalized characters' descriptions reproduce a damaging narrative of disability. But by presenting multiple internal focalizations, the texts emphasize that specific observations about disability are not necessarily facts but perceptions—and perhaps flawed ones since perceptions frequently differ drastically between characters.

Deaver's chapters are divided between the protagonists and the antagonists, switching back and forth between the scenes of the detectives interacting or investigating the crime and the scenes from the eyes of the criminal and/or victim. Even if the villain's identity often (his name in particular) is hidden, as in *The Coffin Dancer*, the reader receives information about the antagonist and his situation from the antagonist himself. By focalizing through an antagonist, some of Deaver's novels, such as *The Empty Chair*, sympathize with the antagonist and contextualize his behavior. Others, like *The Stone Monkey*, use this same antagonist focalization and point of view to depict the antagonist as evil and irredeemable.

Dynamic focalization and different points of view affect the presentation of more than just Rhyme's disability. Giving the antagonist a voice helps to break the binary of good/evil and hero/villain and its connection to physical representation, which has been used frequently throughout the history of literature and film. For example, the evil witch in *Snow White* must be an ugly old lady, and the man with a peg leg or a hook for a hand in *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan* must be dastardly. The disfigurement of Mr. Hyde as well as the heavy

facial scarring of both Darth Vader and Palpatine from the original *Star Wars* trilogy designate “evil!”<sup>34</sup> I listed a number of representations from Sherlock Holmes in Chapter II in which physical features represent internal characteristics. As these examples show, disability has been used as a visual metaphor for evil and to justify the cultural idea that evil can be easily physically identified (and then presumably quarantined). These texts use visible disability as a simulacrum, a visual synecdoche for evil. Many contemporary detective texts have broken with this tradition. Deaver develops the context of the antagonist and portrays a more reciprocal relationship between society and individual. Because of the attention and authority given to the criminals, the audience is asked to consider, and sometimes sympathize with, the criminal as much as we are asked to consider the detective. Instead of merely focusing on how to quarantine bad individuals from a healthy society, Deaver’s texts explore how society has, at least in part, created the current situation and provoked the actions of the individual.

*The Empty Chair* details how the suspect (presented as the probable perpetrator of the crimes through most of the novel) is forced into desperate actions because of poor treatment received from the city at large based on his mental abnormalities. Sachs and Rhyme have been hired to help find two young women who have recently been kidnapped by Garrett, a mentally disabled young man. Garrett is blamed for the death of one and the kidnapping of both because the town wrongly judges him based on his differences. Garrett has a hard time socializing with people and has turned instead to an interest in insects, an interest that the town views as dangerous and freakish. He explains to Sachs that “insects

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<sup>34</sup> For more analysis of the “evil cripple” stereotype please see Sami Schalk and Kerry Powell’s “What Makes Mr. Hyde so Scary?: Disability as a Result of Evil and Cause of Fear” or Martha Stoddard Holmes’s *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture*.

gave his life meaning” (*EC* 332). His foster parents are scared of him and the spiders he keeps in his room, and he is blamed for an accident where a man is injured when he knocks over one of Garrett’s beehives. The novel showcases the cultural judgment of Garrett based on his mental and social differences and emphasizes that his treatment by society is partially responsible for his actions.

Sachs, based on her nurturing intuition, refuses to believe that Garrett is guilty and breaks him out of jail so he can take her to the missing girl, who he swears he did not kidnap but is instead protecting. Both of the characters are right; Garrett has taken the young woman to protect her from thugs who town officials have hired to protect their secret: they have been allowing corporations to manufacture toxaphene, a dangerous and unpopular pesticide. In this instance, as with Rhyme, disability is explored as a cultural construct. The town has invented evil associations with Garrett because he functions differently mentally and socially; the townspeople think of him as retarded at best and monstrous at worst. He kidnaps the girl because he has few options in a town full of people who neither like nor trust him; his desperate actions are not just the result of his inability to communicate with others but also stems from the inability of most of the town, including his foster parents, teachers, and peers, to communicate with him.

The novel depicts Garrett’s point of view when he speaks in depth with Sachs and in the scenes focalized through him. The novel uses the differences between other characters’ perspectives and his point of view to interrogate. For example, Rhyme processes evidence, semen on clothing that suggests that Garrett has sexually assaulted the girl he has kidnapped. In other scenes in the novel, the girl he has kidnapped narrates how Garrett has kidnapped her and what he has done to her. In one scene, she watches as he gets an erection, thinks she

is about to be attacked, and watches him walk away in anger. In Garrett's focalization of the same scene, he gets an erection, is embarrassed about it, and walks away to masturbate into a tissue. The tissue eventually transfers semen to her clothes, which is the evidence that Rhyme processes. Garrett never sexually assaults or even ponders sexually assaulting her. The shifting focalization demonstrates to the reader that people have differing stories about the same event and allows the reader to question whether physical evidence alone leads to correct interpretations.

Like Rhyme, Garrett has been judged and treated as inferior because he is disabled. Insofar as criminals are like insects, Garrett is also a foil for Rhyme; they are both are a kind of entomologists who study specimens in part because it gives their life meaning and helps them with their disability. Garrett reads about insects and thinks, "I could be healthy and normal again" (EC 332). Garrett's insect book tells him "A healthy creature strives to grow and develop. A healthy creature strives to survive. A healthy creature strives to adapt to its environments" (EC 332). Rhyme studies criminals for the same reason: to determine what is healthy and unhealthy and to make sure he and society strive to follow healthy rules. As I argue throughout, interest in detection is all the evidence of health we get here. Rhyme is successful in adapting, while Garrett has been unsuccessful. The novel portrays Garrett as having a mental disorder, but instead of blaming all of his social failures on him personally, the novel details how others have failed socially with him because of his mental disorder. By presenting Garrett's point of view, even though he is both victim and villain, and by exploring his character in depth, the texts situate disability as a social issue, not merely a personal or medical one. But the novel also clearly presents Garrett as *mentally* disabled, not physically disabled and mentally functional like Rhyme. Garrett is a criminal because he

breaks the law and intentionally hurts people, and Garrett's relationship to the world is only set right because Rhyme and Sachs intervene. The textual frame is that Garrett, unlike Rhyme and other mentally abled people, cannot figure out by himself how to work around social constraints.

Although the series offers internal perspective, complexity, and less one-sided absolute authority through the focalizations and point of views of multiple characters, the series still relies on norms about bodies and abilities and demonstrates them through the narrative construction. In *The Coffin Dancer*, a pilot has been murdered by a hired killer. From the first pages of the novel, the police believe it is a hired gun whose nickname is the Coffin Dancer. Rhyme has worked on cases involving him before and has been unable to apprehend him. The text juxtaposes Rhyme's descriptions and knowledge of the Coffin Dancer with the subjective third person narration of the killer. Rhyme knows that the Coffin Dancer is very smart, very controlled, objective and unemotional. The sections that focus on Stephen Kall present a very different personality. He talks to himself as if there are voices in his head. The voices sometimes seem to be his father, who apparently sexually and physically abused him as a child, and sometimes seem to be a drill sergeant or other military figure because the voice frequently addresses him as "soldier." He also sees worms in threatening situations such as when "the face in the window was like a worm crawling up his leg" or thinking of Rhyme as the Worm, "a big lumpy thing, a larva, moist with worm moisture, looking everywhere, seeing through walls, oozing up through cracks... Crawling up his leg. Chewing on his flesh. Wash 'em off. Wash them off! Wash what off, Soldier? You still harping on those fucking worms? Sir, I am... Sir, no sir" (CD 46). The text's portrayal of Kall, the worms and the voices, points toward some type of mental illness.



Either this literalizes the metaphor that all criminals are mentally disabled (a common metaphor) or attempts to demonstrate the social position of people with disabilities. That is, that they are frequently poorly treated in society, that social situations cause or exacerbate mental illness, and/or that people, like Garrett, are sometimes “pushed” into committing criminal acts because of their social treatment.

The text emphasizes the significant difference between Rhyme’s description of the Coffin Dancer and the narrative of Stephen Kall. This juxtaposition could provide critical commentary on the boundaries of sanity and insanity and shine light on how people are not so easily “detected” or “understood” by the Holmesian logic that one can read the exterior to understand the interior. But it does not. Instead, this juxtaposition between the two acts is a clue in the detective text. The reader should be able to understand that this is foreshadowing; something is not right. This becomes clear by the end of the novel when the man the police and Rhyme believed was a harmless, homeless man named Jodie turns out to be the real Coffin Dancer. The narration reveals his identity as the Coffin Dancer when it depicts Jodie acting exactly as Rhyme previously described the Coffin Dancer. Jodie pulls a ceramic-impregnated polymer out of the spine of a book, and the text describes how he can touch the weapon because he owns “new fingerprints. The skin on the pad of eight fingers and two thumbs had been burned away chemically last month by a surgeon... and a new set of prints etched into the scar tissue by a laser” (*CD* 321). This depiction matches Rhyme’s profile of the Coffin Dancer as brilliant and ruthless. Stephen Kall is not the Coffin Dancer but is instead an easily manipulated, “broken” cover Jodie has been using. After the narration reveals the truth about Jodie and Stephen, Rhyme realizes that Stephen has been “the pawn and the Dancer’d been using him as a weapon” (*CD* 327). Not only does Stephen do the

grunt work that Jodie's master mind conjures up, but Jodie gets close to the victims by pretending to be another innocent victim of Stephen's. After Stephen serves his purpose, Jodie kills and dismembers him. The Holmesian methodology of external observation and internal summation still works since Rhyme was right about the Coffin Dancer (only slightly misguided along the way).

Jodie and Stephen's relationship also acts as a foil to Sachs and Rhyme's relationship; Stephen and Sachs are the bodies to Jodie and Rhyme's master minds. Interestingly, the novel flips disabilities and how they serve in their relationships. Because Rhyme's body is disabled, he uses Sachs as a physical replacement. Because Stephen's mind is disabled, Jodie can use Stephen's body as a tool. In Rhyme and Sachs' relationship, he claims that he is grooming her for a status like his as master "criminalist," while Jodie is simply using and then discarding Stephen. This difference again privileges physical disability over mental disability by suggesting that a physically disabled person can achieve more than a mentally disabled person. In both situations, the novels use disability as a way to connect two individuals and explore the dynamics of their relationship. The relationships are metaphors for the split between mind and body. The text implicitly endorses the idea that people must be whole, independent individuals (even if that means joining two broken people together). This demonstrates that, although the series shifts earlier detective frameworks by broadening boundaries of the body and presenting multiple perspectives of characters, it still relies on finding order through stable truths based on narratives about mental/physical norms and bodily differences.

As in the Holmesian universe, bodily norms and disability appear in the Deaver series in the portrayal of police methodologies as well as in the portrayal of the criminal.

Even with the broadening of perspectives in the series, Deaver still privileges the detective and the law that he supports. In *The Coffin Dancer*, a woman is singled out by the murderer because she is fat and is revictimized by the police as they try to solve her kidnapping. In order to save the woman who has been kidnapped and to find the perp, they analyze residue from a crime scene, traces of hair dye and slim-u-lite cream. When Sachs asks Rhyme if he is sure the victim is a woman, he responds, “No, but we don’t have time to be timid in our speculation. More women are worried about cellulite than men. More women color their hair than men” (CD 118). Because lives are in danger, Rhyme, like Holmes, asks for abductive reasoning. He demands “Bold propositions!” which apparently entail stereotyping. Sachs offers a suggestion: “She’s trying to be stylish and nothing she’s doing is working. I say she’s fat, with short hair, in her thirties, professional. Goes home alone to her cats at night” (CD 118). Rhyme could have used hairs found to identify a cat and check veterinarians in the area (which is all they seem to gain from creating the ugly cat lady narrative); instead, the detectives create a full profile of the woman using pejorative stereotypes. Similarly, the entire mystery of *The Stone Monkey* relies on constant stereotyping of the Chinese immigrants, the Chinese cop, and the Chinese villain, a human smuggler. The observation style seen in the Sherlock Holmes stories is important in the Deaver’s detective text: people are reduced to their bodies in particular when their external characteristics are judged to be abnormal and inferior. Bodily norms serve to reinforce social order.

Bodily norms appear again when two police officers report to Rhyme about the witnesses they have interviewed, and they say, “Interviewed all of them. Haven’t had much luck... Most of ‘em blind, deaf, amnesiacs. You know, the usual” (CD 123). This is an example of impairments being used as negative metaphors. Disability has been disconnected

from impairment and embodiment altogether; the witnesses in this instance are labeled disabled because of their failed function in law and order. They also might be refusing to participate in law and order, perhaps refusing to participate with the structure that diminishes them. From the police's standpoint, the usual condition of witnesses is disabled. Disability is about social function and positioning. The series falls back onto simplistic and negative narratives about body norms through disabilities with marginal(ized) characters even as it explores how power is exchanged in regards to Rhyme, his disability, and his detective work. In this conception of disability, a good detective is never actually disabled, and the public cannot ever be enabled.

### **Responding to the Detective:**

#### **Complicating Power Exchange Between Characters**

The Deaver series does not reproduce the Holmesian narrative of the empowered detective who always (or almost always) has the upper hand with the police and everyone else with whom he comes in contact. Marilyn Wesley asserts that "Novels of detection, which investigate extreme instances of extra-legal violence, may, therefore, be understood as pertinent inquiries into the practical operation of power" (103). She investigates racial inequities and how white detectives serve the dominant system of law and order in comparison to the operations of power in the detective novel *Devil in a Blue Dress* by Walter Mosley. According to Wesley, Easy Rawlins's "process of detection does not result in a unitary moral code," and the acts he encounters "call for a confusing variety of ethical responses" (103). As *Devil in a Blue Dress* addresses the complicated interactions of power through the detective's experience as a marginalized character, in this instance a black man, the Deaver texts address the complicated interaction of power through a different

marginalized position. Rhyme participates with power based on his knowledge and position as a detective, yet he faces restrictions and treatment because of disability.

Although Rhyme and his aide, Thom, have a good relationship, the text occasionally portrays Thom as denying Rhyme choice. Thom lets people into Rhyme's house, cleans and reorganizes Rhyme's home, and adjusts Rhyme's body, without or explicitly against Rhyme's permission. This denial of personal power appears consistently throughout the series. Rhyme is infuriated "when people talk[] to him through others, through *healthy* people" (BC 70). In *The Coffin Dancer*, the narration explains, "Because he was a cripp, a quad, because he was merely a portion of a human being, visitors often seemed to think he couldn't understand what they were saying; they spoke slowly or even addressed him through Thom" (56). People reject his ability to act for himself; they explicitly deny him power because of his impairment. People's responses are one reason Rhyme stopped doing detective work prior to *The Bone Collector*. In *The Bone Collector* Rhyme has returned to detective work, but cops again have a hard time working with him and treating him like the forensic authority he is. The series suggests that before Rhyme was impaired, his authority went unchallenged, but as a disabled man (and a civilian), his authority is questioned.

Not only do people act as if he cannot understand them, but they also treat him as a spectacle instead of as a subject. Instead, they are busy gawking at him. The text describes people's reactions to him; Rhyme sees "surprise and discomfort on their faces" when they first meet him (BC 31). People stare at his legs but only when they think he cannot see. When caught staring, "most people slap a dumb grin on their faces, blush red as fruit, and force themselves to stare fixedly at Rhyme's forehead so their eyes don't drop accidentally to his damaged body" (CD 55). Although the narrative here focuses on Rhyme's body, it also

depicts the ways that people respond to disability as shameful using words such as “dumb” and by portraying their inability to handle the situation.

The text addresses how people actively deny Rhyme power, but the text also depicts how Rhyme feels like he has lost autonomy because of his impairment. The interaction between his disability and his impairment is emphasized as a reciprocal process. This is one of the main issues in Rhyme’s search for euthanasia; he does not have the power or ability to commit suicide by himself, and so he must find a doctor willing to help him commit suicide. Not only is he upset by his physical inability to commit suicide, but he is also appalled by the legal and ethical oppositions to his control over his life by choosing euthanasia.<sup>35</sup> He explains that he “didn’t necessarily mind the idea of dying. But there were too many ways to die; he was determined not to go unpleasantly” (BC 31). Rhyme feels his impairment has significantly reduced the control he has in his life, and he feels like assisted suicide would represent a last act of control.

Rhyme also participates with power in how he chooses who he should interact and work with. If people deny him authority because of his disability, he either does not work with them or responds negatively to them. He can choose to do this since he has significant social presence as a forensic authority. Because his impairment makes many people uncomfortable and they then avoid him, Rhyme specifically appreciates people who confront him as they look at him, impairments and all, such as Amelia Sachs in *The Bone Collector* and Percy Clay in *The Coffin Dancer*. People who meet his eyes and look at his body demonstrate a willingness to engage with him, and people “with no use for pointless

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<sup>35</sup> This is how he sees the issue in the novel; it is not a universal summation of the euthanasia debate or the novel’s summation of the euthanasia debate.

tact” who directly ask him about what happened to him allow him to be involved in their reaction to his body instead of being excluded from that process (56). The text creates a narrative where Rhyme acknowledges his body and wants to be treated as a whole person even while he hates his body, constantly tries to fix it, and separates his “broken” body from his sense of self. As Foucault explains in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, the juridico-discursive conception of power (how power is usually demonstrated in detective narratives), is limiting; power relationships exist at all levels of society, do not just come down from above, and are relational. Deaver uses Rhyme’s disability to explore more power relationships than contained in early detective fiction.

The series focuses on how power exists between individuals and is situational. Rhyme, high on the legal hierarchy, is situationally powerless in many social interactions. Not only does he gain power through his sidekick, but it is important that his sidekick not overpower him. The texts emphasize the affinity Sachs and Rhyme feel for the other’s power and position. The series sets up a number of similarities and complementary connections between Sachs and Rhyme. The similarities include their shared “take no shit/lack of tact” attitude and their shared interest in detection and protecting the crime scene (hence his admiration for her stopping the train). Because of their similarities, Rhyme sees a way to make her into the new Rhyme. He wants her to become an even better criminalist than he has been. Never did early detectives think about their sidekicks replacing them. Yet Rhyme, like Holmes or Nero Wolfe, is clearly in the dominant position in relationship to his sidekick. Instead of suggesting that Sachs could become the master detective, the series depicts their relationship as “complementary” as is traditional in detective/sidekick portrayals. Holmes tells Watson that “It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you

are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it” (*Hound*). Similarly, Sachs is a conductor for Rhyme. Their relationship demonstrates how Rhyme himself can become whole (not disabled) because he and Sachs balance each other. They are teacher/student, man/woman, and mind/body. Additionally, they are both lost and “broken” people (because of his marginalized position as a person with a disability and her marginalized position as a woman) who find support through each other. In this construction, they can both find the social power that they lack by working with each other.

While Rhyme’s problems stem in some way from his disability, the texts emphasize how Sachs’s issues stem in some way from her gender. As she is considered to be a beautiful woman, Sachs is continuously defined by her relationships with men. After the scandal, she becomes known as the corrupt cop’s “girlfriend” instead of as a police officer in her own right. Before attending the police academy, Sachs had been doing “steady assignments for the Modeling Agency on Madison Avenue” (*BC* 23). The narration describes her as “tall [with] that sullen equine beauty of women gazing out from the pages of fashion magazines” (65). The texts frequently describe her height, her beautiful face, and her brilliant red hair (*BC* 83, 87, 121, 166, 229, 415, *CD* 30, 37, 39, and more). Instead of using her beauty as some type of juxtaposition to the “creature” Rhyme (relying on a beauty and the beast trope), the text instead sets up a connection between how society treats her as a spectacle because of her beauty and treats him as a spectacle because of his disability. When she walks into Rhyme’s room for the first time, the narration explains,

We see others as we see ourselves and since the accident Lincoln Rhyme rarely thought of people in terms of their bodies. He observed her height,



trim hips, fiery red hair. Somebody else'd weigh those features and say,  
What a knockout. But for Rhyme that thought didn't occur to him. What did  
register was the look in her eyes. (BC 65-66)

Although the narration declares that he never looks at her beauty, the number of times throughout the series that he thinks about her physical attractiveness refutes this. However, the texts emphasize that he can relate to her and she to him. According to the text, Rhyme and his sidekick identify with each other based on similar social marginalization.

The series presents scenes where Sachs struggles with her work because of misogynistic and sexist behavior by the people around her—including a doctor she interviews in *The Bone Collector*, patrol officer Jerry Banks, and two cops at a crime scene she examines in *The Coffin Dancer*. In this latter scene, the cops move from staring at her chest to verbally abusing her. They call her “honey” and interrupt her work “because she wasn't going to tug off her jeans and have intercourse with them or at the very least flirt back, they had no choice but to torment her further” (CD 97). Rhyme instructs Sachs on how to handle the situation:

Sachs, Rhyme whispers, “tell him to get the fuck out of your crime scene.

“Jim, get the fuck out of my crime scene.”

“Or you'll report him.”

“Or I'll report you.”

“Oooo, gonna be *that* way, is it.” He held his hands up in surrender. The last of the flirt drained from his slick grin. (CD 86)

In this instance, Rhyme not only acts as Sachs's mind in the crime scene but as Sachs's mind as she negotiates sexism. The cops stop flirting, but they do not actually leave until she

upsets their construction of her as feminine and a sexual object because she cuts open the dead body on the scene; the violent cuts she makes as a detective create a different persona of her in their mind. Both Rhyme and her detective work offer her help with gender marginalization. The text parallels the misogynistic problems Sachs faces with the disability problems Rhyme faces and creates a resolution for both by partnering them together in detection.

Although these representations of Sachs depict gender issues, I qualify this by criticizing how the series deflects these gender issues onto beauty. All of these examples demonstrate a consideration of social position and power relations; however, the series' focus on beauty does not seem well constructed or thought out. Sachs's life before becoming a police officer was controlled by the need to protect her face; she worried about "the risks of getting pregnant and how that would ruin her chances to use her beautiful face to make a million dollars at modeling," and she had been lectured "about smashing up her beautiful face and ruining her chances to make a million dollars at modeling" (*BC* 87). Cops discuss her lack of a dating life, saying "A face and a bod like that, you'da thought some good-lookin' hunk woulda snagged her by now. But she doesn't even date" (*BC* 228). This depicts the same discourse about anxiety over loss that Rhyme experiences, which I discussed earlier in the chapter. Although the implicit focus could trouble the concept that all women should be dating, these lines explicitly address her attractiveness. The series correlates Rhyme's marginalization specifically with the attention Sachs receives because she is beautiful; this deemphasizes gender in these issues. She explains, "Everybody thinks looking like me's wonderful. I could have my pick of guys, right? Bullshit. The only ones with the balls to ask me out're the ones who want to screw all the time" (*BC* 322). The text

undermines the gender problem here (that women are viewed as sexual objects) by focusing on Sachs' attractiveness. Later, when Rhyme is trying to understand what he is thinking and feeling, he recalls "something Blaine had said once, seeing a gorgeous woman walking down Fifth Avenue: *The more beautiful the package, the harder it is to unwrap*" [emphasis in original] (BC 159). While making the disparate social identity marginalizations parallel elides the different experiences between the two groups, the parallel between disability and *attractiveness* is far more problematic. The text never offers the nuanced view that while Sachs is marginalized by her gender (and perhaps her attractiveness), she is in other ways privileged by her exceptional looks.

On the one hand, the series demonstrates situational power and pays attention to the importance of power in social positions and relationships. On the other hand, the series collapses social identities and the differences in how power functions because of social identities. Along with depicting problems based on Sach's social marginalization because of her gender and beauty, the texts also depict problems caused by marginalization because of ugliness. The narration explains the social problems Percey Clay has faced because she is considered to be ugly. Because of Rhyme's presence, she thinks about the names she has been called: "Troll Face, Pug Face, Troll, Trollie, Frog Girl" (162). Rhyme feels a connection to her because she has intensity even though she is "unpretty—pug and tomboyish" (CD 55). The series again presents how unfortunate it is that people have judged her based on "abnormal" or "inferior" body characteristics. And Rhyme feels an affinity with her because of similarities between his situation and hers. Rhyme feels close to Sachs because she's gorgeous and to Clay because she's ugly, and the text emphasizes that all three characters have been judged and segregated because of their differences. By creating

identifications among these three characters, the series suggests that they are all socially disabled. Thus, the series presents disability as a socially constructed concept based on position, power, and function. Additionally, in the practical operation of power, Rhyme becomes close only to people who are similarly marginalized because of social identity. Having depicted more complicated power relations in a number of characters and situations, the series still presents a framework where the detective is the detective and the sidekick is the sidekick for a reason.

### **From Asexual to Fetishist:**

#### **Sachs, Rhyme, and the Erotics of Disability**

Sachs and Rhyme's romantic and sexual relationship is one of the significant ways the series portrays how their gender and dis/ability identity positions complement each other—i.e. their sexual relationship normalizes each of them. Challenging the Cartesian notion of an autonomous subject with an inviolable body, the series' suggests that the coming together of Rhyme and Sachs's bodies creates the new normal and functional. They are not each whole as a subject but are whole as subjects and objects together. The texts eschew an autonomous individual paradigm for a heteronormative paradigm. The series deploys sex to portray power exchanges in positions of disability and gender to create new social locations and functions for both characters.

Rhyme is clearly attracted to Sachs's beauty as well as to the social vulnerability resulting from her beauty and gender, and Sachs is attracted to his lack of physical sexual threat as well as his mental acuity, both things that she and the texts attribute to his disability. When she sees him for the first time, he is surprised at the look in her eyes: "Not the surprise—obviously nobody'd warned her he was a cripple—but something else. An

expression he'd never seen before. It was as if his condition was putting her at ease. The exact opposite of how most people reacted. As she walked into the room she was relaxing" (BC 66). He later realizes that "She was at ease with him because here was a man who was no threat to her. No sexual come-ons. Someone she wouldn't have to fend off. And perhaps a certain camaraderie too—as if they were both missing the same crucial gene" (BC 322). She is attracted to him because of his lack of physical and sexual threat, and he finds comfort in her reaction to him even though Sachs (and the text) here categorize disabled men as non-sexual and emasculated. Her reaction allows Rhyme to participate with her on a human level; she does not reject or treat him as an object to be scrutinized or ignored.

Soon after Sachs meets Rhyme, however, she decides that she does not like and will not work for him because of his condescending and high-handed behavior. This titillates him as she is responding to him in ways not based on his disability. By the end of *The Bone Collector*, her feelings have moved from dislike to grudging respect to partnership. He agrees to continue working as a detective again on the condition that Sachs works with him. Their relationship, along with having the teacher/student or father/child dimension that I mentioned earlier, also has a romantic dimension. These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive, and are perhaps complementary since romantic relationships frequently involve hierarchical power exchanges. Although their relationship is not yet sexual in *The Bone Collector*, by the end of novel, they have slept in the same bed together. She climbs in seeking comfort after having been being buried alive and saved just in the nick of time. By *The Coffin Dancer*, they are working together and sleeping together "as chaste as a sibling... the talk...mostly forensic, with Rhyme's lulling her to sleep with tales of stalking serial killers and brilliant cat burglars. They generally steer[] clear of personal issues" (32). But

other interactions in the text contradict the platonic rhetoric presented here. The text depicts their interactions during forensic work as sexual (*CD* 144). When he tells her to “get into” the mind of the victim “his voice [is] low and seductive” (86). The narration further explains that “Lincoln Rhyme had the power to conjure her into someone else. Sometimes it angered her. Sometimes it thrilled” (87). Their interactions are intimate and sexual. Their sexual interactions develop not in the bedroom but at the crime scene where the hierarchical power dynamic most present is Rhyme as dominant and Sachs as deferential.

Their sexual interactions develop from flirtation to physical sexual intimacy in *The Coffin Dancer*. Rhyme is the dominating force in detective work, but Sachs is the dominating force in their sexual activities. Their sexual relationship is also instigated by Sachs’s need for stability and power. Because Sachs is threatened by Rhyme’s connection with Percey Clay, a woman in the mystery he and Sachs are investigating, Sachs feels as if she is losing him. In response to this feeling of diminished power, she turns to sex to regain Rhyme. The text presents the narrative that a beautiful woman can use her powerful sexual wiles in order to gain other things, in this case emotional intimacy and monogamy.

Although the narration up to this point has insisted that their relationship is professional and platonic, these sequences suggest that Sachs has been viewing their relationship as romantic and sexual. In order to present their relationship as sexual, the series must apparently negotiate what sex is for a person with quadriplegia. Alison Kafer explains,

There has been an excited discourse around disabled people’s sexuality as inherently kinky, bizarre and exotic. Medical and popular assumptions that people with disabilities are asexual contribute to the discourse about sexuality and disability— while the sexuality of disabled people may be

denied in these conversations, it is being denied loudly and repeatedly, not silently. (85)

Sex becomes more visible because of the disabled body. The narration explains, “some months ago Sachs bought a book called *The [fictional] Disabled Lover*. Sachs was surprised to learn that even quadriplegics can make love and father children. A man’s perplexing organ literally has a mind of its own and severing the spinal cord eliminates only one type of stimulus. Handicapped men were capable of perfectly normal erections” (CD 147). This text within the text groups all types of “handicapped men” together and relies on abled and sexual norms. Both texts, *The Disabled Lover* and *The Coffin Dancer*, implicitly suggest that men who cannot have “perfectly normal erections” cannot make love and that sex must involve erections and that fathering children is the expected goal of sex. Sachs’s thoughts about sex with Rhyme also continue the series’ depiction of the binary between mind and body. She knows that “he’d have no sensation” but Sachs thinks “the physical thrill was only a part of the event, often a minor part. It was the closeness that counted; that was a high that a million phony movie orgasms would never approach. She suspected that Rhyme might feel the same way” (CD 147). For Sachs, mental pleasure is better than physical pleasure as psychological intimacy counts more to her than physical orgasms. Sex is rethought through the disabled body in Deaver’s texts.

The first sexual encounter between Sachs and Rhyme also presents Rhyme as lacking power in such sexual situations. When she comes on to him the first time, the narration reads, “all that she could think about was trying to be closer. As close as possible” (CD 147). She takes her shirt and bra off, and rubs against him. She kisses him, and he says “No.” (147). Sachs continues to engage sexually even though Rhyme frequently turns his

head away and tells her no. The scene depicts him occasionally engaging and occasionally refusing her advances. In other parts of the series, Rhyme's internal narration presents how his first wife left him because of difficulties that ensued after his accident including sexual problems. Rhyme feels threatened by sex and cannot even successfully tell Sachs no. She only stops when he shakes his head "so violently that she [thinks] he might [be] having an attack of dysreflexia" (148). What strikes her is not that he is refusing her and that she has been ignoring his refusal but that he sounds "weak" (149). Although the text explains away his rejection later (he was scared and thought they needed to keep a professional distance between them), he cannot physically stop her and she does not pay attention to his verbal responses because of his disability. It is important to note that she commits non-consensual sexual advances on a person with a disability. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's *National Crime Victimization Survey*, in 2007, "Persons with disabilities were victims of about 47,000 rapes. Rates of rape and sexual assault were more than twice those for people without disabilities" (Rand).

The text portrays multiple levels of power exchange in this sexual encounter—she tries to gain it, he is vulnerable and feels vulnerable because of his disability, and ultimately she does not gain the power she seeks. The text presents her as the victim, saying "her face burned with shame" because of his rejection (149). Instead of regaining the power she feels like she is losing to Clay, Sachs has been refused power. Yet this refusal is only temporary. By the end of *The Coffin Dancer*, they begin a sexual relationship. Between the two of them, Sachs is depicted as being the dominant in their sexual positions and their relationship. Although Rhyme is framed as not having much power in their sexual relationship, the text overall depicts that the power exchange is not just between the two of them. Power that has



been denied them from culture at large has been restored to both: Rhyme succeeds in remasculinizing himself through his beautiful partner, and Sachs, who has struggled with a lack of power in her previous relationships, has found herself in a position of power as the sexual aggressor with a man. The text portrays her as more confident and happier after she becomes fully partnered with him.

In the portrayal of the relationship between Rhyme and Sachs, the depictions of disability, gender, and sex all incorporate exchanges of power. In “Dangerous Discourses: Anxiety, Desire, and Disability,” Margrit Shildrick explains that, because of Western manifestations of the autonomous subject, “the sexual relation itself, and the operation of desire as that which extends beyond the self to the other, is always a locus of anxiety, a potential point of disturbance to the normativities of everyday life” (225). Desire suggests a giving over of power to the object of desire; “pleasure and danger in the erotic” are linked (Shildrick 226). If one is autonomous and powerful as an individual then a sexual relationship threatens that autonomy. Shildrick states that the “coming together of bodies” is “encompassed within an implicit anxiety about the loss of self-definition, then that anxiety—which operates within us all—is at its most acute where the body of the other already breaches normative standards of embodiment” (226). I argue that in Deaver’s series, the same social frame of autonomy, power, and sex exists; however, because Rhyme and Sachs are portrayed as already having lost self-definition because each breaches normative standards of embodiment—they are not recognized as autonomous individuals—then their sexual relationship eases anxiety and supplements self-definition with a different normative standard—the heteronormative and abling partnership.

In Deaver's series, Rhyme's body, because of his disability, serves an erotic function. Shildrick's psychoanalytic narrative of sexuality explains that adult sexuality "is permeated with a nostalgia for the fragmented, incomplete body, the body, in other words, that is intrinsically dependent on another" (235). Sachs uses Rhyme to reject sex, and then recovers her power through her sexual dominance of Rhyme. Thus, in the narrative of Rhyme's disabled body there is both a "normative imperative to devalue or silence sexuality" and "a highly evident strand of voyeurism, which spills over into a fetishistic focus on disabled bodies precisely as sexual" (236). This narrative shows how disability, "as a crutch on which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potential, and social critique" becomes a way to negotiate sex and power (Mitchell and Snyder 17).

### **The Power of Looking:**

#### **Framing Forensics and the Disabled Body**

Not only does the reader gaze at Rhyme's body, but, just as the Holmesian structure sets up, gaze is essential for the detective as well. In his forensic work, Rhyme is a voyeur; he literally examines microscopic aspects of people's lives in order to create a narrative about that person, and this behavior of viewing and narrativizing, which I'll refer to as looking, makes up his career and his purpose in life. I turn to the film version of *The Bone Collector* to explore the concept of looking used in forensics and visual representations of disability. Visualization gets emphasized when the meta-nature of a forensic film is added to this summation of the forensic genre—the film medium visually depicts the visualization of forensics. In detective films, everything is spectacularized—criminal, detective, and the process of detection.

Only two years after the publication of Deaver's first novel, the film adaptation was released. Two novels, *The Bone Collector* and *The Coffin Dancer*, had been published by the release of the movie in 1999. I compare characteristics between the series as a whole and the film, but I attempt to focus on the first novel and the film. Directed by Phillip Noyce and starring Denzel Washington and Angelina Jolie, *The Bone Collector* is formulated as a Hollywood blockbuster detective film. *The Bone Collector* plot uses a voyeuristic gaze and focuses primarily on the crime and crime scene investigations, which leaves little room for development of characters and nuanced exploration of cultural topics. In this section, I analyze the differences between the novel and film, and the film's techniques to present the story, and concepts of looking, spectacle, and voyeurism. The film returns to a single narrative and a stable social order, and uses visual images in order to present meaning and classify bodies. This returns the film to the traditional detective philosophy that solving problems (detection) means creating and relying on norms and, using this same logic, that disability is a static and universal fact instead of a socio-cultural normative concept.

In the time period between the original publication of Sherlock Holmes and contemporary detective texts, the relationship between vision and the production of meaning has been explored in a variety of ways by different theorists. Jacques Lacan advanced Freudian work by theorizing the process of looking, i.e. the mirror stage and the gaze. Michel Foucault connects sight and power in his discussion of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*; surveillance, the ability to see without being seen, exercises power. Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord both discuss the dominance of the image and the visible form that act as mediator between people and life. In some postmodernist thought, photography and cinema have had important influences on the concept of the image and cultural

engagement with reality. Norman Denzin explains that the “postmodern is a visual, cinematic age; it knows itself in part through the reflections that flow from the camera’s eye. The voyeur is the iconic, postmodern self. Adrift in a sea of symbols, we find ourselves, voyeurs all, products of a cinematic gaze” (1). Denzin specifically connects the voyeuristic gaze to cinema and a postmodern time period, and films, as they are more directly (or at least obviously) visual, might be more prone to having a voyeuristic gaze. Laura Mulvey’s influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” demonstrates the voyeuristic nature of watching films. Cinematic postmodern examples of the gaze follow from an earlier literary tradition that similarly consume and controls symbols (such as disability) to support simplistic and normative narratives about life and people.<sup>36</sup>

Forensics as a visual process and the visualization of forensics are a central focus in both the novel and the film. Lindsay Steenberg argues that *The Bone Collector* novel “insists that visualization is the most important mode for analyzing a crime scene. In the forensic subgenre, everything is visualized: the crime scene, the federal database searches, the evidence collection, and even the process of laboratory analysis” (114). As the example of the slim-u-lite cream mentioned above demonstrates, forensic criminalists all search for “individuated evidence, evidence that is unusual or identifiable, which can be connected to an individual person or place” (Steenberg 116). The series focuses only on individuated evidence even though most evidence found in crime scenes in reality is not (Steenberg 116). Moreover, the film equates science with looking, and by focusing only on individuated evidence, the story suggests that looking leads to identification and knowledge.

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<sup>36</sup> A further project could analyze the reliance on vision and abled looking in these theories.

In the framework of the film and series, the body is understood by how it can be measured and how it relates to other bodies and ideals about bodies. As in forensics, in the presentation of “disabled,” bodies are reduced to a “curve of statistical norms” and placed in an identification system, as I discussed in Chapter II (Gunning 31). By boiling both forensics and disability down to simplistic visual representations, the film can “move [the] story forward quickly while educating the spectator and providing spectacles of science in action” (Steenberg 116). Most often associated with Debord and his work *The Society of the Spectacle*, the concept of the spectacle refers to how images mediate the processes of social relations and exchanges of power. According to Debord, one major function of the spectacle is “obfuscation.” Spectacle hinders critical thought and encourages passivity and consumerism. In short, spectacle means to disable us. According to Christine Abbott, Astrid Kersten, and Lauren Lampe, “like the Roman circuses of old, the purpose of spectacle is to redirect citizens’ attention from structural inequalities to spectacular events designed to subdue social criticism” (82). Spectacular images of disability and science obfuscate more critical considerations of the structural inequalities in these complicated processes.

Extreme close-ups throughout the film are almost always of two items, screens and clues. These are, according to the film, the things that assist viewing and the things that need to be viewed. The film uses these representations in order to make visible Rhyme’s mental process. The screens include eyes as well as computer screens that show larger or manipulable representations of the clues of the crimes (e.g. screen views of the document camera view of scraps of paper as well as the computer screens that transmit information including medical information about Rhyme (such as heartbeat or blood pressure)). In these screens, the clues can be magnified or resolution can be changed. In the scenes with these

extreme close-up, the film uses “montage and parallel editing sequences to deal sensationally and economically with the processes of collection, analysis, and hypothesis” of the clues in the film (Steenberg 116). According to Steenberg, “trace functions successfully in *The Bone Collector* because its collection and analysis is made visually compelling. It makes the intangible visible, and it economically visualizes the criminalists’ deductive reasoning and crime solving skills” (115). Not only does this make the one who views in the movie viewed by the audience of the movie, but the similar framing also makes solving the mystery of the disabled body parallel with solving the mystery of the crime.

As in the above quotation about the visualization of forensics, the film depicts disability in detective texts as visible (when previously tangible *or* intangible) and visualizes the productivity and the success of the disabled detective. For example, the film’s title sequence begins to lay out Rhyme’s background and authority by showing the covers and jackets of his crime textbooks and pictures of Rhyme as a cop before his accident. Later, when a stranger walks into Rhyme’s bedroom, the camera (and presumably the character—the stranger and/or maybe even Rhyme himself) looks towards pictures of Rhyme pre-accident before cutting back to a shot of Rhyme paralyzed in his medical bed. The camera movement highlights abled Rhyme versus disabled Rhyme. Thus, visualization is used to represent and understand the disability of the detective. This is the second function of the extreme close-ups of Rhyme’s eyes. These images convey both that he is a voyeur and that he, as a disabled man, is viewed. The extreme close-ups in the film are of symbols of visual conductors—screens and eyes, both Rhyme’s and the villain’s. Similar film techniques (montages and parallel editing) used to portray clues are used to depict “Rhyme the disabled.” Like the use of complicated medical terminology in the series, images of

“medicine” frame and act as symbolic representations of disability. Similar to the way images of a beaker, magnifying glass, or microscope represent “science” in early Sherlock Holmes films, Rhyme’s hydraulic bed, the computer screens, and his finger control device communicate medical disability and residual ability as much as the image of his immobile body does, perhaps more so. The film highlights the close connections among criminal forensics and images thereof and the image of the disabled; there is a voyeuristic participation in both.

The aspects of the original story that receive the most time in the film are the crimes and crime scenes, which mimic the novel’s depictions of the crimes fairly closely. They both involve copycatting old crime scenes from a turn of the century crime book, including death by steam pipe, by rat, and by drowning in an upcoming tide. The climax of *The Bone Collector* is when the perpetrator comes to kill Rhyme. The only major omissions from the crimes are the removal of the scenes in which Sachs has been kidnapped by the perp and buried alive. While the details of the crimes are very similar, the perpetrator’s identity and motive are different in the film. In the novel, the killer is an ex-doctor who seeks revenge on Rhyme because his children and wife were killed after Rhyme misread a crime scene. In contrast, in the film, the killer is an ex-forensic cop who seeks revenge against Rhyme because Rhyme testified that the forensic cop had planted evidence at crime scenes. The film does not develop the assisted suicide plot from the novel. By integrating disability into the mystery, the novel depicts how disability is integrated with other cultural aspects, e.g. the law, his career, and how people treat him, etc. In the film, disability is instead a tangential plot thread, which leaves Rhyme’s position more defined in culture by his role as a detective. Both the series and the film consider how Rhyme can be an active participant in

society through his work but only the series addresses how Rhyme lacks social power and faces marginalization because of his disability. While the series, with its detective generic features, opens up the concept of disability by exploring the mystery alongside the characters' cultural situation and voices, the film creates a narrative (both in the story and of ontological truth) that relies on images and closed narratives and signifiers.<sup>37</sup> As in the Holmesian universe, this narrative uses detection to offer fixed answers to disability, crime, and social interactions. Similar to older, more traditional detective stories, the film places all of the focus (including both praise and blame) on the detective and individual agency instead of analyzing culture or presenting socially situated individuals. I believe this is in part because Hollywood blockbusters usually focus on a hero narrative because of a belief that it is more entertaining to watch individuals act than it is to think about social constraints.

While the crime scenes are similar between novel and film, their relationship to the plot within the larger work differs. Deaver relies on shifting points of view with a significant amount of character development and the characters' internal monologues in order to tell the story. Even in the "action" scenes, Deaver develops the antagonist's personality, voice, and background. In contrast, the film, a fairly traditional Hollywood detective film, prefers visuals and closed signifiers to exploration of interiority. Presenting shifting focalization in films is intrinsically harder.

Returning to this more traditional formula, the film, unlike the novel, uses an antagonist merely as decoration and plot development. In the crime scenes, the film's villain

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<sup>37</sup> I use the term closed signifier to refer to the film's tendency to use signifiers to represent the signified as if they are in a fixed and closed relationship. The film elides the differences between signifiers and signifieds of concepts such as race, gender, disability, and crime and the people involved in each. To be disabled can be represented by signifiers of disability such as medical equipment and visual representations of Rhyme's paralysis.



wears black from head to toe, and all of his features are hidden. Before the final scene, the only thing we see of him is one semi-revealing shot of an extreme close-up of his bright blue eyes. As in the close-ups of Rhyme's eyes, the close-ups of the villain's eyes ask the viewer to classify him. Instead of revealing any interiority of the character, this shot acts as a clue to tempt the audience to participate in solving the mystery. What other character has blue eyes? By paralleling the extreme close-up of Rhyme's eyes and the antagonist's eyes, the structure of a detective story—detective versus criminal—is emphasized. By privileging Rhyme's eyes (and his voice), the narrative structure in the film presents Rhyme as the clear authority. During the crime scenes in the film, the antagonist never speaks and the reason behind the crime is never addressed until the final reveal.

The mystery in the film, which dominates the plot, takes place primarily in two locations, which in different ways concentrate on looking and movement. The first is the aforementioned crime scenes where the antagonist commits the crime and Amelia Donaghy, Sachs analog, walks the grid.<sup>38</sup> In the crime scenes, the plot events consist mostly of the victims' struggling to get away until the antagonist restrains them, and during the crime investigation scenes, of Donaghy walking, moving from clue to clue, picking each up, and bagging it. In these scenes, there is dialogue between Rhyme and Donaghy, but this dialogue consists mostly of Rhyme asking her what she sees and telling her how she should move—conversation all about movement and seeing. These crime scenes, which are full of movement with little dialogue, contrast with the second location, in Rhyme's bedroom. After the first flashback scene, which depicts Rhyme pre-accident, most of the scenes with Rhyme

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<sup>38</sup> Amelia's last name is now Donaghy instead of Sachs, and hereafter, I use Donaghy to refer to the film character, Sachs to refer to the series character and the Amelia character if I am emphasizing similarities between the two versions.

began with a shot of his eyes and then zoom out or cut to different shots of his paralyzed body in the medical bed surrounded by medical equipment. Looking is signified by shots of eyes and the movement and frame of the camera. Through movement and images, these sequences of Rhyme tell the story of how Rhyme became disabled and how his disability functions through visual demonstration as opposed to Rhyme or a narrator describing his disability and what his disability then means. This is a representation of the challenges films face in representing interiority.

Unlike in the action sequences, very little movement takes place in the frame; as in the action sequences, most shots last between two and six seconds long, which supplies movement and action where there is little. Both locations look at action and movement to put exteriority at the forefront and replace deeper considerations and interiority. According to Guy Debord, life has been reduced to appearances; “all that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (Debord, *Society*). The completeness of the visual depiction conceals that the representation is not real and only a copy of the real.

The extreme close-ups of Rhyme’s eyes frame, either as the first or the last shot, scenes involving him; they act as the leitmotif for voyeurism and the paradigm that seeing things means categorizing and understanding them (the same paradigm that I discuss and analyze from my first chapter on the detective icon, Sherlock Holmes). In this structure, the image then becomes a replacement for the person or thing behind the image.<sup>39</sup> Images are not only the medium that tells the story but also a repeated theme throughout the film. Very similar shots of Rhyme’s eyes also depict his perception and interpretation of forensic clues;

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<sup>39</sup> I use the term voyeurism because the act of seeing that the film continuously depicts both results in pleasure for the viewer (in and outside of the film) and breaks a relationship or connection between the viewer and the person or object being viewed.

these shots are followed closely by Rhyme's forensic epiphanies. The images of his eyes serve multiple purposes. They symbolically represent his position as a voyeur and his position as something consumed by a voyeur. The film, following in the tradition of many famous thrillers (e.g. *Rear Window*, *Peeping Tom*, *American Beauty*) develops the theme of voyeurism; the man, depicted as broken either literally or metaphorically, watches the world, and the audience watches the broken man.

Along with the shots of eyes and the movement of the camera, images of images are used to portray other aspects of the plot including pictures of Donaghy's earlier modeling career and the comparison between pre accident and post accident Rhyme. In *Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy and Peering in Modern Culture*, Clay Calvert explains how the West has become a zone of voyeurs: "We are an increasingly hedonistic, self-absorbed society in which we get pleasure from watching others' lives without having to interact with them" (74). In a society based on spectacle, relationships between people are replaced by images. Instead of allowing Donaghy to explain her past or give information about her modeling career, the viewer learns about her history through simple images. Privileging the symbol/image-object deemphasizes the cultural context where the image object actually occurs and so the film presents a decontextualized image that focuses only on the individual.

The film shifts and deemphasizes many cultural contexts that occur in the book. Because the film alters certain crucial traits of the main characters, cultural contexts shift. Most importantly, Lincoln Rhyme is black, while he is white in the series, and the caretaker is no longer Thom, who is a gay white man in the series, and is instead a black woman named Thelma, played by Queen Latifah. There are similarities between the relationship, which suggests that the film is attempting to adapt the characters and relationship from the

series. For example, Thelma and Rhyme still have the loving but contentious relationship that Thom and Rhyme do in the novel.<sup>40</sup> However, the changes in the characters become important as both the novel and the film talk about the social contexts of the character's group identity positions. In the series, Rhyme acknowledges his white privilege and class status. For example, Rhyme explains that he can function in society because he has the money to pay for expensive and uncommon technology. He also thinks about the negative reaction a Chinese cop receives, from him and others, in *The Stone Monkey* because he is set apart racially.<sup>41</sup> However, in the film Rhyme pays more attention to individual agency. He gives Donaghy a pep talk about how one can overcome his or her situation. He uses himself as an example and explains that his parents between them had never read a book, but he has read thousands. He tells her there is no pre-ordained destiny, and she does not have to end up like her father, having committed suicide. This speech ignores any discussion of social position and class privilege. Presumably his parents had never read a book because they were poor and black. By emphasizing individual power, the film erases social privilege and position. The viewer watches as a black man tells a bootstrap narrative; this image of blackness affects the meaning and value of his narrative and the film does not recognize or interrogate its representation of race.

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<sup>40</sup> I use first names for both Thom and Thelma because they are consistently referred to only by first name in both film and novel versions. In the series, Thom even makes snarky remarks about how Rhyme uses last names if the person has position or gravitas, and Thom, as caretaker, does not rank high enough. I think this is astute commentary on class position and labels.

<sup>41</sup> This is far more complicated than I briefly describe here. The Chinese cop is also set apart because he entered the country illegally and undercover, and he does not know American law or etiquette like not smoking indoors and not referring to people by racial characteristics (ie nicknaming the Black detective the Chinese word for black.)

The different treatment of the caretaker in the film also tends towards erasing social position and privilege as well as privileging symbols over complicated interiority. The series addresses the cultural treatment of Thom as a gay man, even without necessarily challenging the stereotype of gay men as effeminate and nurturing. The film never discusses Thelma's race, gender, or class position but arguably still relies on the visual marker of marginalization, her blackness. Similarly, the series also explicitly discusses the role of a caretaker. Rhyme considers Thom's position and emphasizes his importance in his life. Rhyme thinks of all of the things that Thom does for and with him—he is a nurse, right hand man, caretaker, etc.—but recognizes that Thom prefers to be called a caretaker and thus addresses him as such. The film never presents any conversation about Thelma's duties, never mentions her title, and is referred to by Rhyme as “My Thelma.”<sup>42</sup> Thus the film does not explicitly engage in a conversation about her social position. Instead, the film simply visually presents her service role, and Rhyme claims her in this language. Also, changing the caretaker's characteristics changes the dynamics between the characters. While the film includes another woman as a main character, the film reproduces stereotypes of women, specifically black women, by making the only black woman character a caretaker. She does not raise white children like a “mammy” character.<sup>43</sup> Yet she's a domestic servant, specifically a nurse, and is a foil to the romantic and sexualized white woman, Donaghy.

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<sup>42</sup> This is also an allusion to Thelma Ritter as James Stewart's caretaker in *Rear Window*.

<sup>43</sup> For information about the history of the “Mammy,” please see Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* and Jessie W. Parkhurst's “The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household.” For more discussions about contemporary interpretations of this figure, please see Cheryl Thurber's “The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology” and Patricia A. Turner's *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture*.

Donaghy, like Sachs, is recovering from a traumatic history; however, Donaghy's trauma is finding the body of her father who had committed suicide instead of Sach's breakdown that I discussed earlier. This shift in context for the character has implications for the depictions of gender between series and film. Both the series and the film frame the Amelia character through her romantic relationships. There is a short scene at the beginning of the film where Donaghy pushes her boyfriend away. He wants more commitment, and she does not. Comparatively, Sachs has changed jobs and isolated herself after her boyfriend drama. Yet, each handles her relationship trouble differently. In the film, her commitment issues are reduced to the symbol of her family trauma (family trauma causes commitment issues-making the psychological process dominant); this emphasizes that she is incapable of a "normal" relationship presuming that she wants or needs a committed boyfriend. In the series, because of her relationship issues, culture treats her in problematic ways. In order to protect Sachs from being implicated in his crimes, her ex-boyfriend trivializes their relationship and refers to her as "just a good lay." Her co-workers judge her for being a slut and sleeping with a "bad" man. In general, in the series, people treat her with less respect because she is a woman, an unmarried woman, and an unmarried woman with a poor history in her dating life. The series tries to point out the problematic process of using a signifier (slut) to define her. Again, the series considers cultural issues, and complicates singular narratives and symbols, while the film prizes individual issues over cultural issues and presents one dominant narrative. The film uses symbols to define characters.

In the film version of *The Bone Collector*, disability is communicated through visual signs of the disabled body (i.e. Rhyme's lack of movement, his medical bed, and his wheelchair). The film leaves disability as only a story-telling mechanism and returns

detective stories to the realm of the individual hero restabilizing social order. Moreover, the film shifts back to the ideology that disability is something to be seen. By presenting spectacles and by focusing on looking, disability can be understood, labeled, and fixed. The series presents disability similarly, but the series develops beyond the depiction of the world as scientifically defined and ordered to consider social exchanges and negotiations of power. In such a construction, bodies are not necessarily reduced to absolute, fixed systems but seen as socially located and shifting. The disabled body is used to negotiate contemporary narratives of power, position, and social order in the Lincoln Rhyme texts.

## CHAPTER IV

### HARDBOILED BODIES IN A BROKEN WORLD:

#### INTERDEPENDENCE IN HARDBOILED DISABILITY DETECTIVE TEXTS

In classical detective texts, science and medicine act as arbiters of order. In both Sherlock Holmes and the Lincoln Rhyme series, the detective has specialized knowledge and functions as a doctor-judge. The American hardboiled subgenre eschews the privileged knowledge that constitutes the original texts for a boot-strap mythology. George Grella explains, “Where in England a society with a recognizable class distinctions provides a propitious background for isolating a select number of privileged characters, American society is vast, polyglot, and heterogeneous” (103). In “The Simple Art of Murder,” Raymond Chandler writes that he and Hammett, the two most iconic hardboiled authors, were specifically reacting against English detective class traditions. Instead of relying on the authority of science, hardboiled texts prize individuality and strength of character. Man should be the core of his world; individual codes and internal moral strength are privileged above all else. In original hardboiled texts, detectives live independently in a violent world, and their independence gives them an objectivity to establish their superior personal morality.<sup>44</sup> In order to present a hero narrative where the detective “is the best man in his world,” the texts depict a world of “urban chaos, devoid of spiritual and moral values, pervaded by viciousness and random savagery” (Grella 110). The texts then present man against the world. According to Bethany Ogdon, “hard-boiled narratives essentially revolve

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<sup>44</sup> See William Marling’s “The Hammett Succubus,” Bethany Ogdon’s “Hardboiled Ideology,” or Greg Forter’s *Murdering Masculinity* for readings on this in the original hardboiled texts.



around demeaning descriptions of these other people, their perverted psychologies and diseased physiognomies, and later their destroyed bodies” (76). Thus, the original hardboiled texts use representations of disability in order to highlight the superiority of the hardboiled detective.

Hardboiled disability detective texts take up a search in this vein but nuance man’s position in society. In three contemporary hardboiled texts, Paul Tremblay’s *The Little Sleep* (2009), Jonathan Lethem’s *Motherless Brooklyn* (1999), and Christopher Nolan’s film *Memento* (2000), the authors play with the original conventions of hardboiled fiction but reject traditional hardboiled’s objectivity and its aggressive hierarchical frame. Instead, the boundaries between personal and social morality are complicated through the portrayal of the detectives’ disabilities. These texts depict a binary of abled and disabled. Abled is portrayed as healthy and whole, while disabled is unhealthy and broken. However, the texts also use disability to create community, call attention to the illusion of wholeness, and deny an ideal reality that the original hardboiled texts uphold. By playing with the tradition in detective fiction of exploiting the body, the three texts consider society’s involvement in disability. Detective fiction has long stared at broken bodies, and, in small but significant ways, these hardboiled disability detective texts use disability to stare back at the broken world.

The hardboiled genre began during a time in America when questions of identification were prominent. America was undergoing drastic social changes involving the aftermath of World War I, the approach of World War II, and the Depression, in addition to Prohibition, a law that contributed to widespread gangsterism and the expansion of the FBI. During this period of instability, writers expressed feelings of disillusionment and alienation,

sentiments prominent in the developing genre of hardboiled crime fiction. Elements of hardboiled fiction represent a departure from previous detective fiction in terms of class position (from upper to lower), setting (from British teagardens and trains to the urban streets of America), and style (from polite to blunt). The detectives take on a “tougher” and more violent identity; their “hardboiled” exteriors prevent easy “cracking.” Hardboiled is stylistically marked by short snappy dialogue, urban settings, and a femme fatale. Its detective works outside the law, drinks whiskey to excess, and puts himself in dangerous situations. Hardboiled texts use the detective’s investigation to point out problems in society, and although they refuse to solve the mystery neatly in a way that addresses all of the problems, they offer the detective pathways to build himself up.

The original hardboiled texts are concerned with what makes a *man* a *man* (a term understood within this genre to mean a white, able-bodied man). As a result, Kathleen Klein argues, the hardboiled genre is by its very nature anti-feminist. Additionally, the upper-class detectives of earlier classical forms became middle class or blue collar detectives in the hardboiled genre. This development came about in part because many pulp readers were “working-class, young, and poorly educated; many were immigrants... office or factory girls, soldiers, sailors, miners, dockworkers, ranchers, and others who worked with their hands” (Smith 23). Consequently, the texts mock upper-class tastes as effeminate, homosexual, and foreign, and they create hardboiled male detectives through a picture of what they should not be. The texts portray misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia as part of the answer to what defines masculinity; that is, a man is a man because he is not a woman, a homosexual, or a foreigner. Critics such as Manina Jones and Priscilla Walton argue that using hardboiled traditions allows contemporary authors to play with the original

constructions through reverse discourses and counter-traditions. Contemporary hardboiled texts reinterpret the “standard,” normative detective figure by presenting minority, gay or lesbian, women, and now, disabled detectives. Reverse discourses function specifically in comparison to the original, and they critique through reproducing the dominant discourse with specific strategic differences. They depict a structure similar to the original hardboiled texts in that the detective defines himself through what he is not (for instance, able-bodied); however, they shift the conversation. Counter-traditions offer hardboiled examples that “correct” a problem in the originals and can be read by themselves without standing alongside the originals. Unlike the original hardboiled genre, the social context is a significant part of these texts, examining and at times undermining the personal morality and individual heroism that the original texts glorify. By paying attention to social context, these texts undermine the infallible hero, call attention to society’s responsibility for individuals, and raise awareness for the ways in which disabled people are ostracized.

In this chapter, I analyze how specific texts use disability to modify traditional characteristics of the hardboiled genre, particularly that of the lone wolf figure in a tough and violent world. In the first section, I analyze how Tremblay’s *The Little Sleep* refigures the detective’s isolation by portraying his disability in inter/intrapersonal relationships. The novel constructs the detective as being defined by his disability because of how it affects his relationship with himself, his friends, and his family. In the second section, I analyze how violence is a feature of the detective’s relationships and is tied to his disability in Lethem’s *Motherless Brooklyn*. The third text, Nolan’s film *Memento*, offers a distinct contrast to the first two because the disabled detective tries to live up to an actual hardboiled ideology. He thinks of his subjective view of the world as objective. Moreover, he has seriously flawed

personal morality. So as a contemporary disabled noir, *Memento* portrays a worst case scenario where all characters are irredeemable, and the world is centered on self-deception and revenge.<sup>45</sup> All three texts use disability to make social identity and cultural interactions between people visible; people are objects as well as subjects in the world.

Each text begins with a focus on the detective's disability. In *The Little Sleep*, Mark announces "I am narcoleptic" (5). *Motherless Brooklyn's* first lines end with Lionel Essrog stating, "I've got Tourette's" (1). *Memento* similarly defines Leonard through his amnesia at the very beginning; after Leonard states who he is, Teddy tells him "That's who you were, you don't know who you are," and then both characters tie the change from who he was to who he is to his "condition" and "handicap." The three texts begin by focusing on disability; they start by highlighting a subjective perspective: who the detective is shapes how he interacts with the world. By the end, these points become more universal, and the representations of disability are used to challenge how the concepts of self-knowledge and community are conceived.

### **Reframing the Lone Wolf:**

#### **From Sovereign to Subjective**

In *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, Kingsley Widmer describes the hardboiled character as "an isolato" (xxix). In this interpretation, the classic masculine hardboiled detective is purposefully alone because it renders him more "objective." Grella says that the hardboiled detective's "faith lies in his own values" (111). The lone wolf detective operates

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<sup>45</sup> Noir texts are a subset of hardboiled in which the main character is not a private investigator but arguably still a detective because he investigates a crime to explore himself. This crime is usually one committed by or against him.

by himself and breaks rules; he is a private investigator not because he can help people or make money but because he can be his own boss and live by his own rules.<sup>46</sup> Although hardboiled appeared as a new genre in the early twentieth century, the hardboiled private detective “is actually another avatar of that prototypical American hero, Natty Bumppo, also called Leatherstocking, Hawkeye, Deerslayer, and Pathfinder” (Grella 106). This American hero has freedom from “all social or family ties” except some “loyalty to male comrades” (Parker 434). The avatar’s “claustrophobic compulsion to escape civilization, supported by a belief that social organization destroys natural virtue,” is a vital aspect of the original hardboiled detective (Parker 434).

These contemporary hardboiled texts overhaul the figure of the isolato. He is still alone, playing by his own rules, and facing a hostile world. However, he is no longer an objective figure of manly perfection fighting against unnatural civilization. Instead, the detective has a more complicated relationship with society. *The Little Sleep* continuously emphasizes that Mark is constrained by society. Mark’s lone wolf status is not just an individual choice but a structural position. In a letter to Dale Warren, Raymond Chandler writes, “P. Marlowe has as much social conscience as a horse. He has a personal conscience, which is an entirely different matter” (1023). Although the original hardboiled detectives struggle with society, they present men rising above. Chandler writes that “It is the struggle of all fundamentally honest men to make a decent living in a corrupt society” (1038). This frame separates the “natural” (honest) individual from the “unnatural” (corrupt) society. By

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<sup>46</sup> See John T. Irwin’s *Unless the Threat of Death is Behind Them: Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir* for further discussion.

analyzing disability, *The Little Sleep* presents the false binary between individual and society. Mark's individuality is always already socially constructed.

The first depiction of the mystery in *The Little Sleep* is in Mark's hypnogogic hallucination, an experience caused by his narcolepsy.<sup>47</sup> In this hallucination, a young woman named Jennifer Times hires him to find out who stole her fingers. Upon "waking," he finds an envelope on his desk with pictures of the naked young woman inside. Mark then decides to investigate 1) whatever crime has occurred involving the pictures and 2) who hired him and why, since he cannot remember.<sup>48</sup> The narcolepsy structures the story since readers first read the narcoleptic hallucinations and discover the surrounding events only as Mark does. The focus on Mark's narcolepsy emphasizes the subjectivity of the detective; the text structures the narrative through his narcolepsy. When Mark experiences a hallucination, the text either jumps and restarts when Mark wakes up or portrays the hallucination with no break, so the reader, like Mark, frequently does not know what parts of his life are hallucinations and what parts are not. If and when he discovers what happened during the hallucination then we do as well, but if he does not, the reader does not. These texts ride a very fine line between allowing the reader to participate with the detective in his disability, his perspective, and his life, and separating the detective from other characters and the

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<sup>47</sup> Because the story is told in first person with Mark as the narrator, there is overlap between what the text presents and what he presents. I'll reference what Mark perceives and how he describes things, but all of this is always constructed by the text, a significant point because I'm particularly interested in how the text constructs disability.

<sup>48</sup> Of note, Mark could be considered an unreliable narrator since the first scene involves a situation that turns out never to have happened. Even by the end of the text, there are situations that have not been resolved, such as whether the goons exist in the world of the novel or only in Mark's hallucinations. However, I do not consider Mark an unreliable narrator because the story of the novel is about Mark's experiences and his life. These unreliable moments of his confusion and memory lapses are reliably his life.

reader by making him different and inexplicable. Like each impairment in the texts in this dissertation, Mark's narcolepsy is a significant part of the plot. Unlike classical detective fiction, which centers on the criminal mystery, the hardboiled narrative "is more preoccupied with the character of its hero, the society he investigates, and the adventures he encounters" (Grella 115). *The Little Sleep* thus delves into Mark's history, his family, and his personality, connecting all of them to his narcolepsy.

While many of the original hardboiled texts focus on the detective liberating himself from a corrupt society through personal competency, *The Little Sleep*'s use of disability shifts this focus onto how societal structures affect individuals. Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple argue that hardboiled writing is inhospitable to feminism (and really to any marginalized position) because it promotes "extreme individualism, violence and outrageous social attitudes towards women and other minority groups" (46).<sup>49</sup> Walton and Jones reject Coward and Semple's conclusion and argue, as I do, that "the feminist [and disability studies'] appropriation of the hardboiled mode can redefine textual and cultural boundaries precisely because it comes into intimate contact with them" (87). The novel highlights how masculinity and disability are not just personal traits but socially defined identities. At times in the novel, disability serves to form community and at others, inhibit it.

In all three novels, disability serves as a marker to distinguish the works from their predecessors even while the author references the older tradition. The title *The Little Sleep* calls attention to the novel's participation in a larger hardboiled tradition as well as

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<sup>49</sup> While the original texts are certainly misogynistic, homophobic, and racist, this position is nonetheless a gross oversimplification of the original texts. To name only one example, Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* (1929) offers complicated representations of societal injustice that cannot be overcome or swayed through individualism.

emphasizing the importance of disability in the novel. The title refers to both Mark's description of his narcoleptic episodes and Chandler's canonical hardboiled text *The Big Sleep* (1939). While "the big sleep" is a reference to death, the little sleep is a reference to Mark's sleep "attacks," when he cannot tell the difference between what is real and what is a hallucination.<sup>50</sup> This reference simultaneously separates hallucinations from actuality and embraces them as a part of Mark's lived experience.

Traditional hardboiled detective texts emphasize the detective's lone wolf status through the absence of the sidekick, a common figure in other types of detective fiction.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, in other disability detective texts like the Lincoln Rhyme series, identification between a disabled detective and his able-bodied sidekick is emphasized to call attention to the sidekick as a representative figure of/for the reader.<sup>52</sup> In *Who's Who in Crime and Mystery Writing*, Rosemary Herbert suggests this "helper" character "stand[s] in for the reader, asking the obvious questions and worrying after the fate of the usually eccentric, always cerebral hero" (176). In this way, the sidekick is identified both with the detective and with the reader; he or she ultimately serves to bridge the two. The sidekick figure is notably absent in hardboiled texts; the text makes the reader's comprehension of the detective psychologically more difficult, which highlights the inability of one person to

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<sup>50</sup> I use quotes because I'm using violent terminology to refer to his disability. I do so because this is how narcoleptic episodes are frequently described and because this is how the text presents them.

<sup>51</sup> To my knowledge, none of the original hardboiled fiction of James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, or Dashiell Hammett uses a sidekick. John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee series is a more contemporary example that occasionally uses McGee's best friend Meyer as a sidekick of sorts. Mouse in Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins series is another such example. They do not play as integral a role as sidekicks usually do.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Deaver's *The Bone Collector* or the BBC's new show *Sherlock* are examples of classic disability detective texts.



access another person's world. Like the original hardboiled texts, *The Little Sleep* and *Motherless Brooklyn* do not have an external sidekick figure; however, the detective has a doubled nature, and his disability acts as a malicious sidekick. He has internalized social norms and thinks of himself as divided, the part of him that can function "properly" battles the part of him that is disabled. Furthermore, this confrontation of the self hostile to the self fosters knowledge.

*The Little Sleep* probes the disconnection between Mark and the people around him. When he becomes impaired, people leave and his disability replaces them. In a flashback, the text introduces a character, George, who could have been Mark's sidekick, and this possible sidekick's death occurs at the same time Mark becomes impaired and disabled. Pre-narcolepsy, he and George dropped out of college together and randomly selected jobs from the yellow pages. Mark picked private investigation (18). Partially responsible for Mark becoming a P.I., George is also part of the car accident that causes Mark's narcolepsy. Mark sums up the accident and declares, "George died. I miss him" (19). Mark's isolation and his narcolepsy are directly connected.

Mark explains that when his narcolepsy began, he sleep-walked, pissed on couches, did "horrible, crazy things," and lied to his roommate (and himself) about the situation (21). Similarly, although it is not explicitly stated, Mark lost all of his other friends because of his narcolepsy and because he could not figure out how to handle the changes caused by his narcolepsy. For Mark, the "truth was too embarrassing and devastating. I argued with my roommates all the time. Argument became part of my character. Nothing they said was true or right, even the mundane proclamations that had nothing to do with me or my narcoleptic actions" (21). Mark divides the blame for the loss of his friends between the bad symptoms

of narcolepsy and his rejection of the condition. Because Mark's narcoleptic, "inappropriate" behavior cannot be integrated with his internal picture of "whole and normal," he originally denies it. His process of identification with other people is broken; society does not see Mark as normal so Mark does not identify with normal. Instead, Mark learns to identify with his narcolepsy. He finally recognizes his narcolepsy, but the recognition does not reestablish his social connections; he describes how "eight years ago I got my private detective's license and narcolepsy. I now live alone with both" (22). To some extent he recognizes a new image of himself, yet he believes that society will never accept it, and, indeed, the novel shows many instances where society does not accept him either because his disabled status or his narcoleptic symptoms.

Unlike the original hardboiled texts, where the detective is better than and therefore separated from other people, the disabled detective remains isolated because he functions physically and mentally differently than able-bodied people.<sup>53</sup> With this social separation, disability functions like a sidekick. Watson humanizes Holmes by explaining Holmes's actions and behavior to the reader; narcolepsy humanizes Mark because it explains Mark's "horrible, crazy" behavior to the reader. Where Watson forces Holmes into taking better physical care of himself, narcolepsy forces Mark to take better care of himself. The sidekick makes the detective's uniqueness comprehensible and is the reason the detective's health is addressed. While disability serves many traditional sidekick duties, it has a fraught relationship with the detective.

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<sup>53</sup> Although these texts set up a divide between able-bodied and disable-bodied, they reinforce that it is culturally created. They end with the suggestion that separation occurs between all people, and people create binaries (man/woman, black/white, abled/disabled) in order to cover universal separation (lack).

Mark views himself as having a disabled identity, and this is how he is positioned as the hardboiled lone wolf, a private investigator. Identity can be used to refer to the essential self, uniqueness, personality, self-image, group affiliation, role-behavior, and more. When I refer to identity, I am specifically referring to social identity, which is the “*outcome* of an identification of self by other; it is an identification accorded or assigned an individual by another social actor” [emphasis added] (Rummens 3). The outcome results in the individual’s perceived belief that they are a member in or an outcast from a particular social group (or groups). The detective in these texts identifies himself (because he is identified by others) as having the social identity of disabled.

In the original hardboiled texts, the detective can access anything by being the consummate autonomous man. For example, the hardboiled detective overcomes race and class divides to a certain extent, as can be seen in Hammett’s *The Dain Curse* (1929) when the Continental Op walks into black neighborhoods and rich mansions and successfully gains the information he needs from both. The original texts suggest that the hardboiled detective can access everything because he is just *that good*. Chandler discusses the class position of hardboiled detectives in many of his letters and in “The Simple Art of Murder.” He writes that the PI is “is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people” (992). Yet, the detective overcomes his working-class identity through his position as a liminal figure that can rise above and move in and out of classes. In *The Big Sleep*, General Sternwood identifies with Marlowe, finding similarity in their cynicism and insubordination. The original hardboiled texts rarely portray the detective’s marginalized class position as a detriment and do not address how the detective’s cultural privileges provide his mobility. By having a common

man succeed despite his class position, the original texts emphasize the possibility of class mobility for an extra-competent man. Chandler recalls, “There was even a bird who informed me I could write a good proletarian novel... I am the last mind in the world to like it, being by tradition and long study a complete snob. P. Marlowe and I do not despise the upper classes because they take baths and have money; we despise them because they are phony” (“Dale” 1023). Again, this reduces systemic issues to individual issues of competency, talent, and knowledge without asking how people gain knowledge.

Unlike earlier hard-boiled detectives, Mark is not a liminal figure in *The Little Sleep*; he does not move easily as a disabled person in an able-privileged world. In both *The Little Sleep* and *Motherless Brooklyn*, the text integrates how the cultural position of disabled affects the detective in his investigation and beyond. Both texts focus on movement. Mark should not drive because his sleep episodes are unpredictable, but the construction of the city assumes the use of cars and so his mobility is restricted. People refuse Lionel entrance to places because his Tourettic behavior is not “appropriate” for the mainstream public. Each text explores assumptions about physical and mental norms that are usually taken for granted in detective texts. Contemporary portrayals of hardboiled disability focus more on issues that nuance individual achievement and social position. Unlike the hardboiled objective detective, Mark succeeds through his personal relationship with the criminal investigation, not despite it. As the son of one of the perpetrators of the crime he investigates, he has a biased view of the case and access to clues he would not otherwise find. Furthermore, the bad guys underestimate Mark’s capability, and he takes advantage of their erroneous assumptions. The hardboiled detective is no longer objective and superior. The detective

also recognizes that the perception of him as inferior is an experience he shares with other people with disabilities. In this way, the hardboiled detective is not alone either.

Mark's disability is represented in *The Little Sleep* in both positive and negative ways, as both a malignant force and a beneficial means of existence. He looks at the world differently because of his narcolepsy, and this sometimes leads to case-breaking discoveries. However, the text also represents Mark's disability negatively, as through the previously mentioned "horrible things" that Mark did after his car accident. Tobin Siebers explains in *Disability Theory* that there is a difference between disability as an identity and disability as a condition of bodies and minds. The first, he argues, should never be negative, but the second "has both positive and negative valences" (4). Mark clearly has negative views of the conditions of his disabled mind, and they also seem to negatively impact his view of his disabled identity. Indeed, he occasionally references his disability specifically as an identity. Early in the novel, he groups narcoleptics together because of shared experiences: "I already said I was sick of irony, but it's a narcoleptic's lot" (53). Mark points out how ironic it is that a person with an illness that causes too much sleep also suffers from too little sleep. Narcolepsy yields experiences for him that he shares with other narcoleptics and constitutes his self.

Mark is established among the close ties between his private eye career, his friendships, and his narcolepsy, uniting the individual and societal concerns of careers, relationships, and group identity. His career and narcolepsy begin at the same time, his narcolepsy causes him to lose his friendships (as he sees it), and his work as a private eye

allows him to work by himself with his fairly severe narcoleptic symptoms.<sup>54</sup> Tremblay separates the section where Mark details his accident, narcolepsy, and losing his friends with italicized short paragraphs that detail how in order to get a private detective license, an applicant needs three citizens to certify that he is of good moral character. While pre-accident citizens judged him to be of good moral character, the social judgment changes after he becomes disabled. Unlike the original hardboiled genre, the social context of the detective is a significant part of hardboiled disability detective texts. The texts undermine the individual heroism that is so important to the original texts, and they focus on the detective as a member of society. He is a lone wolf because his community views him as disabled and ostracizes him. He is a detective, not because he has superior personal morality, but, because his only choice is to work alone.

### **A Contentious Community:**

#### **Interactions through the Detective's Marked Body**

In the original lone wolf formula in hardboiled texts, the detective rarely has any biological family, no parents or children and very few siblings or wives. The detective “must proceed through moral entanglements unencumbered by the impediments of social or sexual alliances” (Grella 110).<sup>55</sup> As these texts reject the framework of the objective detective, they have a more complicated relationship with friends and family. In spite of the detectives’ tendency to imagine themselves as sharing experiences with other disabled people in *The*

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<sup>54</sup> As the book details, he cannot drive, needs to work odd hours, and suffers from frequent fugue states in public and business situations such as the one where he hallucinates Jennifer Times in his office.

<sup>55</sup> I believe it is an oversimplification to suggest that they never have any community. To overlook a working man’s connection with partners or friends denies his own created community. Sam Spade in *Maltese Falcon* turns Brigid in because “when a man’s partner is killed he’s supposed to do something about it” (Hammett 193). To be fair, the detective can be considered a loner even with the occasional connection to partners or fellow working men; Spade seems to despise Archer even though he does something about his murder. To not do something would also be bad for business.

*Little Sleep* and *Motherless Brooklyn*, there are no other main disabled characters. While each novel references a disabled community, neither contains other disabled persons.

In *The Little Sleep*, however, Mark is “close” to his mother, Ellen. His father died when he was young, and he has very few memories of him. Lionel in *Motherless Brooklyn*, an orphan, has a created community of fellow orphans and their mentor. However, while the original detectives only relate to others through their job, the community in these contemporary texts is depicted only in relation to the character’s disability. Relationships between parent and child (really any abled person to disabled person) are complicated because of the disabled identity of the child and abled identity of the parent. In a similar social identity relationship, “the African-American parent expect[s] to share bonds with their children that will provide love and community to be some refuge against racism in the outside world” (Asch 26). However, “the typical non-disabled prospective parents have no experience with or knowledge of life that includes disability” (Asch 26). As a result, these caregivers frequently mock or reject the detective’s disability, which is extremely problematic given that they are the detective’s only community members.

Mark’s mother Ellen is one such character who functions as a caregiver and as a disgruntled but somewhat loving family member. *The Little Sleep* first introduces Ellen when she walks into Mark’s place and catches him asleep on a couch that is smoking because of a cigarette he dropped when he nodded off (24). This is only the first of many times when Ellen catches him in a compromised position due to his narcolepsy. Some moments are merely inappropriate, as when she walks in on him asleep with his pants down “and an Edward Penishands porno on TV” (24). Other moments genuinely point to how Ellen helps Mark survive, like the couch-on-fire scenario and when she catches him as he

falls during a cataplexy episode. By highlighting these events, the text emphasizes that Mark's connection to other people is defined by disability; people engage most with him when he needs help because of his disability or when he breaks social etiquette rules. Like the original hardboiled detective, Mark is a social actor, but he is also bound by cultural prescriptives. In particular, Mark is marked by cultural constructions of disability.

Although "she won't admit to being [his] de facto caregiver," Ellen walks in on him (ignoring a "normal" barrier of a closed and/or locked door) because she's the underwriter of his business and "the landlord who doesn't want her property, the brownstone she inherited from her parents, to burn to the ground" (25). Mark thinks of himself as a burden on his mother, dangerous to her possessions. He clearly views their relationship poorly as he refers to himself as "Ellen's charity-case son" (28). This highlights common constructions of people with disabilities; they are portrayed as unable to take care of themselves. This stereotype glides over how all people need others to survive and projects the problem specifically onto disabled people. Because able-bodied people have needs that are normally met, their need remains invisible, which is not true of disabled people. According to sociologist Tom Shakespeare, disabled people have "normal needs—housing, education, employment, health, relationships—only these ordinary needs are not normally met," and so their needs become visible (54). Disabled people frequently cannot have or are not allowed their own private space, and there is an extra "pitiable" burden on the "selfless" caregiver of people with disabilities. The text shines a light on these social situations.

Similarly, the text considers the gender dynamics in their situation; Mark is a disabled man and his caregiver is his mother. Disabled men are frequently feminized because of their lack of power in their marginalized position, and Mark is still being taken



care of by his mother. Caregivers of disabled children are almost always women because of the social stereotype of women and mothers as nurturers and primary caretakers. *The Little Sleep* implicitly considers these gender dynamics. Mark feels the need to stand on his own two feet (perhaps a bad but appropriate metaphor). In a way, he must regain his masculinity; it does not emerge automatically because he is biologically male.

One way Mark attempts to establish his masculinity is through identification with his father. Throughout the novel, he blames his mother for his lack of knowledge about his father. He says that she refused to share him with her, seemingly hoarding memories. She reassures him that she does not hold narcolepsy against him and that she is not one of the people that believe he has nothing medically wrong with him (64). This is in response to Mark accusing her (and everyone else) of just that, and her rebuttal holds little weight in the conversation. She does blame his narcolepsy for his lack of knowledge about his father. She says that she has told him about his father, and he simply does not remember. This seems unlikely, since the novel presents no reason to believe his narcolepsy affects memory. Furthermore, all relationships in the novel always come back to the detective's disability. Because Mark has a fraught relationship with his mother caused by his disability, he keeps the case secret from her until the end. She will worry, might not believe him, and could step in to make him stop. He also seems to want to succeed without her so he can tell her about his triumph when he is done. If Mark can regain a sense of control by solving cases, he can regain some of his lost manhood. In addition, solving this case means discovering his father, although he and his mother bond in the end as well.

*Motherless Brooklyn* portrays Lionel Essrog as part of a community less defined by care-giving, although Frank Minna acts as a sort of adoptive father. Lionel does not have a

name for his “problem” until Minna gives him a book describing Tourette’s. The novel specifically explains how Lionel acquires his friends. At St. Vincent’s Home for Boys, Lionel and Gilbert Coney become friends before Danny Fantl and Tony Vermonte round out the final foursome. Gilbert witnessed one of Lionel’s first tics, and he interpreted it as a comedy routine. This performative moment, according to Lionel, led to a “series of confidences. I was crazy, but also malleable, easily intimidated, which made me Gilbert’s idea of a safe repository for what he regarded as his crazy feelings. Gilbert was a precocious masturbator” (42). Lionel’s disability serves a purpose for Gilbert; Gilbert can open up to him about what he views as his own abnormal behavior.

The only reason Lionel finds a space in a larger community and becomes one of the “Minna Men” is because Minna needs white boys to suit his clients, and there are only five white boys at St. Vincent’s. So Minna takes Lionel, Gilbert, Danny, and Tony out of St. Vincent’s Home for Boys and employs them in a “detective” agency. The agency fronts as a driving service but actually runs small jobs for the mob. Because of his Tourette’s, Lionel only narrowly beats out the fifth white boy who suffers from severe obesity, another disability. Arguably, Lionel’s Tourette’s is preferable because it “disrupts” in moments as opposed to the constant “disruption” of obesity. Thus, community is both created and inhibited here based on different types of social identity, race and disability. The Minna Men are grouped together first because of race and second because of social acceptance (obesity excluding that fifth white boy). Apparently, in this text, Tourette’s is more “normal” or “okay” than obesity. And so Lionel believes that “the others, Tony, Gilbert, and Danny, were willing to be grouped with [him], to pretend [he] fit with them, if that was what it took to be plucked up by the outside world” (38). Yet, when they meet Minna, Tony tells him,

“You probably ought to know, Lionel’s a freak” and Minna responds, “Yeah, well, you’re all freaks, if you don’t mind me pointing it out... No parents—or am I mixed up?” (49).

Tony views Lionel as a freak because of his Tourette’s, but Minna reminds him that they are all marked as abnormal and marginalized because of their status as orphans.

From that moment, working for Minna causes The Boys to form a group identity.

Lionel explains,

We developed a certain collective ego, a presence apart at the Home. We grew less embattled from within, more from without: nonwhite Boys sensed in our privilege a hint of their future deprivation and punished us for it.... So Tony, Gilbert, Danny and myself smoothed out our old antipathies and circled the wagons. We stuck up for one another. (54)

Again, the text describes how identification occurs based on social identity. The boys develop a connection because of their (perceived) race.<sup>56</sup> However, while Lionel describes them in terms of their “collective ego,” the Minna Men continue only partially to accept the “freak” Lionel, and their interactions with him are defined by his disability. Lionel’s “tics and obsessions kept the other Minna Men amused, but also wore them out, made them weirdly compliant and complicit” (5). A fifth man eventually joins as a pseudo Minna man, and he flatly refuses to accept Lionel’s disability altogether, always referring to it as a routine that Lionel performs for attention (similar to Gilbert’s first reaction to Lionel’s tics) even though Lionel has explained that it is a medical condition called Tourette’s (123).

Lionel’s communities, both his primary and intimate circle of friends and the secondary and

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<sup>56</sup> Danny is actually a black student who is light skinned enough to pass as white.

distant medical community, are involved in his foundation of self. By portraying his history of disability, the text shows that he may be a lone wolf, but he is constructed in society.

Even though Lionel gains a place in the detective agency through solving Minna's murder, he concludes at the end of the novel that while he is not exactly in "Butt Trust category," (the lowest dregs of society) he is "King Tugboat" (309-310). Tugboat refers to a person who "pushed [his] luck, said too much, overstayed a welcome" (52). As a "dysfunction of wits and storytellers, and a universal one" (52), Lionel's position with the other boys (and in society in general) as King Tugboat occurs in large part because of his Tourette's. In spite of the fact that he tries to make the boys view each other as a collective, Minna also teaches the boys how to sum people up according to social identity. Lionel explicitly explains Minna's prejudices. According to Minna, "Hippies were dangerous and odd [...] Lesbians were wise and mysterious and deserved respect. [...] The Arabic population of Atlantic Avenue was as distant and unfathomable as the Indian tribe [...] Classic minorities—Irish, Jews, Poles, Italians, Greeks and Puerto Ricans—were the clay of life itself, funny in their essence" (68). Again, here is a reference to the desire for intrinsic truths. This values the structure over the individual and reinforces the need for norms. Minna also has strict philosophical codes behind these stereotypes. Lionel explains that

It was a form of racism, not respect, that restricted blacks and Asians from ever being stupid like a Mick or Polack. If you weren't funny, you didn't quite exist. And it was usually better to be fully stupid, impotent, lazy, greedy, or freakish than to seek to dodge your destiny, or layer it underneath pathetic guises of vanity or calm. (68)

In the hierarchy of social identities, a sense of humor and an acceptance of one's position are the characteristics that are most important to Minna; "passing" and being too serious are both irredeemable traits. Lionel as "Overt Freak Supreme, became mascot of a worldview" (68). As the mascot of this social identity categorization, Lionel is an example of Mitchell and Snyder's assertion that "physical and cognitive inferiority has historically characterized the means by which bodies have been constructed as 'deviant'" (2). Lionel represents the exemplar of body/mind inferiorities that Minna (and society) categorize onto social identities (hippies, glbta, ethnicities). Lionel's freakishness is inescapably written on his body and his actions, and they make him a clown, funny and useful.<sup>57</sup> Mitchell and Snyder explore how historically physical and cognitive inferiorities provide the binary opposite of good/normal, and this binary of abled and disabled is then used for all other deviants. For Minna, disability exposes men's general deviancy. The hardboiled detective depicts man, albeit a consummate and privileged one, as the arbiter of order in the world. However, man is also an object of order, and Lionel as overt freak supreme is at the top (or bottom) of these hierarchal arrangements.

Throughout *Motherless Brooklyn*, there are discussions about people with "bone stupidity, mental illness, and familial or sexual anxiety" (68). According to the detective's mentor, "these were the bolts of electricity that made the clay walk, the animating forces that rendered human life amusing and that flowed, once you learned to identify them, through every personality and interaction" (68). The phrase "clay walking" references the Hebrew myth of the Golem and "bolts of electricity" invoke Frankenstein's monster. Just as the word

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Minna always takes Lionel to his meetings with the Mafioso because Lionel's unusual behavior throws them off their guard and gives Minna an upper hand. Lionel also points out otherwise unmentionable truths because his Tourette's does not succumb to social etiquette.

of God is the animating force of the Golem, and science is the power behind Frankenstein's monster, psychological norms made visible through stupid, mentally ill, and anxious people are the keys to human behavior. Through this commentary, the text points out disabled people are used within a culture that simultaneously separates and dehumanizes them. People create and are created by culture, and the texts warn that bad things happen when people abuse power. According to the original hardboiled texts, man can find order.<sup>58</sup> The hardboiled disability detective texts question the relationship of self and society. The world is ordered by individuals both as subjects and objects.

There is one scene in *Motherless Brooklyn* in which another character with an impairment is referenced. Lionel describes a ride on a bus where "a miserable-looking black man in his sixties, a drinker, an idler" has a "belching tic—long, groaning, almost vomitous-sounding noises, the kind a fifth-grader learns to make, swallowing a bellyful of air, then forgets by high school, when charming girls becomes more vital than freaking them out" (43). Lionel relates to this figure by noting that they both disrupt social norms and breach the borders between self and other. As much as the novels in this chapter nuance the binary of individual and society, they depict only brief glimpses of other disabled characters to further focus on the hero. This places more value on the individual/hero like the original hardboiled texts do.

In *The Little Sleep*, Mark emphasizes just how socially created a disability identity is. When an aunt asks him what his nationality is, he answers "'Lithuanian.' Maybe I should tell her what I really am: narcoleptic. We narcoleptics have no country and we don't

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<sup>58</sup> This does seem to be a specifically gendered concept; men find order, not women.

participate in the Olympics. Our status supersedes all notion of nationality. We're neutral, like the Swiss, but they don't trust us with army knives" (147).<sup>59</sup> In one way, he accepts and views disability as an identity. But, he also criticizes this same identity position: "My cataloging is a comfort to her. I'm not a stranger anymore; I'm Lithuanian" (147). Here, Mark sarcastically recognizes that his aunt needs to put him into an identity group so she can understand him and his social position. She focuses on nationality as identity, but he puts his disabled identity before his national identity because he believes society marks him at a more basic level than his ethnicity.<sup>60</sup> Although national identity classifies "sides" (us versus them), Mark thinks that society marks disability at a more fundamental level (perhaps sane versus insane or animal versus human). Evidently, his aunt would better understand him if he were to announce himself as a disabled person; this is what she needs in order to categorize him, and she would then know what to do with him—not give him a knife. Mark recognizes disabled identity in this way as a shared experience between disabled people as well as a social stigma for disabled people. Thus, the novel is working through different constitutions of a person; disability inhibits but also creates community.

Disability also directs Mark's intrapersonal relationship. Because Mark compares his pre-accident idealistic self with his current narcoleptic being, Mark thinks of himself throughout as "Awake me" or "Narcoleptic me." He explains that "During micro-sleeps, my narcoleptic brain will keep my body moving, churning through some familiar task, and I won't have any memory of it. These acts belong to my secret life" (8). Later, he thinks of

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<sup>59</sup> Leonard makes a similar remark in Nolan's 2000 film *Memento*; he finds a gun and explains to Teddy that the gun can't possibly be his because "I don't think they'd let someone like me carry a gun."

<sup>60</sup> I do think it is important to note that this perhaps functions this way for him because being Lithuanian has far less social stigma than being black or Latino/a in America.

himself as “Goldilocks in my own house. The awake me can’t help but rerun everything in my mashed-up head” (54). Mark understands himself by compartmentalizing his disability, and his disability becomes a separate figure, his sidekick. Certain actions, qualities, and moments he attributes either to his awake self or his narcoleptic self. The text introduces the detective as being divided in himself between some version that has no impairment and the other part that is only his impairment. This division mirrors the division of a self isolated from community and a self that is defined by community.

Similar to Mark’s separation of “selves,” Lionel references “Tourettic me” in *Motherless Brooklyn*. Lionel describes how sometimes when he gets up in the morning he doesn’t recognize his toothbrush. He wonders whether it is new but says, “I have this relationship to objects in general—they will sometimes become uncontrollably new and vivid to me, and I don’t know whether this is a symptom of Tourette’s or not” (131). His troubled relation to objects is an example of Lionel’s disconnection from the outside world. This issue also demonstrates Lionel’s separation between a healthy him and an unhealthy him. Lionel explains that “the strangeness of having a Tourette’s brain” is having “no control in my personal experiment of self” because what “might be only strangeness must always be auditioned for relegation to the domain of symptom, just as symptoms always push into other domains, demanding the chance to audition for their moment of acuity or relevance, their brief shot—coulda been a contender!—at centrality” (131). Here, Lionel creates a separation between symptom and personality. If this behavior were just “strange,” it would create a different sense of self than if the behavior were part of Lionel’s Tourette’s.

In both *Motherless Brooklyn* and *The Little Sleep*, disability causes the characters confusion about reality. The novels waffle between labeling narcoleptic and Tourettic



episodes as fantasies and trying to blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality. When Mark's narcolepsy is first introduced, he emphasizes the separation between the two:

Right after I come to is always the worst, when the questions about dreams and reality seem fair game, when I don't know which is which...I try to push the murk to the corners of my consciousness, but it squeezes out and leaks away, mercury in a closed fist. The murk, it's always there. It's both a threat and a promise. I am narcoleptic. (5)

His narcolepsy is juxtaposed with the question of perception and confusion of reality.

Although the relationships I've discussed to this point (Mark and his mother, Lionel and the boys) provide insight into the inner workings of the detective, they act clearly as interpersonal relationships. However, the femme fatale is used more to reflect the interiority of the detective than she is used to show a relationship with him. Critics debate whether the classic femme fatale provides positive depictions of women through her dangerous sexuality and aggressiveness or whether she is only a flat character who serves as an object of fear or hatred for the detective. *The Little Sleep* portrays a femme fatale who is only a femme fatale because that is how Mark constructs her in his imagination. She is portrayed as an object of the detective's experience instead of as a subject in her own right because she is introduced as a product of Mark's hallucination. She is mostly only a threat because Mark perceives her as one. He sees her nude pictures as sexually threatening when they actually portray a violated, powerless woman who died years ago. Ironically, Mark projects a disabled identity on her as has been done to him. She needs help, outside the hallucination because she was raped and murdered (because she is female and underclass as a drug addict and prostitute) and inside the hallucination because she is disabled. The disability acts as a metaphor for a

vulnerable position. Although Jennifer Times is introduced later as a real person upon whom Mark has based his hallucination, her role as femme fatale develops out of his imaginary version of her. The detective navigates the world, but he is a biased subject, not an objective arbiter.

Although Jennifer actually has very little to do with the mystery, Mark's hallucination of her and his attempts to connect with her prove significant for the text's themes. Mark wants to establish some type of connection with Jennifer. In the first hallucination, he constructs an image of her as an amputee; someone has cut off and stolen her fingers. The real, material Jennifer is not the woman in the pictures Mark finds after he wakes up, and she is not impaired in any way. Thus, his hallucination portrays Mark's desire to create someone who could identify for him as a person with a disability. Even though this disability identification proves imaginary, Mark thinks of the actual Jennifer as isolated from other people, and, in doing so, Mark imagines a community for himself. When he meets with her later, he describes her as "angry. It's all over her face. The emotion looks exterior, not belonging to her. It's a mask. It's not real. She's giving me what she thinks I expect or want. Maybe I'm projecting again. I don't know anything about this woman, but I did see her on TV surrounded by fans" (89). Partially because of her position as a television star, Mark sees Jennifer as multiple parts as well; in his waking state, he knows she is not disabled, but he sees the disconnection between her famous image and her everyday self as similar to his narcolepsy.

Fittingly, the most in-depth conversation Mark has with another character about his narcolepsy is with Jennifer. Because Mark thinks she has hired him, he initiates contact. During one of their visits, she asks him what narcolepsy is like. He responds,

‘I can’t tell you. I’m in it all the time. No basis for comparison. I might as well ask you what not having narcolepsy is like. I certainly don’t remember what I felt like before I had it, before the accident... Do you remember what you felt like eight years ago?’

‘No. I guess I don’t.’

‘Neither do I.’ I’m getting mad. (90-91)

This conversation represents a clear tension between abled and disabled people. Jennifer presumably thinks that Mark can somehow encapsulate what his being is like. She disconnects the impairment from his being. No one thinks to ask “What is being able-bodied like?” because that is the presumed norm and because it is not disconnected from general identity or experience. But in asking what being disabled is like, this text questions what being abled is like. Disability is used as a bridge to show that disconnection exists in able-bodied people as well.

Mark confides in Jennifer, telling her more intimate details about himself than he does to any other character; however, these moments of sharing are always found through separation. After their meeting, he finds out that she has asked him to meet her because her father ordered her to. As he leaves the restaurant, her father’s goons attack him, and Mark believes that she set him up. He angrily calls her and leaves a message on her voicemail, saying

I lied to you too. I said I didn’t remember what I felt like before my accident, before I became the narcoleptic me. I remember what it felt like. I was awake, always awake.... Sleep was my pet, something I controlled, scheduled, took for walks. Sit up, roll over, lie down, stay down, give me

your fucking paw. Not now. Now there's only me and everything else is on the periphery, just slightly out of reach or out of touch or out of time. ... I remember what it was like to have a regular face, one that folks just glanced at and forgot. There's more. I remember everything I lost. That's what I remember. The loss and loss and loss. (103-104)

Mark attempts revenge by telling Jennifer he lied, and he implicitly requests either sympathy or guilt from her. In this way, he tries to reassert control; yet the situation also places Jennifer in a position of power. By asking him the question earlier, she has formed Mark's focus, and he polices his own disability. They have a mutable power relationship; he teaches her about his life yet she also compels him to open up about his life. He expounds tragically on the loss in his life and doing so connects him to the person who was forced to meet with him. Similarly, he also reveals intimate details of his life only by comparing it to what he is now disconnected from. Their conflict instigates Mark's personal reflection, and his confession of loss is a means of potentially establishing community. Instead of bridging separation through identification, they connect through these shifting power roles that are based around his impairment.

Mark is not being unreliable or false in his conversations with Times in presenting two disparate responses to the same question. Instead, I read both as truth. He sees the differences and changes from before his accident to after his accident as losses, but he also creates a narrative that he realizes is not truth. He recognizes in his first answer that he is in the middle of his narcolepsy (his being and experience) all the time. But, as people do, he has created a narrative for his history to which he can compare his experiences now. He probably never had as much control of his life as he thinks he did, but in his narrative, he

compares that sense of control he perceives he had with the loss of control he feels at this moment.

One example in which he recognizes the paradox between his past self and his past idealization of his self occurs later in the novel when he is looking at a picture of his father. Mark thinks, “He looks like how I imagined my own appearance, my old appearance in all the daydreams I’ve had of the pre-accident me. He is the idealized Mark Genevich, the one lost forever, if he ever existed in the first place. He’s young, whole, not broken. He’s not the monster me” (226). Mark acknowledges that it is questionable whether the ideal Mark Genevich ever existed. However, Mark is also influenced by norms and social stigmas of disability, and so he focuses on his “wholeness,” when he was “not broken” and “not a monster.” All of these are a conception of an ideal able-bodied Mark.

Mark believes that people should function a certain way, internalizing the cultural belief in able-bodied norms and ideals. Because Mark does not function the way he and the world believes he should, he feels fragmented and rejected by the world (the people and the physical properties). Because he cannot fit in otherwise, his work as a private detective allows him access, agency, and participation. Although Mark probably would not have gained his PI license post-accident, his ability to solve this case proves his ability to function as a private investigator. The social stigma and difference of disability denies him a viable social position, but he gains a sense of achievement by solving the mystery of the pictures and learning more about his father.

Mark’s investigation of the Times case and his investigation of himself connect. He discovers that a friend of his father hired him and revealed the truth about a crime committed years ago when his father, the friend, and DA Times were young men. They load a young

homeless woman with alcohol, rape her, and she dies mid-rape from an overdose. They bury her body and the secret. Mark learns about his father and himself through the process of uncovering the men's crime. In this way, the boundaries between his work and personal life, the boundaries between his self and his community, and the boundaries between fiction and reality have all been blurred.

The examples of Mark separating his "abled" and "disabled" self *could* suggest that if the detective were "healthy," he wouldn't have an internal division; however, the novel denies this point, emphasizing that his disability just clarifies that all people are disconnected and the world is incomprehensible. This is standard hardboiled ideology, as Grella explains; "All hard-boiled novels depict a tawdry world which conceals a shabby and depressing reality beneath its painted façade... society's debilitating influence; wherever human beings gather, evil results. The social contract breeds not happiness but culpability" (Grella 112). However, through representations of disability, disability detective novels comment on enforced isolation at the societal level, instead of just at the level of individual experience and agency, allowing disabled detectives to act as microcosms of a disabled world. *The Little Sleep*, for example, is more focused on exploring the relationship between individual and society, and the novel depicts that Mark's alienation from himself because of his disabled identity engenders the creation of a better community with his peers at work and his mother.

At the end of the novel, Mark falls asleep while thinking that his mother, Ellen, "is determined not to forget, determined to keep her collected memories exactly where they were before, determined to fight against her very own version of the little sleep. I don't think she'll succeed, but I admire the effort" (268). Ellen's own little sleep, the mystery's

revelation about her husband having been involved in the death of a woman when he was younger, threatens her nostalgic and formative memories in which she “knew” who her husband was. This knowledge formed their relationship and who she is now, so she refuses or is unable to relinquish her “collected memories.” Like the powerful and individual detectives in the original hardboiled texts, the disabled detective influences the lives of others. In these texts, it is the detectives’ search for self-knowledge that undoes what other characters think they know about themselves. People’s lives and identities are interconnected, and the novel emphasizes the correlation between characters. Mark describes Ellen’s idealization as false; they are unreal yet authentic like Mark’s hallucinations. The little sleep has expanded beyond narcolepsy.

### **Recontextualizing the Hostile World:**

#### **External and Internal Violence in Disability**

*Motherless Brooklyn* and *The Little Sleep* portray tensions between individual and society through the use of disability. Disability affects both inter and intrapersonal relationships, defining behavior as well as creating and inhibiting community. Violent behavior and violent rhetoric, key traits of the hardboiled genre, are linked directly to disability and these relationships. The lens of disability is used to shift the meaning behind hardboiled violence; violence becomes not an inherent part of social order that is corrupt because all society is corrupt but caused in part by society’s binary of able versus disabled, normal versus abnormal. Hardboiled detective novels traditionally differ from their classical predecessors in the amount and type of violence they portray. Clearly, murder is usually prominent in both, but classical stories keep descriptions of murder victims cursory and

unadorned while hardboiled texts revel in graphic abundance.<sup>61</sup> The early “psychological account of the detective story’s popularity” explains that detectives sublimate the violent blood-lust of human nature (Brophy).<sup>62</sup> Brigid Brophy rejects this hypothesis, however, and argues that classical detective fiction keeps the violence to a minimum (as merely stage machinery) because violence is used to point out everyone else’s absolution. The criminal is guilty so that no one else has to be.

Unlike the Golden Age detectives, who generally remain at a safe, sterilized distance from the crimes they investigate, the hardboiled detective gets physically involved by “dealing out and absorbing great quantities of punishment” (Grella 106). Chandler’s Philip Marlowe is drugged, stabbed, knocked unconscious, and just generally beaten throughout the Marlowe novels. Abusing the detective became a common aspect of the hardboiled genre, and in hardboiled disability detective texts, the detective’s disability functions as a justification for the violence against him. Disability becomes an excuse for the abuse of the detective that the texts highlight as a social injustice; but, the texts also portray a detective who has internalized violence, feeling his disability in violent terms.

In *Motherless Brooklyn*, Lionel investigates the murder of his boss. After Minna is stabbed, Lionel discovers that when they were younger Frank and his brother, Gerard, once betrayed two mobsters. Frank begged their forgiveness and swore loyalty while Gerard ran away. Since Gerard has recently moved back to Brooklyn as a Zen master of a local school, he must keep his return secret from the mobsters. Gerard and Frank start a new scam on a

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<sup>61</sup> See Colin Watson’s *Snobbery with Violence* or Stephen Wright’s *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity*.

<sup>62</sup> There are still arguments along this line about video games and other violent mediums especially those for children.



Japanese company, and Gerard and his giant minion kill Frank in a squabble over their dealings. At the end of the novel, Lionel takes out the giant, tells the mobsters about Gerard's return so they can deal with him, and helps make the detective agency legitimate.

The novel begins with Lionel and Coney on stakeout outside a building where Minna is in a meeting. Lionel has a talent for stakeouts since "counting and touching and repeating words are all the same activity. Tourette's is just 'one big lifetime of tag, really'" (5). So, Lionel hears everything, records small observations easily, and has a focus unmatched by any of the other men. The novel focuses on Lionel's Tourette's throughout, from how it makes him a unique detective to how it frames all of his social interactions. Lionel even discusses, in one of the many breaking-the-fourth-wall moments, how many times he mentions Tourette's: "Have you noticed yet that I relate everything to my Tourette's? Yup, you guessed it, it's a tic. Counting is a symptom, but counting symptoms is also a symptom, a tic *plus ultra*. I've got meta-Tourette's" (192).

The first paragraph of *Motherless Brooklyn* describes Lionel's Tourette's in detail; Lionel summarizes who he is because of his Tourette's and then describes it with violent terminology. In the first line, Lionel states, "Context is everything. Dress me up and see. I'm a carnival barker, an auctioneer, a downtown performance artist, a speaker in tongues, a senator drunk on filibuster. *I've got Tourette's*" (1). As well as announcing the importance of who Lionel is specifically because of his disability, these lines also enforce the importance of social relationships. People understand and categorize Lionel depending on context. He continues, "My mouth won't quit, though mostly I whisper or subvocalize like I'm reading aloud, my Adam's apple bobbing, jaw muscle beating like a miniature heart under my cheek, the noise suppressed, the words escaping silently... (If I were a Dick Tracy

Villain, I'd have to be Mumbles)" (1). The word choice and imagery, "muscle beating," "suppressed," "escaped," "villain," all indicate force or violence. He summarizes his symptoms as an "invisible army" that at first seems "peaceful" but then "rebels, breaks into the stores" looking for "weaknesses" and "vulnerabilities" (1-2). And this is how Lionel and the novel articulate his Tourette's—violently.

For Mark, brain damage results through actual violence when a car accident causes trauma to his brain. For Lionel, his Tourette's manifests seemingly without cause but occurs most frequently during times of high anxiety and isolation at his orphanage. On a field trip, Lionel feels "overwhelmed by a tender, touchy impulse toward the stiff, poignant penguin" at the Museum of Natural History where his Tourette's first appears (41-42).<sup>63</sup> His compulsions blossom when he is eleven, and he "grew terrified of [him]self" (45). His language here refers to his Tourette's through violent word choice. His verbal ticks were "trapped" inside him, "roiling" (45). Aware of social norms, where a person does not behave in these ways, he desperately represses his symptoms, articulating his tics as battles. So, the detective is the source of his own fear.

Lionel also recalls how his Tourette's elicited violent responses at the orphanage. His physical compulsions manifested first; he touched doorknobs, grabbed at loose shoe strings, and the worst, kissed his "fellow Boys" (45). This "abnormal" behavior, which breaks strict gender and sexual boundaries, inspired violence in his classmates. Although he tried downplaying the kisses by calling them a game in order to "defend" himself, this defense failed and "Leshawn Montrose cracked [his] head against a porcelain water fountain, Greg Toon and Edwin Torress generously only shucked [him] off onto the floor.

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<sup>63</sup> Ironic that his first tic occurs at the Museum of "Natural" History.

Tony Vermonte twisted [his] arm behind [his] back and forced [him] against a wall” (46). These are the foundational memories that the novel gives about his Tourette Syndrome’s manifestation. He feels scared of it, verbalizes it through violent word choice, and his peers beat him in response to it.

Part of the reason his tics manifest physically at first instead of verbally is because he’s afraid that the words evoke more hostility. He explains that it is one thing to walk up to a boy and touch him, but it is quite another to call him “Fuckyou Roseprawn” so he “collected words, treasured them like a drooling sadistic captor, bending them, melting them down...before [he] release[d], [he] translated them into physical performance, manic choreography” (47). Although Lionel never explains why words might evoke more hostility, there is a sense that they are more intimately linked to identity. Names are supposed to distinguish a person as an individual and are believed to communicate information including lineage, gender, and other cultural assumptions. And so, words have the possibility of attacking and destabilizing people at a deeper level. Lionel’s negotiation of words is a detective process inasmuch as the detective is always moving between signs and the violence these signs represent (as clues). The detective is a kind of interpreter. Lionel eventually “succumbs” to the verbal tics because he can no longer hold them back, and they satisfy the urge in a way that the physical movements cannot.

Lionel continues to describe his impairment using hostile terminology such as “letting off more of the pressure in [his] head” when he chooses to release a tic (2). In instances where he feels he cannot tic and is able to contain it, he still describes it in violent terminology: “So I kept my tongue wound in my teeth, ignored the pulse in my cheek, the throbbing in my gullet, persistently swallowed language back like vomit. It burned as hotly”

(48). And in other moments, he battles to hold back tics but the “straining dam” does not “hold back the torrent” (2). Even beyond the verbal Tourettes, other Tourette’s symptoms are described violently. When he chats with a woman, he pictures her cigarette falling and igniting her slip: “This was an uncomfortable feature of Tourette’s—my brain would throw up ugly fantasies, glimpses of pain, disasters narrowly averted” (100). The similarity between this scene and the overtly sexualized language of the original hardboiled texts reframe that type of language as Tourettic. When Chandler began writing, he wanted to “play with a fascinating new language” in order to “see what it would do as a means of expression which might remain on the level of unintellectual thinking and yet acquire the power to say things which are usually only said with a literary air” (“Dale” 1023). Chandler wants to find deep truths through the way a “man of his [the detective’s] age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness” (992). His violent and “authentic” language is Tourettic, a “torrent” that wants to explode past any created “dam.” By drawing this connection, Lethem points out the social repercussions of hardboiled language. When Lionel cannot control his language, he is beaten and ostracized, but as I stated earlier, this hardboiled language also represents truth that escapes social etiquette.

Lionel experiences the most physical violence during his years at St. Vincent; as he grew up, he “grew larger—neither fat nor particularly muscular, but large, bearlike, and so harder for the bantamweight Tony or anyone else to bully” (82). Although the violent altercations lessen because Lionel is no longer a small young boy, there are other instances of physical altercations because of his Tourette’s. After they take Frank to the hospital, Lionel tics in the hospital waiting room. At first, the crowd identifies him as “some sort of

patient: spirit or animal possession, verbal epileptic seizure, whatever” and because they have identified him they are reassured that he “would presumably be given drugs and sent home” (31). Disability again acts as a nationality; he is a patient so the crowd accepts that he belongs in that space. The exception is a hospital security guard named Albert who “knew he wasn’t the patient in [his] party” (31). So Albert tells him he “Can’t be doing *that* shit” (32). Because Albert has started a confrontation (for which he believes Lionel is responsible), the crowd reassesses its previous evaluation of Lionel: “*This guy might be interesting after all. Free Human Freakshow*” (32). Coney tries to explain that Lionel has a condition, but the guard tells him to “walk his condition out of here... Or I be calling the armada, you understand” (32). Having taken the conversation to a physically violent place by referencing an “armada,” Coney responds by saying: “We stand up we’re gonna lay a condition on *your* ass, Albert” (32). Albert reacts with violence to Lionel’s condition. He tells him, “You can’t be like that in here...Gotta take it *elsewhere*” (31). There is an irony implicit in this situation because the characters are in a hospital, and disabilities have been understood through medical terms. However, in this place where his disability should be the most understood or accepted or sympathized with, it is not. The security guard tells Lionel this is an inappropriate place for his behavior, and he should take it (and himself) somewhere where it *is* appropriate. Unfortunately, Lionel is left with no other options after even the hospital—the recognized safe haven for those suffering “illnesses”—rejects him.

Although Coney defends Lionel in this situation, even the other Minna Men respond violently to Lionel’s outbursts. This usually happens when there is dissension in the ranks such as after Minna kicks all of the boys out of the car for making an inappropriate remark. As they walk home, Lionel says “*Muffin ass*” and “Gilbert and Tony looked at [him] with

disgust, Tony with something worse. ‘Shut up’ There was cold fury in his teeth-clenched smile” (76). But Lionel continues to verbalize even as Tony threatens him with a stick. Lionel explains that he is “prisoner of [his] syndrome” And so he “grabbed Tony back, [his] hands exploring his collar, fingers running inside it like an anxious, fumbling lover” then Tony tries to shove “dog shit” in his mouth but only manages to wipe it on his cheek (76). This situation where Tony responds to Lionel’s disability with violence also lines up the violent altercation with Lionel’s reference to his disability using the phrase “prisoner of [his] syndrome.”

As the Minna Men struggle among themselves, separated by the death of Minna, Tony and Lionel continue to interact violently. Lionel tics, sometimes verbally and sometimes physically, and Tony strikes. When they’re arguing about the search for Frank’s killer, Lionel caresses Tony’s shoulder, and in response, Tony “raises his hand and slapped me on the side of the head” (178). Tony references hardboiled detective fiction as he continues to slap Lionel. He accuses Lionel of thinking he’s “Mike fucking Hammer” and tells him that he’s like “the Hardy Boys’ retarded kid brother... Hardly Boy” (179). He ends this argument that includes the repetitive pet name “Freakshow” by pulling a gun on Lionel. Again, the violence is framed by disability, and it explicitly connects this text to other detectives including the hardboiled “Sam Spade” (183). The original hardboiled focuses on how the detective “takes a beating like a man,” but *Motherless Brooklyn* focuses on how violence against Lionel is grounded in stigmas against disability. Like other hardboiled detectives, Lionel is beaten, but he nonetheless solves the mystery and finds meaning through his identity as a private investigator.

In one of the most interesting arguments spawned by Lionel's verbal tics, he and a black police detective, Lucius Seminole, argue because of each of their marginalized positions. When Seminole asks him "What's the matter with you," Lionel responds "Tourette's syndrome" followed by the tic "*Tourette Is the Shitman*" because "Tourette's was my other name, and like my name, my brain could never leave the words unmolested. Sure enough, I produced my own echo: 'Tourette's is the shitman!'" (110). Seminole has no idea what Tourette's is and does not understand that Lionel is trying to explain his verbal tics. He humors Lionel, waffling between treating him like a crazy person and treating him like a hostile witness until Lionel asks "Can we go back to—*fuckmeblackcop*—back to talking nice now" (114). This tic in the middle of the question angers Seminole, and he grabs Lionel who describes the detective's behavior as "roughhousing." Seminole later accuses Lionel of thinking of him as a "nigger" and "dumb black cock" (187, 190). Lionel explains that "I wanted to find a way to allay his fears, I really did. I sort of liked the homicide detective. But everything out of my mouth sounded vaguely like a racial slur" (191). Both Lionel's tic and the negative reference to the cop's race inspire a physical reaction. Unlike the original hardboiled texts which tend to portray violence as resulting from a dog eat dog attitude, *Motherless Brooklyn* spotlights how violent tension is caused by two marginalized positions and social situations coming in conflict with each other.<sup>64</sup>

Soon after meeting the black detective, the text breaks to a separate section marked by asterisks that reads:

My life story to this point:

The teacher looked at me like I was crazy.

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<sup>64</sup> I think more could be said in future work about the class implications of the dog eat dog attitude.

The social-services worker looked at me like I was crazy.

The boy looked at me like I was crazy and then hit me.

The girl looked at me like I was crazy.

The woman looked at me like I was crazy.

The black homicide detective looked at me like I was crazy. (107)

And this succinctly sums up how people treat Lionel poorly because his disability marks him as abnormal. His life is consumed by these interactions, and the interactions between other people and Lionel frequently become violent.

Like *Motherless Brooklyn*, *The Little Sleep* also connects violence with Mark's disability. Although DA Times tries to kill Mark not because he is disabled but because he is threatening to expose Times' secret, his victimhood is accessed through his disability. DA Times lights Mark's apartment on fire and plans to blame it on Mark's tendency to drop cigarettes during narcoleptic sleeps. In a fight to escape, Mark jumps on Times' back, pushing them both down the stairs, where Times breaks his neck. In addition to this final violent climax, Mark gets beaten throughout the investigation by thugs hired by DA Times; they stalk and threaten Mark as he investigates the mystery. In their first interaction, the redhead asks, "What are you doing down on the Cape? For a retard who can't drive, you sure do get around" (71). Here, he expresses surprise that Mark can work on a case since he's disabled; they continue referring to him as "retard" in every interaction after this. They also call him "Mushface" in reference to his scars and try to intimidate him through his disability: "Be a smart retard, Genevich. Give us the photos" (72-73). All of the bullies'



threats address Mark as a disabled person (i.e. “retard”).<sup>65</sup> Most negative judgments are presented as being at least partially caused by (or occurring during) social situations where people stare at, judge, and discount the detective because he is impaired.

Although they provide some of the plot progression, the thugs are the least resolved aspects of the novel in regards to Mark’s narcoleptic hallucinations. After each violent interaction with them, Mark wakes from a narcoleptic episode. Stress increases the likelihood of these states, and violent encounters are stressful. However, the text leaves open the interpretation that the encounters are hallucinated. At the end of the novel, when Mark refers to them in front of DA Times, Times responds “Are these the same imaginary goons you warned Ellen about in voice mail? [...] I’m telling the truth. No goons. You hallucinated or dreamed them up” (242, 243). However, the DA is unreliable, and the text gives physical proof that the goons do exist. After encounters with the goons and waking up from narcoleptic episodes, Mark notes that “Pain is my proof” and “My left cheek, where Redhead slapped me, is sore and puffy (76, 101). Supposing that the goons never existed, Mark has hallucinated them and their violent remarks about his disability. Either the goons exist and beat him up while mocking his disability, or Mark has internalized and hallucinated the violent reactions to his disability. Both situations use disability as a pretext for violence.

The detectives have a violent onset of their disabilities, they describe their disability through violent rhetoric, and violence that is grounded in their disabilities occurs in many of their relationships. The novels do not suggest that impairments are inherently violent or

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<sup>65</sup> Lionel also mentions sensitivity about this particular word when he describes how the people at the school think of him as “probably a retard of some type, certainly a regrettable, inferior offering” (38).

cause violence, but they do explore the social situations in which people think or act violently in response to disability. The relationship between violence and disability has also affected the detectives' roles as private investigator. Throughout the novels, both detectives make sense of violence inflicted on others, like the rape in *The Little Sleep*, through the violence inflicted on them because of their disabilities.

Although the detectives have internalized some sense of their disabilities as violent, the novels also try to demonstrate the detectives' struggle to accept their impairments. Both Mark and Lionel talk about the separate sides of themselves, one healthy and the other disabled, but the novels stylistically integrate representations of their disabilities. *Motherless Brooklyn* plays with the language, evoking hardboiled language but twisting it through Lionel's verbal tics in both his dialogue and thought process. *The Little Sleep* portrays Mark's narcolepsy through the style and structure of the novel by integrating hallucinations in the narrative progression. *Motherless Brooklyn* uses asterisks to separate tangents, marks off strings of verbal tics through italics, and occasionally uses parentheses and other punctuation to portray Lionel's Tourette's. Through these style markers, the audience gains insight into the structure of Lionel's thought process. Although the characters articulate themselves as fragmented on the inside because of their disability and the texts show that society views them as broken because of their disability, the texts also represent each character as fully constituted in part because of their disability. Lionel is who he is in part because he has Tourette's. If he didn't have Tourette's, he would be a different man. Both novels make this clear through their form, and *Motherless Brooklyn* explicitly states the idea. In a chapter titled "(Tourette Dreams)," the entire content of the chapter is as follows:

(in Tourette dreams you shed your tics)

(or your ties shed you)

(and you go with them, astonished to leave yourself behind) (130)

### **Objectivity Gone Wrong:**

#### **A Hardboiled Worst Case Scenario**

Unlike the reflective and tumultuous nature of the detective and his disability in *Motherless Brooklyn* and *The Little Sleep*, the detective in *Memento* creates a rigid structure of being in which he believes he can overcome his disability. The other two texts attempt to reframe the hardboiled narrative. The hardboiled detective does not just act because of an iron-clad sense of self and internal fortitude; instead, this new hardboiled detective is shaped by outside forces and acts through his subjective experiences. In contrast, Leonard from *Memento* ignores individual particulars in favor of a superficially controlled narrative about himself. He is completely cut off from ethical behavior, personal growth, and other people. All of the texts in this chapter use representations of disability to show the detectives facing personal and social challenges; disability acts like a moral litmus test. Although *Motherless Brooklyn* and *The Little Sleep* connect disability to violence, they present likeable detectives who struggle to find a moral position in society. Unlike those in the other two texts, *Memento*'s detective is an unredeemable character who is the cause of most of the violence throughout the film. Amnesia is used to represent Leonard's moral disability, although the movie heavily implies that Leonard would be a moral failure with or without his impairment. By using his amnesia for the narrative structure and as a theme, the film suggests that disability makes these questions more transparent; his disability offers an avenue through which to examine questions of self-knowledge and relativism. *Motherless Brooklyn* and *The Little Sleep* use the depiction of a person with a disability to reflect a disabled world and

both positive and negative possibilities between the two. In contrast, *Memento* uses disability to show how Leonard is a nonfunctioning member of nonfunctioning society.

The complex narrative sequencing of the film uses his disability, amnesia, as a visible way to investigate overarching themes of identity formation, the meaning of reality, and interpersonal relationships. Film critics have paid significant attention to the film's structure, either lauding it for its innovation or criticizing it as merely a "filmmaker's conceit."<sup>66</sup> Because much of the focus of the film is on the puzzle that the reverse chronology helps solve, Sean Burns calls the film "intellectual gamesmanship." He asserts, "Once the visceral thrill of the puzzle structure begins to wear off, there's nothing left to hang onto," William Arnold calls it a "one-time treat," and Roger Ebert said it did not warrant multiple viewings. In his *Chicago Sun-Times* review, Ebert explains that, since "confusion is the state we [the audience] are intended to be in," after the audience sees it once and loses their confusion, the film is no longer effective.

The film, through structure and plot, questions how a person connects to other people when they do not and/or cannot know them and considers how Leonard lives and what meaning he finds in life. Scholarly criticism on *Memento* has analyzed many themes such as time, memory, and the detective genre with very little consideration of the film's use of disability. Some critical works erase disability altogether. For example, Tony Jackson, in an examination of story-time in *Memento*, refers to Leonard as an "anomalous kind of new-born, appearing full-grown, with a mind, with language, but disoriented in space and time"

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<sup>66</sup> See James Berardinelli's "Memento" on *Reelviews* and Marjorie Baumgarten's "Memento" on *Austin Chronicle*.

(56). This ignores and marginalizes disabled people by thinking of human nature as functioning in a specific able-bodied way.

While the humanities have responded by talking about other content and only briefly discussing disability, the scientific response to the film has analyzed the representation of anterograde amnesia. Many of these responses praise the representation of anterograde amnesia as authentic. Caltech neuroscientist Christof Koch calls *Memento* “the most accurate portrayal of the different memory systems in the popular media” (196). Clinical neuropsychologist Sallie Baxendale writes in “Memories Aren’t Made of This: Amnesia at the Movies” that most amnesic characters bear little resemblance to reality, but in *Memento* “this amnesic character retains his identity [most amnesia representations focus on lost identity characters “I don’t know/remember who I am!”], has little retrograde amnesia, and shows several of the severe everyday memory difficulties associated with the disorder. The fragmented, almost mosaic quality to the sequence of scenes in the film also reflects the ‘perpetual present’ nature of the syndrome” (1480-81). While most scientific critiques focus primarily on authenticity of amnesiac representation, physician Esther M. Sternberg goes further to analyze how this “perfect exploration of the neurobiology of memory...makes one examine preconceived notions in a different light. *Memento* is a movie for anyone interested in the workings of memory and, indeed, in what it is that makes our own reality;” therefore, she connects representations of the medical condition with concepts of memory and reality (1661-1662).

*Memento* is based on the short story “Memento Mori” by the director’s brother, Jonathan Nolan. The shortening of the Latin phrase “Remember your Mortality” places emphasis on remembrance, and Leonard’s amnesia serves as plot device and thematic focus.

As in the two novels, the implicit mystery of Nolan's *Memento* is Leonard himself. When accused of not knowing who he is, Leonard responds that he is Leonard Shelby from San Francisco. Teddy corrects him and says, "That's who you were, Lenny. You don't know who you are, who you've become since the incident. You're wandering around, playing detective... and you don't even know how long ago it was... Maybe you need to apply some of your investigative skills to yourself." Regardless of Teddy's assertion that Leonard was Leonard Shelby from San Francisco, this is a superficial label. In "Out of Joint: *Memento* as Contemporary *Hamlet*," Eric Mallin asserts, "Leonard has almost no past at all—narratively, novelistically—outside of or prior to the narrow confines of the violence visited on him and his wife. No parents, no schools, no friends or colleagues, no childhood, no siblings, no life that he recalls or attempts to rejoin. No self to speak of" (312). Amnesia embodies Leonard's lack of social context and internal stability.

By using reverse chronology and by forcing the audience to watch events with no context, history, or explanation, disability haunts the audience—always there but never the explicit thematic topic, unlike the previous two texts. G. Christopher Williams explains that the film "places the viewer of the film in the same position as Leonard, witnessing the present while having to attempt to reconstruct the events that have led up to this initial moment in the film through the same clues and cues Leonard has" (27). The audience, like Leonard, is confused and misunderstands people and events throughout. Anterograde amnesia serves as a model for the two chronologies, one in black and white and the other in color, that combine to form the plot of the film. Mallin argues that these "competing chronologies and chromatic modes merely schematize the hero's utter self-division, his duality of perception split between a backwards, improvisational present and a forward if

bleached and rehearsed past” (323), thus the narrative structure is used to represent the intrapersonal separation I discussed earlier that is causally linked to the detective’s disability. The color scenes take place in reverse chronological order (some scenes end where the preceding scene begins but other scenes do not quite connect so gaps remain); each scene raises questions because the audience lacks context or explanation, and the following scene reveals earlier information that slowly starts to fill in these gaps. The opening sequence shows a dead man. The color sequences slowly reveal that a man named Leonard who has anterograde amnesia shot Teddy because Leonard believes Teddy killed his wife. However, other color scenes portray Teddy as Leonard’s friend and sidekick. And finally, Teddy is revealed to be a threat to Leonard’s freedom, not because he killed his wife, but because of what Teddy knows about Leonard. A woman named Natalie has helped Leonard find Teddy because, like Leonard, she lost someone too, her boyfriend Jimmy. And yet, further into the movie, it shows that Leonard kills Jimmy because of Teddy’s manipulation, and Natalie has orchestrated Teddy’s death at Leonard’s hands in revenge for their involvement.

The color scenes begin with Leonard either waking up or “coming to” with no recent memory because of his amnesia, and he usually asks “Where are you?” Although he asks the question because he wants the literal answer, the question also reminds the audience that Leonard is metaphorically lost; the film focuses on Leonard’s exterior and (lack of) interior awareness. After Leonard asks the question, the camera pans around the room mimicking Leonard as he looks around the room for clues in order to determine where he is. Leonard must be a detective at all times, and clue gathering represents his response to his disability.

All of these exterior symbols represent how Leonard lacks interior self-knowledge, so his physical disability represents his moral disability.

The color scenes are separated by black and white scenes that take place in chronological order with few gaps. In these scenes, Leonard is talking on the phone about his wife's murder and the story of Sammy Jankis. Partially through the phone narration and partially through flashbacks, the film reveals that when Leonard was an insurance adjuster before the attack that caused his amnesia, he investigated a man named Sammy Jankis who suffered from anterograde amnesia. Leonard told Jankis' wife that he believed the amnesia was psychological and not physical; in order to "snap" her husband out of it, Mrs. Jankis tested him by asking him to inject her insulin three times in a row. When Jankis complied, not remembering that he already injected her, she died. Although these sequences flow chronologically, they still mimic Leonard's amnesia. The audience is never told explicitly who Leonard is talking to, and it also shows the narrative that Leonard has given himself in order to make sense of his life.

The juxtaposition of the black and white sequences and the color sequences present questions about reality. The color sequences and the black and white sequences battle between each other and force the audience to question which is more real. The color sequences seem real because they are in color. Although they are artificial because they are not color, the black and white's real-time chronology is more realistic. Similar to the films and television shows in the preceding chapters, *Memento* visualizes the detective's mind through the representation of the colors, the fragmentation of the scenes and the point of view camera pans visualize the detective's mind.



Near the end of the film, the color and black and white scenes converge.

Chronologically, the black and white scenes occur before the color scenes. In the converging scenes (they take place in the middle of the story between the black/white and color scenes but at the end of the plot and film), after killing Jimmy, Leonard feels unsure that Jimmy was his wife's murderer so he turns on Teddy who had given him the information. Teddy reveals that Leonard's wife had been attacked, but not murdered; she survived only to die of an insulin overdose at Leonard's hands. Leonard sublimates his own involvement in his wife's death onto the Sammy Jankis story. The real Jankis was a fraud, never had amnesia, and was never married. According to Teddy, he helped Leonard find his wife's attacker a year ago, but because Leonard has no memory of it, he feels no sense of relief. So Teddy has set up other situations where Leonard could kill "an attacker." Because Teddy uses him and because Leonard does not believe or cannot handle the truth, Leonard manipulates his future self to believe that Teddy is the attacker. The film ends with the stage set for Teddy's death, which occurs in the beginning sequence.

The narrative structure mimics Leonard's amnesia. However, lest we assume that the film actively wants the audience to identify with Leonard, to understand what he is going through, it must be emphasized that the film also actively separates the audience's experience from Leonard's experience because the audience knows what will happen even if they do not know why it happened. The audience knows the future and will learn the past. Jackson points out that "the non-linear alternating of black-and-white and colour episodes requires us to work simply to determine our place at any given moment of the actual chronology, and the doubling back upon itself of the plot forces us always to be moving literally both forward and backward at any point in the story" (58). Like the scenes that

might or might not be Mark's hallucination in *The Little Sleep*, *Memento's* structure mimics (but does not become the same as) Leonard's disability, and it forces the audience to always question the context and position of the detective. By offering a parallel between structure and disability, *The Little Sleep* offers a place to sympathize with Mark; however, *Memento's* parallel between structure and disability permits the audience to recognize Leonard's failure.

As in *Motherless Brooklyn* and *The Little Sleep*, the film uses the detective's disability to explore his relationships, and it specifically questions what role memory plays in these relationships. Leonard is aided in his revenge quest by Teddy. As a sidekick, Teddy is Leonard's externalized conscience—as Leonard is unreliable, temperamental, and depraved so is Teddy. Teddy also functions as a sidekick to explain Leonard's actions, not only to the audience but to Leonard since he has no short-term memory. Teddy has given Leonard's life meaning, but he does so by recreating the mystery of Leonard's wife's death. Because Leonard does not remember killing her attacker, he either finds no resolution from the act or cannot process a lack of resolution. Instead, he is stuck in an endless loop where fictional mysteries and resolutions give him meaning. The film questions the role of the sidekick, by presenting an unethical sidekick and the consequences therein. Teddy personally benefits by setting Leonard up to kill more people. For example, he gains drug money when Leonard kills Natalie's boyfriend. As the sidekick, Teddy is in a position to mastermind misinformation, and through this he becomes both the villain and the victim in Leonard's mystery.

The film uses anterograde amnesia as a narrative cause or at least explanation for Teddy's shift from sidekick to mastermind and then victim. After Teddy explains his manipulation of Leonard, Leonard asks himself, "Can I just let myself forget what you've

made me do?” then continues, “You think I just want another puzzle to solve. Another John G. to look for. You’re John G. (Teddy is his middle name). So you can be my John G.” And while thinking this, he burns Polaroid evidence that he killed the most recent representation of “John G.”, and writes down Teddy’s license plate as a clue that his future amnesiac self will believe is the license plate of his wife’s attacker. Leonard’s choice is volitional; he chooses to use his disability to make Teddy his next victim. Leonard, for those few moments, knows exactly what he is doing. Later, Teddy will die because Leonard falsely believes Teddy murdered his wife. Leonard makes this choice with contextual information. Disability is a tool for Leonard and the film.

*Memento* troubles the function of sidekick by depicting Teddy as villain and victim; similarly, the film questions the role of femme fatale through Natalie. Frequently when the femme fatale leads men into temptation in original hardboiled and noir texts, she destroys herself in the process and rarely succeeds in her dastardly deeds. Through using Leonard’s disability, Natalie gets her way and remains unpunished by the end of the film. Natalie provokes Leonard into hitting her, and then convinces him directly after that another man beat her and that Leonard can help by taking care of him. Natalie wants revenge on Leonard because he helped kill her boyfriend not because of his disability. But she and the film can use his amnesia to enact revenge. By the end of the film, Natalie has succeeded in getting Leonard to beat up a man named Dodd, and successfully set up Teddy’s murder at Leonard’s hands. As a result, she has help with a stolen drug/money situation and has revenge on both Teddy and Leonard, without negative repercussions for herself.

In *Memento*, disability is used to portray Leonard’s relationship with himself as it is used in his relationship with other characters. The end of the film reveals that Jankis was not

amnesiac; Leonard had projected his own disability onto him. In *Memento*, Leonard uses the Sammy Jankis story to separate disabled Leonard with functioning Leonard. Not only does Leonard displace his guilt onto Jankis, but he also creates a “how not to live disabled” model. His most visible tattoo, on his hand reads “Remember Sammy Jankis.” Leonard explains that unlike Jankis who “had no drive,” Leonard uses “habit and routine to make [his] life possible.” Jankis should have been able to learn through repetition, but “conditioning didn’t work for Jankis so he became helpless.” Leonard declares triumphantly that unlike for Jankis, conditioning, another system, works for him. Jankis acts as the disabled part of Leonard that cannot function because of his disability. Leonard’s perception of himself as functional with his system represents the abled part of Leonard who tries through various methods to be as close to normal as possible. Leonard functions, but only by dividing himself. He can continue with life as long as he separates parts of himself and his history onto Jankis.

Like those of the detectives in *Motherless Brooklyn* and *The Little Sleep*, Leonard’s disability is directly tied to the violence throughout the film. He reacts violently to people because of his disability, others use his disability to ground their violent treatment of him, and all of the deaths occur because of his amnesia. The film situates Leonard as a wounded animal who responds violently when taken by surprise in cornered situations. When Teddy appears unexpectedly in Leonard’s car, since Leonard cannot remember him, he attacks him. In another scene, while he is taking a shower, a man startles him, and Leonard’s first response is to punch. Teddy and Natalie both verbally abuse him, calling him “freak” repetitively. Natalie also calls him “pathetic piece of shit,” “fucking retard,” “fucking stupid,” and tells him that she “hates his retarded guts.” In addition to outside violent

conceptions of Leonard, Leonard thinks of his amnesia in very violent terms. He says that the attack that caused his amnesia “destroyed [his] ability to live” and later screams that he wants his “fucking life back.” Even more than *The Little Sleep* or *Motherless Brooklyn*, Leonard’s disability is his enemy; it is the opposite of living. In a scene where Leonard tries to deal with the death of his wife, he asks, “How can I heal? How am I supposed to heal if I can’t feel time?” Every day to Leonard is like the day after his wife died. However, the end of the film makes clear that this must be some choice of Leonard’s, because he gained his amnesia before his wife died. His wife dying was not his last “abled” memory, but this created narrative replaces what Leonard feels he lost because of his disability.

Including that of his wife, all of the deaths in *Memento* occur because of Leonard’s amnesia and/or characters’ manipulation of his amnesia (Teddy, Natalie, and Leonard himself). And the final twist of the movie reveals that Leonard’s wife manipulates him into killing her because she wants to snap him out of his amnesia. All of these deaths are constructed in the text through the use of Leonard’s amnesia. Presumably, Natalie and Teddy could have manipulated Leonard without his disability, and Natalie would have hated Leonard even if she didn’t see him as a “retard.” Yet, disability is used as an access for their behavior. The film considers how much of Leonard’s philosophical quandaries (including his murdering tendencies) are latent in Leonard before his accident. Leonard’s attempt to make himself “high functioning” is exactly what makes him immoral. Throughout the film, Leonard focuses on replacing the truth (or ways to access truth) that he feels he has lost, but he probably never had it. He covets righteousness but is only left with indignation.

In order to (re)create a reality, Leonard has created a structure of existence; his use of notes, photographs, and tattoos are examples of this. They replace long-term memory

storage in the brain. Whenever he wants to remember something he learned, or emphasize important things in his life, Leonard takes pictures and writes notes on them. Some seem fairly straightforward like the picture of the motel he is staying at. When he needs to figure out where he is sleeping, he checks his photographs for this information. Other pictures and notes are more complex. When he meets a person, he checks to see if he knows who they are and what he should know about them. The picture of Natalie has something scribbled out in the first line and the second line says “She has lost someone, she will help you out of pity.” Like Leonard, the audience gains clues by looking at photographs, notes, and tattoos in the film, and must decide whether they are dependable. They function as clues do in traditional detective stories, but they also function to answer questions usually gained by “normal” means. The film calls attention to positivism and the able-bodied requirements used for the traditional exposition of clues.

Whenever the clues reach a critical enough level, Leonard tattoos them onto his body. The tattoos specifically act as his new unyielding roadmap; he has written onto his body who he must be and what he must do. They serve to recreate Leonard’s body and his life; they physically mark the trauma of disability. Leonard emphasizes that this system of note-taking lets him function. When Teddy calls this system “unreliable,” Leonard responds by saying that “memory is not perfect. It’s not even good. Ask the police. Eye witness testimony is unreliable. Cops don’t catch a killer by sitting around remembering stuff. They collect facts and draw conclusions. Facts. Not memories. That’s how you investigate.” Leonard has replaced his lost memory with a new system that creates, in his mind, a better truth that is more positive than positivism. Leonard finds meaning in his life by replacing his memory (his disability) with his investigation (as a detective). However, the film makes

clear that this metanarrative is anything but the truth. His notes trick him a number of times into believing that he has the full story. By the end of the film, the audience knows that Natalie was not helping Leonard and should not have been trusted. Mallin asserts that through “Leonard’s selective tattooing- *Memento* lets its hero conduct a careful, even physically taxing forgetting. Writing always effectively erases more information than it records, primarily because of its exclusions” (311). The tattoos, as well as the photographs and notes, are literally exterior depictions that metaphorically reflect Leonard’s focus on external over internal awareness. Leonard attempts to replace the division between his disabled self and his healthy self with a system. He believes this system is complete, but as the texts make clear, there is never unity. Carlos Gallego describes how “the writing is intended to anchor the meaning of the images within some context (name, location, time, etc); the tattoos establish a permanent space for the most violent information”; however, the system has a “potential for misappropriation” (42). His system also illustrates a problem with the binary of abled and disabled bodies. Because there is an able-bodied norm that Leonard feels he must approximate, he compensates in dangerous ways. Leonard still looks at his disability as a failure and an incomplete version of his pre-disabled self.

Through a frame of disability, *Memento* participates, with the other two texts, in a new reverse discourse of the detective genre. All three texts use photography to meta-reference the construction of identity and acknowledge the history of such in portrayals of disability and the detective genre. *Memento* uses photographs to replace memory, both Lenny’s and the audience. The film plays with the belief that photographs, like memory, do not lie. However, photographs are unable to portray and thus contain absolute reality. They frame, compose, and reduce. One of the things at stake through the concept of photographs

(and *Memento* as an actual photograph) is the tension between image and language—Lenny’s application of words to pictures either contextualizes them usefully or turns them into lies.

The whole film functions as a photograph, and as I’ve discussed, uses a complicated structure that clearly creates a framed world in which spectators must actively engage. Williams demonstrates that viewers’ experience of the film parallels Leonard’s situation “as they come to realize that they too have to reconstruct facts to know what is true about what they know. This realization undermines their own sense of reality” (32). The film and Leonard’s photographs are used to challenge the idea that there is a singular narrative which film documents. *The Little Sleep* and *Motherless Brooklyn* also use photography similarly. Mark’s mother is a photographer who decorates her life with photographs of the world—of nature, happy people she has never met, antique photos she found at antique market, family photos. She uses these photographs to create a happy narrative of her life. However, what the photographs contain is, at best, only one aspect of the world they depict and, at worst, is a false façade. In a few different scenes in the novel, Ellen dresses as a clown to try to make children she is photographing smile. Parents always want photographs of happy and calm children, but the children are more often crying and screaming. The texts contain the message that photographs are not objective, precise, and accurate depictions of the world but are instead complex, composed frames. By depicting photographs this way, the texts point out the simulated nature of historical constructions such as disability.

Photography frames *The Little Sleep*, and the text uses photography of people not as a representation of a unique identity but as a demonstration of events. The story begins with Mark finding the photographs of a woman and ends shortly after he discovers the video tape



which allows him to solve the case. The photograph and video of the rape of the young woman in *The Little Sleep* act as a pointed frame that highlights specific events. Originally, the boys use photography to create pornography, and thus photography is a process of objectification that reduces the female to an object for the male gaze. However, after the woman dies, the pictures become material evidence of the crime that was committed against her. Photography can be used as a record of criminal objectification. According to Tom Gunning, the criminal's body used to act as the repository of evidence (a la criminal physiologies), and now it is "the victim which holds evidence of the violence done against it" (37). For the murderers in the texts, "the act of being seen collapses into the act of being identified by producing ineradicable evidence, both indexical and iconic, of his guilt. The very act of murder produces its own record" as it has on Leonard's body (Gunning 37). However, the photographs do not capture or categorize humans as criminals in their entirety; instead, they show a moment in the life of a person. The men from the rape in *The Little Sleep* grew up to be fathers and friends; Times even grew up to be a district attorney. If characterized in a quick frozen shot, they are upstanding members of society, but the photographs of the rape show previously hidden criminal moments. Furthermore, the victim's body can at least leave traces of the woman and the injustice against her.

Each text reverses the gaze away from the person with disability; the detective is a subject who uses photographs instead of being an object constructed by photographs. He wields the camera and uses photographs as a tool. Disability, like photography, functions as a frame for the body. Both gaze back and remind the spectator that behind our desire is nothing but our own lack. According to Lionel in *Motherless Brooklyn*, "Tourette's teaches you what people will ignore and forget, teaches you to see the reality-knitting mechanism

people employ to tuck away the intolerable, the incongruous, the disruptive—it teaches you this because you’re the one lobbing the intolerable, incongruous, and disruptive their way” (43). As a reverse discourse of the hardboiled genre, the texts play with the original themes—the detective as a lone-wolf, the world as violent, and the question of the detective’s morality—to reach different developments about self-knowledge. These three texts use disability as a tool like many texts with depictions of people with disabilities do. Although problematic because of how this reduces disability to cultural appropriation, these texts expand previous depictions of people with disabilities in the detective genre by explicitly focusing on how identity is constructed through narrative and how individuals and societies function.

CHAPTER V  
TO WRITE THE WORLD:  
HOW THE POSTMODERN DETECTIVE RIGHTS THE WORLD

Detective fiction grapples with shifting concepts of order in the world, from the scientific deduction of Sherlock Holmes to the super mind and super man of Lincoln Rhyme, and to the contextualized lone wolf in the disability hard-boiled subgenre. Traditional detective fiction presents a modern positivist narrative of the world in which the detective has a core identity and the world is knowable. Most contemporary subgenres might complicate these positions, but they generally work within them. In contrast, the postmodern texts entirely reject the notion that the world is knowable and that there is an autonomous individual. The three texts in this chapter are explorations at best, laments at worst, of a postmodern society where truth and meaning are gone (perhaps never existed) and individuals are lost and isolated. Law and crime have neither inherent meaning nor external referent; instead, stories exist in an active process of interpretation. In order to portray the lack of inherent meaning and its replacement, the novels depict characters with mental disorders whose internal narratives about being lost become slowly externalized; they are literally lost by the end of the novel, replaced by the narrative that they have constructed.

Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987), Denis Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* (1991), and Carlos Brooks's *Quid Pro Quo* (2008) are postmodern disability detective stories. In *Identity Crises: A Social Critique of Postmodernity*, Robert G. Dunn argues that "*the concept of the postmodern itself was an attempt to articulate a growing sense of the problematization of identity as a generalized condition of life in postwar*

*Western society*” [emphasis in the original] (2). Moreover, “most varieties of postmodernism can be read as a reified reflection of and rejoinder to an underlying state of cultural dismemberment in society itself” (Dunn 7). While the texts from Chapter IV include postmodern elements, the texts in this chapter use the detective paradigm to present the postmodern condition and use representations of disability as metaphors for cultural dismemberment. While mourning the demise of intrinsic meaning, they replace positivism with embodied experience and identity with identification. According to Dunn, at the center of postmodernism is “a vital but rather circumscribed preoccupation with the problem of identity” (1). These postmodern detective texts focus on a narrative of loss in which essential identity is replaced with a process of identification. Ernesto Laclau explains that identity implies recognition of an originary essence that defines the person while identification refers to a process of construction based on the Freudian concept of “lack.”

Although there are many examples of postmodern mysteries, the two novels that I have selected are American novels that are very specifically *detective* novels (instead of more general crime or mystery novels) that directly rely on a disability narrative focused on the lead detective. Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*, which is the collected edition of his shorter works, *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), and *The Locked Room* (1986) is arguably the most famous and critically acclaimed of all American postmodern detective stories. Johnson’s *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* is less well known (Johnson is, however, included by Harold Bloom in his *Western Canon*), but I have selected this novel because it is particularly clear in its disability narrative and is thus a good representation of the postmodern disability detective text. The third text I analyze in this chapter is Brooks’ *Quid Pro Quo*, a film about two people’s desire to be paralyzed. Although I categorize this film as

a postmodern disability detective text, the film's style differs from the texts I have examined thus far because it is less radically postmodern than the other texts. In particular, it is far less fragmented; there is a linear narrative with fairly coherent characters. However, the film's use of an erotics of disability to depict the postmodern ideology of loss in this detective subgenre develops my consideration of postmodern disability detective texts.

Intrinsically hard to describe, postmodern literature is broadly defined as post World War II literature that questions and rejects Enlightenment ideas from Modernist literature, and uses the literary techniques of fragmentation, intertextuality, metafictionality, and irony. The era of postmodernist literature began approximately in the 1940s, peaked during the 1960s and 1970s, and persists today. Early influences on the postmodern style include Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) or, even earlier, Miguel de Cervantes's *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (1605). Postmodern literature has been attracted to generic features of detective fiction, as well as those of science fiction and fantasy in part because of postmodernity's interest in pastiche, self-reflexivity, and intertextuality. By using existing genres, the texts can reproduce, redefine, and subvert them. Postmodern fiction plays with the detective genre's use of law and order, as well as crime and deviance—topics central to modernity (both in its concepts of capitalism and Enlightenment philosophy). One interesting aspect of the postmodern mystery is that it has received the most critical acclaim of all detective genres, reaching a level of “literary” status that allows it to transcend “genre.” Tzvetan Todorov argues that “to ‘develop’ [detective fiction] is to write ‘literature,’ not detective fiction” (43). Stefano Tani agrees and takes that judgment even further, stating that “serious novelists” use detective fiction as a “scrapyard from which to dig out new narrative techniques” because “detective

novel clichés are like the spare pieces of an old car that cannot run any more but, if sold as parts, can still be worth something” (34). While I disagree with these value judgments being made about detective fiction, I am interested in the discussion of detective genre as a ground for postmodern experimentation.

Critics generally agree that the first example of the postmodern mystery is Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “Death and the Compass”/“La muerte y la brújula” (1942). Borges also wrote the postmodern mystery “The Man on the Threshold”/“El hombre en el umbral” (1952) and “The Encounter”/“El Encuentro” (1969) (also translated as “The Meeting” and “The Challenge”). Other famous examples of the postmodern mystery include Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Gabriel García Márquez’s *Crónica de una muerte anunciada/Chronicle of Death Foretold* (1981), and Umberto Eco’s *Il nome della rosa/The Name of the Rose* (1980) and *Il pendolo di Foucault/Foucault’s Pendulum* (1988). Postmodern detective stories have also been referred to as metaphysical detective and anti-detective stories.<sup>67</sup>

While critics have established that these postmodern texts try to reject concepts of normalcy and logocentrism, I argue that, while the texts attempt to conceive of a world with no irreducible rules, they actually replace intrinsic meaning with a written narrative of broken bodies to represent a universal lost state. Moreover, the body becomes either absent or abled by the end of the stories, and the narrative of this disabled body’s expulsion becomes the new story, the new answer, the new order of the world. Dunn points out that in general postmodernists “have typically fallen short of understanding these phenomena

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<sup>67</sup> Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth. “Crime in postmodernist fiction.” *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*. Ed. Catherine Ross Nickerson. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Cambridge Collections Online. Cambridge University Press. 30 January 2013.

[cultural fragmentation and powers of discourse] as manifestations of lived cultural conditions or connecting them in any meaningful way... to the dynamics of social relations and interacting selves” (7). These narratives’ reliance on dominant cultural stereotypes of disability as characterized in the mentally psychotic men—i.e. disability as brokenness, disability as unsoundness, disability as in need of removal—reaffirms the lived cultural conditions experienced by persons with disabilities in our current cultural milieu. The postmodern texts become so focused on narratives and absence that there is no framework to engage in a conversation about still-prominent cultural “truths.” When social position and politics are not recognized, it is unsurprising that these texts end up erasing disability and the voices that are left are those of abled characters.

### **Loss and Being Lost:**

#### **Thematic Centers of the Disabled Postmodern Detective**

Much of the critical work on *The New York Trilogy* connects the novel to larger poststructuralist theories about the hopeless search for a single, stable meaning, and the de-centering of reason.<sup>68</sup> However, there has not been much discussion of the representation of loss in the works, which I argue is at the heart of this search. By focusing on the loss for a single, stable meaning, the works present a universal simulacrum of being lost. In “The Process of De-centering; Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy*,” Zohreh Ramin argues that the texts achieve a de-centering of meaning. However, instead of achieving de-centering, both Auster and Johnson’s texts make being lost the new center. The state of being lost is

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<sup>68</sup> For examples see Steven E. Alford’s “Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*,” Alison Russell’s *Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster’s Anti-Detective Fiction*,” and Zohreh Ramin’s “The Process of De-centering; Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy*.”

understood in part through a narrative based on already-existing discourses about disability. The texts investigate the loss of the self and acknowledge that an essential identity does not exist. Instead, the texts privilege identification and the process of discourse.

*The New York Trilogy* presents three very different versions of one quest, portrayed as a detective case in each version. In *City of Glass*, Quinn, a detective writer who uses the pseudonym William Wallace, is hired by a woman who mistakes him for private detective Paul Auster. In Quinn's new detective role, he must find her father-in-law who has recently been released from prison and might attempt to find and murder her husband, the younger Peter Stillman.<sup>69</sup> Prior to the start of the novel, the father, the elder Peter Stillman, has been a scholar of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theological interpretations of the New World. After the elder Stillman's wife dies, he becomes obsessed with the Tower of Babel and the possibility of an original language. The younger Stillman's wife explains to Quinn that the elder Stillman "stayed on in the same apartment, but he hardly ever went out. No one really knows what happened. I think, probably, that he began to believe in some of the far-fetched religious ideas he had written about. It made him crazy, absolutely insane" (Auster 26). In an experiment to find the language of Babel, Stillman locks his son in isolation for nine years. The younger Stillman spends his childhood "in darkness, isolated from the world, with no human contact except an occasional beating" (Auster 27). Mrs. Stillman refers to "the results of that experiment" as "monstrous" damage (Auster 27). Having been hired to protect the younger Stillman, Quinn follows the elder Stillman, making notes and observations, and talks to him about language and meaning in order to understand

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<sup>69</sup> One reason I have chosen to refer to them as such, younger and elder, is because they are presented in the text as fairly interchangeable, perhaps even different faces of the same man. They are notably never referred to as Stillman Jr. and Stillman Sr.



his actions and his intentions towards his son. After following him and talking to him, Quinn also falls into madness and ultimately he and the Stillmans disappear.

*Ghosts*, the second story in *The New York Trilogy*, is a similar adventure filled with observation and madness. In it, the most sparse and cryptic of the three stories, a detective named Blue, trained by the detective Brown, is hired by White to follow a man named Black. He follows him, interacts with him, and realizes that White is Black and Black is Blue, and one of them dies, but it is unclear who. In the third story, *The Locked Room*, an unnamed detective is hired again by a wife, this time the wife of his friend Fanshawe, to publish her missing husband's fiction. After publishing the work, he is hired to write Fanshawe's biography and must therefore investigate Fanshawe's life. The detective knows Fanshawe is alive even though he has promised to keep that a secret from everyone else. The detective travels around the world trying to find and understand Fanshawe; meanwhile, he also falls into his own madness before finally confronting Fanshawe behind a locked door.

*City of Glass* begins with Quinn's explanation of how lost he feels in the world before he takes the Stillman case. After the death of Quinn's wife and son, he reaches the point where "all he ever asked of things" was "to be nowhere" (4). According to Freud, "If one has lost a love-object...The most obvious reaction is to identify oneself with it, to replace it from within, as it were by identification" (SE XXIII 193).

The story begins with Quinn having lost love-objects. He has no friends, and although he does not wish for death, "it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive" (Auster 5). Furthermore, "he had, of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real" (Auster 9). Because of the loss of external referents in his life, Quinn thinks of himself as unreal and enters into a state of being lost. The "of course" emphasizes that this is the correct

conclusion in the postmodern view—to have interactions with external referents is not to be real. There is no intrinsic identity. Although Quinn suggests that he is content with this state, the entire text is about his undergoing new processes of identification in order to reach a different state. In *Identification Papers*, Diana Fuss writes, “Compensating for loss may be one of our most familiar psychological experiences, coloring every aspect of our relation to the world outside us, but it is also a profoundly defamilizing affair, installing surrogate others to fill the void where we imagine the love-objects to have been” (1). The depiction of Quinn represents reality as a narrative in that “Quinn stops *thinking* of himself as real” and is, thus, not real. Moreover, it emphasizes how personal reality is unstable, and the only absolute is loss.

The feelings of loss and the state of being lost are not confined to only one character. The text universalizes this state in the world at large. Quinn’s double, Stillman, explains that “the world is in fragments,” and it is his “job to put it back together again” (76). Although he does not believe there is currently intrinsic meaning in the world, Stillman believes the world once had meaning and wants to find it again. He explains further to Quinn, “Not only have we lost our sense of purpose, we have lost the language whereby we can speak of it. These are no doubt spiritual matters, but they have their analogue in the material world. My brilliant stroke had been to confine myself to physical things, to the immediate and tangible” (76). Stillman believes that it is through an original language that has a direct relationship with the everyday and the universal that he will find intrinsic meaning in the world again. The texts depict the crises of modern subjectivity and the demise of the subject. They ask the postmodern question: how are we to fill “lack” in a chaotic and unstable world.

Similar to *New York Trilogy*, Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* begins with a man lost in the world, searching for intrinsic meaning through detective work, and ends with his embrace of loss. Timothy L. Parrish describes Johnson's work at large as "pursuing an ideal of transcendence and even grace," and in the case of *Resuscitation*, he calls this pursuit a failed quest (17). Before the start of the novel, after attempting suicide, English quits his job as a medical equipment salesperson to take up private detective work because he is left cold by the sales position and wants more out of life and work. English moves from Kansas to Provincetown, MA to take dual jobs as a radio DJ and a private detective. In his attempt to start a new life, he experiences a number of tragedies before he has what the text frames as a mental break where he attempts to murder a bishop and ends up in prison. Most of his troubles are related to his work as a private detective. English finds little comfort in detective work. He explains that as a temporary clerical worker he was working on cases in which

Most of the victims of crimes were friends or neighbors or relatives of the perpetrators, and they ended up just the same, friendly or neighborly once again... But in the meantime, they wanted to be heard. He took down their statements, keeping them to the subject and boiling away the murky waters of personal history until what remained was stuff actually covered by criminal statutes. (Johnson 17)

English clearly remains frustrated that everything remains the same and is disappointed that "justice was never done" (Johnson 18). He complains that his work is nothing like the narrative of crime that emphasizes that law (and detectives) can fix easily categorized wrongdoing. English is ambivalent about the work of private detection. He seems drawn to it

because it offers some kind of meaning, but he is also disappointed that what he finds is difficult and unreliable.

As a private detective, English works for the retired policeman Ray Sands and collects information about people by following, wiretapping, and recording them. When he meets Sands, he believes they share “that sacred understanding they [detectives] all ha[ve], something to do with the irremedial rottenness of people everywhere” (Johnson 18). English’s reflection on his work culminates in a struggle with the ethics of his job. Sands asks English to follow a woman who is currently in a same-sex relationship in order to provide fodder for her husband from whom she is separated. English feels very guilty about recording her sexual relationship. Sands tells English to think of himself as a postman whose job requires him to collect and disseminate information without engaging with it, but English writes an anonymous note to the woman explaining that she is being followed. She immediately leaves town. English’s work does not provide him with the satisfaction he seeks. English experiences further troubles and guilt when Sands dies of a heart attack. Even if the mentorship Sands provides when alive is negligible, it still offers English identification as a detective and a man. English has even less direction after Sands’ death, and he grapples further with guilt and questions of right and wrong when he covers up possible illegal behavior that Sands had been involved in before his death.

As a response to the tragedies in his life, English becomes obsessed with the case of a missing person, Gerald Twinbrook, who was involved in a militia group named “Truth Infantry.” The novel presents English as deteriorating emotionally and mentally while he investigates the missing person case. He obsesses over Leanna, a woman who he has been dating, loses time, and scares people with rants and body tics. He finally finds the body of

the Twinbrook, has hallucinations of Twinbrook's ghost, and attempts to murder a bishop who has been previously mentioned to him by Sands and his wife. According to Parrish, English's crime is not the attempted assassination of the bishop but his failed self-transformation, which is illustrated by his comical disguise as a woman and the debased sacrament at the end of the novel where he consumes Wonder Bread (17). In the novel, English tries to find himself after his attempted suicide.

### **Processing Positivism:**

#### **The Detective's Attempt to Reenter the World**

Since Quinn and English feel a profound sense of lack in themselves and the world, in their new detective roles, they investigate how to be and interact with the world. Quinn attempts to find his *self* again through his new project as a private eye. The term private eye held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter "I," standing for "investigative," it was "I" in the upper case, the tiny life bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. (Auster 8)

Thus, for Quinn, the detective does the same work that a self does; he investigates and tries to understand the world through positivistic observation. After Quinn is hired both to protect the younger Stillman and to keep tabs on the elder Stillman, he has to figure out how to achieve both of these goals. *City of Glass* explores how the primary detective can gain knowledge and relate to others. Quinn decides that he will follow the elder Stillman around, presuming that if he does so, he will be there if he is about to harm the younger Stillman. Moreover, if he observes Stillman, he will then understand him and be able to deduce

Stillman's future actions. Before Quinn arrives at the train station where he is told the elder Stillman will be, he buys a red notebook because "something about it seemed to call out to him – as if its unique destiny in the world was to hold the words that came from his pen" (Auster 38). Not only does the red notebook represent Quinn's reliance on observation, but in these words, Quinn projects a desire for purpose and destiny. He buys the notebook because he believes that a detective's duties are to follow and observe, and he also believes that a person, like the red notebook, has a destiny that can be imagined and fulfilled.

Quinn believes that he can find answers in the case by seeing, recording, and concluding. He has this belief because, as a detective fiction aficionado, he has been told by canonical detective literature that a detective uses a positivist process—the same process that I have discussed in the preceding chapters. Through this representation, the text questions whether positivism is a way for a man to identify with other people and the world around him. And yet, as *The New York Trilogy* presents this process, it immediately begins to undermine it. When Quinn reaches the train station, he sees a man who looks exactly like Stillman and must therefore be Stillman. But then he immediately sees another man who looks exactly the same. His observations have failed him in discovering the truth, so he relies on chance and assumption. He follows the first man—perhaps randomly, perhaps because the first man was dressed more like a man right out of prison, as opposed to the second man who was impeccably dressed. The postmodern text portrays the positivistic process where the detective uses his senses in order to understand the world as desirable but untenable.

The text describes Quinn's process of observation in detail in order to showcase that using outer characteristics to understand that object's inner meaning is fallible and perhaps

pointless. Quinn dutifully observes “with his own eyes what happened, and all these things he dutifully recorded in his red notebook. But the meaning of these things continued to elude him” (Auster 58). After following Stillman around for a number of days, he “began to feel cut off from his original intentions, and he wondered now if he had not embarked on a meaningless project” (60).

Instead, the process of observing offers Quinn a new sense of self. The narration explains that

his excursions through the city had taught him to understand the connectedness of inner and outer. Using aimless motion as a technique of reversal, on his best days he could bring the outside in and thus usurp the sovereignty of inwardness. By flooding himself with externals, by drowning himself out of himself, he had managed to exert some small degree of control over his fits of despair. (61)

On his good days, Quinn can use objects outside of himself to replace the lack that he feels inside himself. Moreover, his identification with these external objects soothes his anxiety about his lack of identity. This process is to treat the exterior world as a kind of prosthesis.

The texts use a disabled body in order to interrogate the processes of positivism. Like Sherlock Holmes, Quinn observes the outer characteristics of impairment to try to understand inner states of being. When Quinn meets the younger Stillman for the first time, he “suddenly felt that Stillman had become invisible” and wonders if “Stillman was blind” (15). After making a connection between visibility and blindness, Quinn realizes that Stillman is not blind and describes Stillman in the following way:

The body acted almost exactly as the voice had: machine-like, fitful, alternating between slow and rapid gestures, rigid and yet expressive, as if the operation were out of control, not quite corresponding to the will that lay behind it. It seemed to Quinn that Stillman's body had not been used for a long time and that all of its functions had been relearned, so that motion had become a conscious process, each movement broken down into its component submovements, with the result that all flow and spontaneity had been lost. It was like watching a marionette trying to walk without strings.

(15)

I quote at length to portray the detailed way in which Quinn interprets Stillman's body. The language of this passage also emphasizes Stillman's unnaturalness; he is "machine-like" with "operations" like a "marionette." Quinn reads Stillman's body as unnatural or wrong. In each of the three *The New York Trilogy* texts, the detective faces a character that suffers from either straightforward "madness" as in *City of Glass* or unnamed peculiarities as in *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*. *City of Glass* characterizes the detective's double as medically disabled.

Like the younger Stillman, the elder Stillman has been categorized as insane and has been hospitalized. Not only does the younger Stillman's wife describe her father-in-law as "crazy, absolutely insane," but the text makes clear that after the case of child abuse, the law "judged" Stillman "insane and he was sent away" (26, 27). Quinn has to negotiate the elder Stillman's madness just as he has to negotiate the younger Stillman's madness. First, he must recognize Stillman, which involves recognizing madness on the body. He studies a picture of the elder Stillman when he was much younger and thinks that it is "Impossible to



know whether the face tomorrow will resemble it. It is certain, however, that this is not the face of a madman. Or is this not a legitimate statement? To my eyes, at least, it seems benign, if not downright pleasant. A hint of tenderness around the mouth even” (Auster 39). Quinn believes that madness should be legible on the face, just as it is in Sherlock Holmes. Yet, by facing the failure of his positivistic observation, Quinn learns that he cannot uncover ontological truth.

The texts show men searching for meaning outside of their work as well. Both search for absolutism through women and relationships as well as religion. English is attracted to Leanna. At first she rejects him because she is a lesbian, but they end up dating. After a brief relationship, she breaks up with him, and English becomes obsessed with her. Their entire relationship, from his courting her to their break up is portrayed as a crisis of loneliness and connection for both of them. They connect because she is “tired of the gay life... getting hurt” and because he feels crazy (86). He describes their relationship: “They slept together all the time and didn’t sleep. They were lovers, and they didn’t make love. It was one of the strangest things that had ever happened to him, and in a couple of senses it wasn’t happening” (Johnson 117). They only engage in sex after she asks him what the worst thing he ever did is. He tells her about attempting suicide, and she asks him if it felt sexy. Her response refuses the repudiation or censure that he seeks. She does not tell him that his attempted suicide was bad; she reframes the conversation. This “frightened him, and he tried to drop back into his interior thoughts... Right now he almost had the power to say that he’d really killed himself. That his life on earth had stopped and then started somewhere else—here, now” (132). The question provokes a sexual response from them. As they have sex, she asks “Who are we” and he responds, “I don’t know” (132). This sexual episode

shows how the characters use each other sexually in an attempt to find themselves; they seek connection and affirmation through each other. However, after sexual intercourse is over he “understood that nothing mattered, that love was just making love, calling to itself out of the void, and they might be kissing... but there was nobody home—nobody but love, so why is it you? Couldn’t it be anybody?” (133). Because she engages in a similar search for meaning, she interrupts the subject/object dynamic he is seeking. He thinks that discovering love and a soul mate will give him meaning in life. But she refuses to be that object; they are both subjects seeking answers outside themselves. He is left distraught again because there is no intrinsic meaning behind this relationship.

In both *The New York Trilogy* and *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, religion serves as a channel for absoluteness and absolution. In English’s struggle with religion, he alternates among feeling guilty for his sinful behavior, feeling detached, and feeling that he has been called to be a “Knight of faith [sic]” (Johnson 85). Religion is a common theme in Johnson’s writing; *Jesus’ Son*, his most discussed work, is about religious transcendence and drug addiction. Johnson frequently investigates how people find meaning or fail to find meaning through religion. In *Resuscitation*, one of the ways in which English tries to find meaning again is by attending Catholic mass, making confession, and taking communion. However, the narrative of religion works against him when the priest tells him that he has already lost his life when he attempted to commit suicide; his life must literally be over since he did not follow the absolute rules.

The belief in absolute religious order is depicted as a disability in *Resuscitation*. At the end of the novel, English sees himself “standing up in a movie theater with a grenade, crying, God told me to do this. Simone Weil wasting down into death on orders from her

conscience in God, extinguishing, for herself, the whole world. Deranged men climbing onto tall structures to snipe down people they've never met, at God's behest" (Johnson 194). Along with Simone Weil, he also compares himself to Joan of Arc and Elijah. All three comparisons raise questions about the sanity of religious revelations and whether certain acts are "great" or "crazy" or both. He (and the text) call, not just Simone Weil and Joan of Arc mad, but God himself. In one of his internal monologues about religion, English thinks that for certain religious people "as for Lewis, God had probably been an Englishman, but a less and less familiar one, passing beyond dotty eccentricity into madness and vomiting up whales and storms" (175). According to the text, trying to make sense of religion, to pull order from the unordered either makes one insane, or, the resulting order, insane.

Historically, insanity and religious piety have been tied together. For example, the Fools of Christ is an Eastern Orthodox tradition; the holy fool "is a person who pretends that he is mad in order to save his own soul and the souls of others" (Heller 154). Their beliefs are inspired by Biblical passages where St. Paul wrote that God "had chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (King James Version, 1 Cor. 27). Heller presents the context of divine idiocy: "If the wisdom of the world is but folly to God, and if God's own foolishness is the one true, divine wisdom, then the worldly must renounce all worldly wisdom in order to become truly wise" (156). Boris Pilnyak writes that "Paupers on the face of Holy Russia, wandering psalm singers, Christ's cripples, fools in Christ of Holy Russia... These madmen or frauds—beggars, bogus saints, prophets—were held to be the Church's brightest jewel, Christ's own, intercessors for the world" (as qtd by Brown 13). The belief that the "fool" is a better channel for God is grounded in the perception that "cripples" and "madmen" are simple, more natural, unburdened by secular falsities.

The younger Stillman is represented in a very similar way in the text. The elder Stillman searches for natural language by locking his son in isolation. As an adult, the younger Stillman continues his father's search. The younger Stillman acts as the original figure of disability through which all of the *City of Glass* texts address issues of language, observation, and a man's place in the world. After Quinn meets Stillman for the first time, Stillman begins a somewhat incoherent speech that lasts for five pages. Although there are unintelligible passages such as "wimble click crumblechaw beloo," the speech also broaches a number of themes of the novel including questions such as "who is this person," and "what are these words coming from his mouth" (Auster 17, 15). He frequently repeats "My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name" (16, 17, 18, 20, 22). These passages present the tension between internal and external expressions of meaning in language and identification that is crucial to *The New York Trilogy* as I'll discuss later, and Stillman also defines his language (God's language), and himself, through the absolute authority of God. He declares that he is a poet who makes all the words up and "has the other words in his head. It is God's language, and no one else can speak them. They cannot be translated. That is why Peter lives so close to God. That is why he is a famous poet" (Auster 20). The text makes the same association between religion and insanity as the Biblical passages from above; the absolute religious order is in conflict with "worldly wisdom." Thus, to be religious is to be insane. *The New York Trilogy* goes further than the Biblical presentation of secular sanity versus religious insanity and uses the representation of insanity in order to portray such religious devotion as a disability.

Throughout the texts, constructions of disability are used to negate the existence of ideals by emphasizing the presence and importance of lack. The younger Stillman's body is

a broken copy of the ideal body. The younger Stillman's prostration before Quinn and God is a plea for forgiveness for his inability to function "properly." The younger Stillman excuses his weird behavior by defining it as God's language. By being framed in this way, his mental disorder becomes meaningful. The younger Stillman presents his nonsensical words and his insanity as godly; he utters God's truth.

### **Writing/Righting the World:**

#### **Embodiment and Identification**

In English's and Auster's texts, the detectives' explorations depict what Fuss refers to as identification, which she defines as "the complicated dynamic of recognition and misrecognition that brings a sense of identity into being" (2). She continues, "at the very same time that identification sets into motion it also immediately calls that identity into question... Identification is a process that keeps identity at a distance, that prevents identity from ever approximating the status of an ontological given, even as it makes possible the formation of an illusion of identity as immediate, secure, and totalizable" (Fuss 2). The detectives search for their identities in multiple places—work, love, religion—and in every instance, the texts emphasize the futility of such searches since they do not reach an ontological given. Instead, they demonstrate embodied existence in which the detectives create their own meaning through their bodies.

In Quinn's first interaction with the Stillmans, Mrs. Stillman and Quinn have a discussion about Stillman's issues in which they explicitly discuss observation and understanding. She tells Quinn, "I could have spared you all that... but I thought it would be best for you to see it with your own eyes" (24). Although Quinn responds that he understands, she says, "No, I don't think you do... I don't think anyone can understand"

(24). Both apparently agree that observing Stillman with eyes will lead towards a better understanding. Mrs. Stillman makes it clear, however, that understanding the younger Stillman can only go so far—no one can ever really understand or identify with him. Quinn clarifies in agreement, “I make no claims about understanding Peter or what you might have suffered” (24). The text emphasizes that viewing disability from the outside is much different than experiencing disability from within the body. Quinn uses his senses to experience the world, but as embodiment and experiences differ, he can never use his senses to experience the younger Stillman’s world. Social reality is not objective or independent of historical and social conditions. Mrs. Stillman does not actually tell Quinn he could understand the younger Stillman by seeing him; she specifically says it would be best for *Quinn*. And ultimately, it is Quinn’s life that is changed through this new identification.

When Quinn follows the elder Stillman, he observes him in the hopes that he can solve the case simply through observation, but what he learns is about himself rather than the objects of his observation. Although the detectives fail to understand the world through positivism, they create their own narratives through their embodied experiences. The text slowly examines what role embodiment plays in making meaning. Quinn must figure out how to physically observe. How can he walk and stare at the same time? How can he write while he walks? How can he write without taking his eyes off of the body at which he is staring? After making a great number of observations, Quinn has made no progress making conclusions about Stillman’s actions. Because Quinn cannot find any clear, overt meaning in Stillman’s movements, he analyzes the work of a detective in great depth. Quinn thinks,

If the object was to understand Stillman, to get to know him well enough to be able to anticipate what he would do next, Quinn had failed. He had started

with a limited set of facts: Stillman's background and profession, the imprisonment of his son, his arrest and hospitalization... But the facts of the past seemed to have no bearing on the facts of the present. Quinn was deeply disillusioned. He had always imagined that the key to good detective work was a close observation of details. The more accurate the scrutiny, the more successful the results. The implication was that human behavior could be understood, that beneath the infinite façade of gestures, tics, and silences, there was finally a coherence, an order, a source of motivation. (67)

Quinn believes what he'd learned from the world, books, and writing detective fiction: positivism. In other words, he believes that the outer should reveal the inner, but he discovers that it does not. To this point, "he had lived Stillman's life, walked at his pace, seen what he had seen, and the only thing he felt now was the man's impenetrability. Instead of narrowing the distance that lay between him and Stillman, he had seen the old man slip away from him, even as he remained before his eyes" (67). Observation has only led him to a greater distance between himself and the object he watches. Through his own embodied process, Quinn undergoes Fuss's process of identification in relationship to the disabled bodies; he recognizes and misrecognizes, keeps identity at a distance and calls it into question.

As he follows Stillman, Quinn also makes notes about other people he sees on the street. Specifically, he looks at marginalized bodies and creates narratives about them. People with disabilities are the most visible bodies to Quinn. He explains that "he felt an urge to record certain facts, and he wanted to put them down on paper before he forgot them" (109). Appropriately using a "deaf mute's pen" that he had been previously given, in

his first paragraph about these people, he feels compelled to record “the tramps, the down-and-outs, the shopping-bag ladies, the drifters and drunks. They range from the merely destitute to the wretchedly broken. Wherever you turn, they are there, in good neighbourhoods and bad” (108). Like Quinn’s previous comment about Stillman’s invisibility and blindness, these “broken” people provoke a strange tension between invisibility and visibility. Robinson explains that “relations of power are embodied in persons whose differential relationships to normativity are registered, in large part, by the evidence of visible, bodily difference” (3). He sees them, he notes that they are everywhere, but he even recognizes that if he does not engage with them by writing about his own observations then he will forget them immediately. Quinn must engage with the bodies or else he will forget them. For Quinn, disabled bodies can be recognizably judged against normative concepts of the body. Although he “reads” them, it is his own embodied experiences in relation to these disabled bodies that create his reality.

As one might expect of postmodern mysteries, the detective work at the center of the *New York Trilogy* and *Resuscitation* is not about solving any actual crime. In all of the texts that I examine in this dissertation, the use of a disabled detective allows the author to emphasize that the detective is the mystery of the text. The detective work at the center of the three stories is about how to create a narrative of existence. English explains, “*I’m a private detective and I’m living out a private mystery... the mystery is the Mystery*” [emphasis in original] (230). The detective detects because he wants meaning in life, but the text are aware that finding intrinsic meaning is fruitless. Instead, it is the process of the mystery, the process of creating a narrative, that offers meaning.



For example, English gathers information not in response to any crime or mystery but in order to give to his client the information on his wife for their divorce proceedings. The intent is for the client to create a narrative using the gathered information; English creates his own narrative by hampering the surveillance. In *City of Glass*, while the Elder Stillman did lock his son away, that is not the crime currently being examined. Similarly, in *City of Glass*, Quinn is asked to investigate a crime that has not happened and might never happen. In order to address whether the elder Stillman will attack the younger Stillman, Quinn investigates who Stillman is not what Stillman has done. Similarly, Blue is hired in *Ghosts* but as he learns, he is only hired to observe and give meaning to Black's life, not to solve any mystery or in response to a crime.

Canonical detective literature actualizes moral order; crime is the representation of bad, and solving crime is the representation of good. In previous detective texts, the detective lives by a code, however personal it may be. Sherlock Holmes usually follows codified law, but even he chooses to occasionally let criminals go if their criminal actions are justifiable. Moral codes also exist for the hard-boiled detective. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade turns Brigid O'Shaughnessy in because when a "when a man's partner is killed, he's supposed to do something" (Hammett 213). In previous detective texts, finding the "truth" is almost always presented as the ethical choice, yet for English as an anti-detective finding the truth is not merely impossible but unethical. English looks for morality and finds specific ethical stances but is clearly disturbed by the lack of a universal code. He is unsatisfied because there are no easy, absolute answers. His detective work highlights the uncertainty of social, legal, and personal morality and that he must be actively engaged in creating it.

In earlier detective fictions, the detectives discovered a pre-existed order (and then narrated it), and in the postmodern fictions, the detectives fabricate a narrative. Postmodern texts emphasize that although there are many clues, there is no intrinsic order to resolve but only narratives to create. The information used to create these narratives is endless. In this way, the detective inevitably fails to reveal *the truth*. In *City of Glass*, the detective fails in the mission he is given; Quinn never discovers if the elder Stillman had plans to attack the younger Stillman. Quinn loses the younger Stillman altogether. In *Resuscitation*, English finds the dead body of the missing man he is tracking but hallucinates conversations with the dead man in order to “figure out” how and why he died.

The postmodern mystery equates the functions of writers and detectives. For *City of Glass* and *The Locked Room*, the detective is a writer, and in *Ghosts*, the detective becomes a writer. Writing and detection are synonymous because in both activities, the world is “dominated by signifiers and assumed solutions” (Russell 72). As Quinn in *City of Glass* explains, “the detective is one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable” (15). Both figures make meaning out of life—create a narrative. Actual writers of detective fiction, as opposed to the fictional detective writer in *City of Glass*, have proposed this same idea; Ross Macdonald in “The Writer as Detective Hero” asserts that he based his detective of Archer on himself and that he believes “most detective-story writers would give the same answer. A close paternal or fraternal relationship between writer and detective is a marked peculiarity of the form” (Macdonald 295). Macdonald emphasizes that Archer has “internal realism” and is based on the “internal qualities” of two private detectives he knows (305).

These detectives' "interest in other people transcends their interest in themselves, and a toughness of mind which enables them to face human weaknesses, including their own, with open eyes. Both of them dearly love to tell a story" (Macdonald 305). Detective fiction has always used the detective to create the ordered world. The detective is a writer because to right the world, as detectives do, is to write the world. The decline of a unitary identity has been replaced by a privileging of discursive relations.

By equating the writer and the detective, the postmodern detective text both acknowledges this generic convention and also scrutinizes the relationship between order and language. In Auster's work, both writer and detective search for meaning and narratives about life. They do so through language. Alison Russell explains that the overall quest found in all three Auster stories is a "quest for correspondence between signifier and signified" that is "inextricably related to each protagonist's quest for origin and identity, for the self only exists insofar as language grants existence to it" (72). Language is a central preoccupation in the text; language must be explored in the *quest* for the real (material existence that cannot be expressed since it is beyond language). In *Ghosts*, Blue, the detective whose double is the writer Black, realizes that writing is an important and confusing aspect of his work. In writing a report about observing Black, he realizes for the first time that "words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say" (Auster 149). He previously thought of words as merely a tool to report life but now instead sees the multiple narratives and realities he can construct or obscure in his reports. In Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, the protagonist, along with being a detective, is also a radio DJ who creates meaning for an audience as the writers do in *The New York Trilogy*.

*Resuscitation* and *The New York Trilogy* self-consciously connect how narrative works in detective work, literary texts, and the world. As Norma Rowen explains, “Auster’s reworking of the detective story as a quest for the definitive language finally tells us that it [the detective story] is not the correct and final text of reality but a text about the text that is the most appropriate one for the postmodern world” (233). Rowen argues that it is “stories about stories, books not of answers but of questions” that offer meaning in contemporary society (233). In this new contemporary philosophy, reality is only a narrative fantasy where a person tries to approach the inexpressible real, and the closest one can get to answers about reality is by looking at the constructions about reality.

Texts and life are intertwined and even indistinguishable in Auster’s texts. In *City of Glass*, Quinn recognizes that in the detective novel, the author knows “almost nothing about crime. ... He [as a detective author] had never been inside a police station, and never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films, and newspapers” (Auster 7). However, Quinn did not “consider this to be a handicap” as texts are integral to the world and knowledge (7). Since a mystery’s resolution is not pre-existing, not something that is whole and just waiting to be revealed, then the corpus of both writing and body actually creates meaning and shapes the resolution. Moreover, the narrator connects the figure of the writer to the process of textual manipulation in order to emphasize that meaning is manipulable through the body.

In each of the works in *Trilogy*, the detectives, Quinn, Blue, and the unnamed protagonist of *The Locked Room*, work on a case in which they follow a person, Stillman, Black, or Fanshawe. During each detective’s work, he admits that his search is a search for “real” or “referential” meaning or purpose. In *City of Glass*, Quinn recognizes that “he

continued to disbelieve the arbitrariness of Stillman's actions. He wanted there to be a sense to them, no matter how obscure" (69). And in *Ghosts*, Black declares that he follows a man because "He needs my eye looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive" and explains that this is the reason Blue needs to follow him as well (184). In both of these examples, the detectives declare that they observe in order to find some greater significance and to create the reliability that they ostensibly observe. The postmodern text reflects on the functions of the detective; although he seemingly works to *return* the world to order, he actually creates localized meaning for his life and substitutes for the lack of an innate system.

When Quinn learns that his positivistic observations are failing, he doubles down and starts creating meaning in his observations. He traces Stillman's movements on a map and realizes that his daily movements look loosely (although how loosely is somewhat unclear) like the shape of letters that spell out "Tower of Babel." Quinn like Stillman begins to see meaning between seemingly unrelated things without a clear explanation of how they are connected. For example, when Mrs. Stillman stops answering her phone, he takes this as a sign that he must increase his protection of the younger Stillman.

Questions of embodiment and observation become further emphasized when Quinn fanatically observes the younger Stillman's residence in order to protect him and make sure no harm comes to him. He stays in an alley way for "perhaps months" taking as little time eating, sleeping, and using the restroom as he can because all of these things take him away from seeing and understanding. The mind and the body are thus in conflict with each other; embodied needs that a human faces might take a person away from "higher," "intellectual" duties. Quinn writes that "he did not want to starve himself to death – and he reminded himself of this every day – he simply wanted to leave himself free to think of the things that

truly concerned him” (115). By trying to separate the mind from the body, Quinn tries to be an abstract individual who is not burdened by social contexts and problems of embodiment. Although Auster’s work critiques this concept as ultimately untenable, the texts romanticize ideal abstraction and do not grapple with social burdens such as poverty and lack of social access. The text seems precariously close to suggesting that embodiment in and of itself is a form of disability.

Unlike Quinn, who becomes progressively more identified with disability, in *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, English is presented as mentally abnormal from the very beginning. He explains to Leanna that he has “inside troubles... unsound thinking” (37). He later refers to this as “crazy,” “crazy feelings” and explains that he is “being called” to something (86). He suspects that he could be “the Second Coming” to which Leanna “with great tenderness” responds, “Don’t you see that’s crazy? It’s a delusion” (87). And English says, “I told you it was. I said it was crazy. But I’m still running away, no matter what. Maybe the idea is just a fantasy, but the fear is for real” (87). The text uses stigmatizing terms including crazy, delusional, unsound, a mess, psychotic, lunatic, childish to refer to English. Ironically, the only time the text mentions the phrase “mentally ill” is in reference to Leanna’s lesbianism, evoking retrograde attitudes of homosexuality as a mental disorder.<sup>70</sup> Leanna’s own position in society is thus that of a disabled person.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Prior to and throughout much of the 20th century, homosexuality was defined in psychology, and thus elsewhere, as pathological.

<sup>71</sup> The entire novel makes a very strange correlation between insanity and GLBT lifestyles. The town English moves to is filled with trans and gay people. This disturbs him and other straight characters in the novel. When he attempts to murder the Bishop, he first dresses in Leanna’s clothes and walks as a man in woman’s clothing through town. Significantly more should be done with this correlation between mental illness and alternative sexual lifestyles. In particular, does the novel suggest that English’s identity is not working because of his sexual orientation or despite of it? Furthermore, is the novel suggesting that it is

In Quinn's positivistic and embodied journey in which he makes notes about disabled people, he only produces a list of observations about the people. They are extraordinarily visible, and yet in the way he writes about them, who they are disappears, and only their "broken" status is left. They are described as "blind pencil sellers, winos who wash the windshield of your car" (Auster 109). The talented among them are allowed to be subjects, such as the "old black man... who tap-danced while juggling cigarettes – still dignified" but people such as him are "the aristocracy, the elite of the fallen" and the others are reduced to only their disabilities, such as the "drunks – but that term does not do justice to the devastation they embody. Hulks of despair, clothed in rags, their faces bruised and bleeding, they shuffle through the streets as though in chains" (Auster 109). Not only are they reduced to the category of drunks, but they lose all individuality, implying the belief that one "drunk" is just like any other. Quinn writes that many of these people are "locked inside madness – unable to exit to the world that stands at the threshold of their bodies" (110). In this perspective, they are locked into their broken bodies, cannot participate in society, and are thus disabled. Further, Quinn tries to connect their "odd" actions to a greater meaning. He thinks that perhaps the man drumming on everything "thinks he is doing important work. Perhaps, if he did not do what he did, the city would fall apart. Perhaps the moon would spin out of its orbit and come crashing into the earth" (Auster 110). Already connecting the behavior of these "broken" people to a search for meaning, Quinn concludes in this passage: "It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place where I am not. Or, more bluntly: Wherever I am not is the place where I am myself. Or else, taking the bull by

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utopian to expect sexual orientation to supply other aspects of identity? Is it realistic to expect sex to generate a sense of self?

the horns: Anywhere out of the world” (111). Instead of being autonomous individuals or characters whose identities are negotiated depending on relationships, context, or situation, the characters of the novel exist in a universal lost state where the only thing a person can understand is that they have no place.

As the *New York Trilogy* progresses, the detective/authors’ written texts replace the detectives themselves. In *Resuscitation*, after attempting to kill the bishop, English is placed in a prison where the rules engulf him. In both texts, discourse dominates. There is a struggle between the body and the word, and Auster and Johnson’s texts rely on narratives of disability to negotiate how embodiment functions in a postmodern world dominated by discourse. Throughout the searches for order, the texts use metaphors of disability in order to present postmodern dismemberment. Using a narrative of disability in order to depict universal lack has a number of implications not only for disability itself but for the relationship between identification, identity politics, and postmodernism. Dunn suggests, in his reformulation of postmodernity, that “what we call ‘identity’ is perhaps better thought of as the more persistently reoccurring elements of multiple and situationally contingent *processes of identification*. The concept of identification, then, shows how identity is constituted in and through yet problematized by difference” (Dunn 4). Using this definition, the texts present disability as a symbol for the difference that constitutes body identity in the postmodern world—specifically processes of identification with disabled bodies allow an abled body identity (or fantasy) to form in the postmodern world.

In *The New York Trilogy*, it is after coming in contact with the case of the disabled double that they lose the concept of the inviolable body. Quinn turns “into a bum. His clothes were discoloured, disheveled, debauched by filth. His face was covered a thick black



beard with tiny flecks of grey in it... It had been no more than a matter of months, and in that time he had become someone else” before giving himself over to language and the cosmos, fully lost in the world like Stillman (121). Blue becomes Black. The unnamed narrator of *The Locked Room* has a breakdown after his search for Fanshawe. The double in *Resuscitation*, the missing man who turns out to be dead, is also categorized as crazy by both English and the narrator. English refers to Twinbrook as “nuts” and “crazy.” He mixes his thoughts and actions up with Twinbrook’s thoughts and actions at one point wondering which one of them wrote a note on a piece of paper (150). In facing and identifying with lack, the detectives have lost any sense of self.

As in *The New York Trilogy*, in *Resuscitation*, people disappear, and communication becomes incoherent. At the end of the novel, instead of attempting suicide again as a response to his feelings of alienation, this time English attempts murder. Even though he embraces prison in the final sequence, the text suggests that what he has found in prison is meaningless and irrational. Prison, like religion, offers him the rules that he desperately seeks, but he remains “hungry” because the rules are without sustenance. The last words of the novel are “He liked being hungry and in prison” (Johnson 257). The text emphasizes that English is happy left with his empty sustenance because it is still an answer to his hunt for meaning. Each text, while devolving into emptiness and fragmentation, emphasizes the position of being lost and the importance of narratives. The concept of the rational ego has been replaced by the concept of an irrational narrator whose processes of identification serve as a phantom for an essential identity.

In their representations of disability, the texts emphasize loss and sadness. Both Auster and Johnson’s texts present anxiety about the failure of logical positivism and despair

over the lack of universal meaning. The narrator in *The Locked Room* does not prevent Fanshawe from committing suicide and rips up Fanshawe's final writings, which "seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out... Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible" (313). In *Resuscitation*, English ends up in prison. In each, being is replaced with the lack of being. The concept of identification replaces identity. In response to an anxiety of lack, the texts uphold discourse and narratives as the new order.

After meeting with Stillman three times, Quinn begins to mirror Stillman. He begins to understand "the true nature of solitude... He had nothing to fall back on anymore but himself... What he did not understand, however, was this: in that he was falling, how could he be expected to catch himself as well? Was it possible to be at the top and the bottom at the same time" (118). Quinn wonders how to be a stable self by himself. Ultimately, by the end of the novel, "He had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned in him" (126). The great truth he references is "There was nothing left. ... everything was gone" (126). He stops struggling against the state of being lost that he describes in the first few pages of the novel. In the beginning, Quinn thinks of himself as not real; by the end, he literally disappears. Both Stillman and Quinn desire to find the intrinsic meaning of something; that is, they want to access meaning from the thing itself, (for Stillman, it is original language, for Quinn it is everything he comes across, the red notebook, the elder Stillman himself, detection). They are left not with original language or objects or people but with nothingness. Russell analyzes *The New York Trilogy* as a travel narrative using the Derridean concept of logocentrism; she concludes that the "plurality of orientations results in endless shifting frames of references that continually deny any one

locus, or ‘place,’ of meaning for the infinite traveler” (84). However, Auster uses phrases such as “true nature” and “great truth” in order to present the nothing that he has found. Russell argues that the text presents a multiplicity of truths, but I argue that he is interested in the singular truth of nothingness.

This pattern of replacing the desire for the intrinsic meaning of something with a universal image of being lost occurs in *Ghosts* as well as *The Locked Room*. *The Locked Room* ends with the unnamed narrator tearing up Fanshawe’s manifesto. He explains, “I tore the pages from the notebook, crumpled them in my hand, and dropped them into a trash bin on the platform. I came to the last page just as the train was pulling out” (314). Thus that text ends simultaneously with the end of *The New York Trilogy*, and the action of throwing away is coordinated with an image of departure. *Ghosts* ends with the words “we know nothing” (198), which is an interesting play on words and different from “we do not know anything.” We *know* nothing. Each text leaves the reader with loss embodied by the physical absence of certain characters, Quinn, Stillman, Fanshawe, either Blue or Black, and the loss felt by the remaining characters represented by broken language—the incoherent red notebook in *City of Glass*, the unfinished manuscript in *Ghost*, the ripped pages in *The Locked Room*, and, of course, the entire text of *The New York Trilogy*.

Although *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room* make no mention of medical or legal issues, no mention of hospitalization or diagnosed insanity or madness, and use less stigmatizing language than Johnson’s *Resuscitation*, both texts are still predicated on *City of Glass*. They are meant to be read as sequels and are currently only in publication as *The New York Trilogy*, thus included as sections in the overall work, coming after *City of Glass*. Since this is one overall text, Black and Fanshawe act as repetitive figures of Stillman and therefore

have his “mad” framework. Yet, they become more universal figures, not bound by any specific identity based on an impairment. Even if there is some conscious conversation about disability at the beginning of *City of Glass* (e.g. Mrs. Stillman’s desire to get the younger Stillman out of the hospital), disability by the end of the overall text of *The New York Trilogy* is reduced only to the metaphor of loss and being lost without any consideration or exploration of the context of disability.

In *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*, Sally Robinson explores how white men in the later twentieth century displayed a crisis of white masculinity and claimed to inhabit wounded bodies in order to appropriate positions of victimhood. By using the disabled body as the visible representation that all bodies are not ideal, all bodies become disabled and the embodied existence of people with disabilities is ignored. The representations of sensory and cognitive impairments in these texts separate the social and historical situation of impairment from disability. After making the disabled body the visible demonstration that the ideal body does not exist, the removal of the body altogether resolves the anxiety. The detective story has all along, back to the days of Conan Doyle, substituted texts for bodies. The trick detective fiction plays on the reader is the substitution of words for bodies. Postmodern texts realize that there really is no body; all people have left are texts that they create and control. *New York Trilogy* and *Resuscitation*’s use of the narrative of disability distracts from cultural positions of a person with a disability. By universalizing disability, the texts “stake a claim to an entire set of cultural conventions originally designed to identify those bodies and subjectivities made to suffer so that white men could retain privileged access to a disembodied norm” (Robinson 20). The disabled person becomes lost within the universality of this metaphor of disability. For example, through the depiction of

English's mental disorder, the novel presents man's struggle with his place in a senseless universe. In an early description of his downward spiral, English "seem[s] to be drifting in and out of the universe, meeting with fuzzy dreams and then arriving back at the table to realize he'd already ordered" (195). When he confronts Leanna, "He fe[els] his isolation, his inability to connect—it [i]s stronger, essential, cosmic. Right. It [i]s now" (Johnson 199). Throughout the novel, English's mental state deteriorates and the text's pronouncement is about the universe and the cosmos.

### **Wannabes and Fetishists:**

#### **Desiring the Disabled Body in *Quid Pro Quo***

Brooks' *Quid Pro Quo* stars Nick Stahl as Isaac Knott, a paraplegic and public radio host, who was in a car accident when he was eight years old; a young girl drove her parents' truck while sitting on a phone book and crashed into them. His parents died, and he was left paralyzed. At his radio job, he receives a tip about a man who goes to a hospital and demands to have one of his legs amputated. Pursuing an investigation, Knott discovers a subculture of abled people who want and sometimes act to become paraplegics. Knott meets his tipster Fiona, played by Vera Farmiga, who is a member of the subculture, and he begins a relationship with her. The overt mystery of the film investigates why able-bodied people want to be paralyzed. The final revelation is that Fiona wants to be paralyzed because she is the one who hit Knott's family, and in meeting Fiona, Knott is cured because he actually has hysterical paralysis. *Quid Pro Quo* uses a disabling framework similar to that in Auster's and Johnson's works. Auster's and Johnson's texts use an explicitly disabled body, both as a way to negotiate lack and to gain control by suggesting that embodiment itself is a disability. Knott's experience suggests that a disabled identity has something that the rest of us want.

According to the film, recognition of a disability allows a person to communicate his or her brokenness, offers a “stable” position of power, and provides points of identification between people. For Fiona and Knott, a disabled identity projects their internal brokenness onto the body, which allows them the fantasy of a “fixed” identity. They exert control over their bodies, their body images match their bodies, and they have a visibly marked position in society. This disability is a visible and voluntary disability viewed from the outside.

The history of impairments in detective fiction has tried to categorize all impairments, both mental and physical, in a positivistic frame where they can be understood through an observer’s senses and labeled, and yet physical impairments are still portrayed as more visible. In detective fiction, the narratives have worked to make mental disabilities more clearly visible. Postmodern texts make mental disabilities visible through the narration. Because visibility is a key aspect of the desire for disability in the film, the character’s desire in the film is for an overtly visible physical disability.

*Quid Pro Quo* is the least interested in detection of all the texts I analyze in this dissertation. Knott is investigating a story about disability “wannabes,” but as in many postmodern detective texts, there is technically no crime, unless it is the emotional crime of wanting to be disabled when you do not have to be. The structure of the film resembles that of the narrative of the amateur detective trying to solve a mystery, and the film employs several film noir characteristics such as the character of the femme fatale, the conflicted and psychologically flawed hero, portrayals of a seedy underground, moral ambiguity, and the alienation of urbanity. Brooks advertises the film as a detective film. In an interview for *The Reeler*, he says “the best detective stories are the ones where the detective ultimately realizes he’s been investigating himself. I would never write an actual detective story—at least I

don't think I would—but that's what this secretly is.” There is a mystery in the story: Knott's car accident. But it is not until the end of the movie that Knott realizes his accident is what he is investigating; the audience is offered clues throughout the film contained in numerous flashbacks of the car accident. At this point, Knott also realizes that the story he is writing is not only about Fiona but also about himself. He is the one who has unconsciously desired disability and thus made himself disabled.

Brooks calls his use of disability a “conceit” in an interview with *The Reeler*. He says he was inspired by “the idea of talking about somebody who was impaired in some way who would get something that allowed him to overcome his impairment.” Thus, the film uses disability to present the theme of quid pro quo. Knott and Fiona create and recreate each other's identities through their interactions. She has caused his life to change when she hits him, and her life has changed by hitting him. She explains, “So this for me is all about understanding you. And, you know, then I'll tell you whatever you want. So, quid pro quo. I want your life, pal, as a paraplegic, in detail.” In return, she promises to tell him all about her desire to be a paraplegic. Finally, when she comes back into his life, this gives him his life back, and, in return, Fiona asks that he help her become disabled so she can find herself. They both teach each other about themselves. Although Knott does not express feelings of loss or being lost at the beginning of the film, he discovers through identifying with Fiona and learning about his hysterical paralysis that he has been lost. He thought he knew who he is but finds out he does not.

Following up on Fiona's tip about disability “wannabes,” Knott interviews a nurse who explains that a man came in to the hospital and asked for a “‘transtibial amputation just below [his] left knee' like he was ordering off a menu or something, like he knew exactly

what part was him and what part wasn't, and the part that wasn't he wanted gone." The nurse swears that they turned the man away, and so Knott must depend on Fiona for more information about Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID). Although not a DSM-IV category, BIID is a psychological condition wherein the person feels like he or she should be an amputee.<sup>72</sup> Fiona does not want an amputation, she instead feels like she should be paralyzed. As she explains, "Even the amputee wannabes get a name... but for paralysis wannabes there is no known pathology." Very recently, a desire for paralysis has been included as a BIID variant. A cognitive behavioral paper in 2012 defines a "variant of BIID, in which people wish for paralysis below the waist" (Giummarra, Bradshaw, Hilti, et al. 35). Although some people with BIID do not consider their condition to be a mental illness, they feel as if their bodies do not match their body images and most want to be treated by therapy or "healed" by a surgery that would remove the limb/s they feel do not belong (Adams). Although outside of the film BIID might have neurological or physiological causes, the film suggests that the characters want to be disabled in order to gain positions of victimization and control. These texts use an anesthetized and eroticized narrative of disability in order for the characters to regain a sense of stability and location in the postmodern world.

The film depicts Fiona wanting to be disabled in order to be her "true self." She emphasizes that there is a difference between what she is and "wannabes" and "fetishists." She clearly ranks the categories; wannabes and fetishists are "crazy" and "losers," but she is already paralyzed. She is "trapped in a walking person's body" (*Quid*). After spending a day in *cripface* (pretending to be disabled through visual representations of disability), she verbalizes to Knott how happy she is to be her "true self." Although Fiona declares that she

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<sup>72</sup> There is a bid to make BIID a category in DSM-V (Davis 322).



*IS* paralyzed, she herself doubts her conviction after an upsetting interaction with her mother where she fails to come out to her. She cries to Knott, “I don’t want to be a wannabe anymore.” While she means that she wants her body to match her body image, the film more broadly demonstrates that authenticity is important to identity. When Knott asks a minor character “why would someone want to be paralyzed who isn’t?” the character replies, “I can’t answer that. You think I choose to be this way? Do you have any idea how many people in my life I’ve lost because I revealed myself to them? I’ll tell you why as soon as you tell me where those people went.” This remark emphasizes the “naturalness” of this disorder—that it is not a choice. Such conversations clearly echo similar conversations about sexuality and gender identity in arguments about GLBT rights. These arguments rest on the power of authenticity: if desiring disability is considered by society at large to be so weird, wrong, and/or painful that a sane person would never choose it, the desire must be genuine. Jenny L. Davis asserts that “a shared, essentialist, BIID narrative is instrumental for members of the transabled community both materially and socio-emotionally” (320). Relying on authenticity is also a way to respond to moral stigma, as the minor character in *Quid Pro Quo* vocalizes. Authenticity is important to the characters, and their desire for disability is in part a desire for an authentic state.

Davis’s research shows that while transabled “bloggers entertain the possibility that their desires stem from worldly experiences, they ultimately deem the cause to be an internal and natural one” (331). Although Fiona declares that being impaired is her true state, the film presents experiential impetuses for her disability desire. Moreover, it is not just the impairment she desires but the response to her impairment. Fiona desires to be disabled because she wants to be special. Visible disability offers her special attention and

recognition. During her wheelchair adventure, she gleefully whispers to Knott, “Oh My God, that woman is staring at me. This is an incredible feeling. Oh, God. This is so incredible. You know, I have dreamed about this moment for so long.” Her happiness about revealing her “true nature” is mixed into her delight at being stared at. This perspective is slightly undermined when she delights in the fact that “It felt like 20 years just to get a cab” and Knott replies, “Welcome to hell. I’ll introduce you to the staff.” Her delight is juxtaposed with Knott’s position; he is not able to avoid the stigma and social hardships that come with being disabled. Fiona feels that she gains visibility and power when in her wheelchair. Her vision of disability is an anesthetized one where she enjoys the positive results but does not understand or linger on the negative aspects. Fiona actually gains a voice as a “bearer of an embodied particularity” because “being subject to such markings determines how one becomes subject *of* speaking, writing, and representation” (Robinson 4). Moreover, “inhabiting a wounded body...draws not only on the persuasive force of corporeal pain” but allows Fiona to “become fully embodied through [her] wounding” (Robinson 69).

As I mentioned in the chapter on *Sherlock*, there is a tendency to romanticize disability in narratives about disability. The website BIIDinfo.com explains that “Anecdotal evidence shows that a majority of transabled individuals do want an impairment, but do not wish to have a “disability.” That is, they want to be amputees, paraplegic, etc, but they do not want the perceived loss of independence, nor the *disabling experience*” [emphasis in original]. Impairment and disability are tempered by separating or ignoring negative social realities. Fiona, in creating her own narratives about disability, glorifies the status of being special that she feels comes with disability; she could be a supercrip, admired and praised

merely for living. The film depicts her struggling between two different labels. She does not want people to think she is crazy because she wants to be paraplegic. She yells at Knott because she thinks he is thinking of her as “not normal.” When he asks her what’s normal? She says, “I think we all know how to point and say, ‘See? That’s normal.’ I don’t want anyone pointing at me because I’m normal.” She then corrects herself, “I mean, I—I mean, I do.” This slip reveals one of the reasons that she wants to be paralyzed. Although Fiona does not want to be perceived as “bad” abnormal—i.e. crazy, she does want to be perceived as “good” abnormal—actually biologically paralyzed because it will make her authentically different. She revels in the attention she receives when she goes out in cripface; she wants to be visible.

Fiona also creates a narrative where being disabled is an idealized position. She explains to Knott at the end of the film, that she “used to think if aliens landed and they saw all the able-bodied people and then they saw the people on their wheelchairs, they would say that those must be the Kings and Queens because they have special ramps and they never have to get up.” Fiona creates a positive narrative of disability as another coping mechanism to resolve her guilt. She has not hurt Knott; she has made him a king. Knott recognizes a similar reaction from other people in response to his disability. At the beginning of the film, Knott explains that there are

Two kinds of people in the world: stares. You know, the ones people give you, or avoid giving you. But once in a while, wheeling in and out of the current of people, I’d catch someone looking at me. And I’d see something else in their eyes—jealousy. They were jealous of me, jealous that I got to sit down and they didn’t.

People do not see Knott, per se, they see his disability. Moreover, they see themselves in response to his disability. In that moment, these people want to be disabled in order to take it easy, to be allowed to be broken. Such a framework, of marginalized people as lazy or entitled, is not new. They are already distanced from the ideal or normal position, so they are not expected to work towards it. Welfare queens, people who use handicap parking, people who take disability or supplemental government subsidies are seen as manipulating the system; thus, “political power and the rights of citizenship, in this formulation, fall to those who are not ‘encumbered’ by racial and gender difference” (Robinson 2). The film offers this as the first justification for a disability desire—“I might want to be a marginalized marked body if I could avoid other burdens.” While the film depicts Fiona’s romanticizing as unrealistic and ridiculous, she is also a savior figure in the film since she saves Knott from his impairment and shows him that he has the power to become whatever he wants to be. By the end of the film, he embraces this and becomes abstract and disembodied, unmarked, like the characters in *The New York Trilogy* and *Resuscitation*.

The film presents contradictory and paradoxical reasons for desiring disability. On the one hand, the characters want to find power and voice through disability, but, on the other hand, they also want to find absolution through a wounded body. Impairment and disability become a type of self-flagellation whereby characters are continually physically punished—Fiona self-consciously and Knott unconsciously—for the sins they have committed.

Fiona wants to use a wounded body to assuage the guilt she feels for hurting Knott and his family. When he realizes that she caused the wreck, he declares, “I think you’re gangbanged in the head... You hurt me and I hurt you—that’s what this is about.” She

realizes that she wants to punish herself for her sins. When Knott tries to talk her out of taking “TriOrthoCresyl Phosphate” (also known as “GingerJake,” which will paralyze her), he says, “Fiona, whatever fucked-up thing happened to you, you don’t deserve to be paralyzed.” “Oh, but you do? You still have no idea, do you?” Knott believes that her desire to be disabled is a need to harm herself because of something traumatic that happened to her. Knott has no idea that her trauma is the same as his trauma; she deserves to be paralyzed because she was the driver who caused the car accident in his childhood. Fiona feels that she deserves to be disabled, and she feels that when Knott finds out that he will too.

Knott also participates in self-flagellation, although he is unaware of the mechanism. Unconsciously, he deals with the crash in the same way as Fiona does. Since he lived while his parents died, he becomes paralyzed, but his paralysis is a hysterical paralysis caused from some kind of psychological reaction rather than resulting from physiological injury. In a postmodern world of instability, the characters’ internal identities are manifested in their bodies. According to Jenny L. Davis, “To convey the experience of incorrect-embodiment is necessarily to convey the experience of existential strife” (329). When this strife is internalized, impairment and disability become embodied truths because the characters’ identifications and bodies match. Disability allows them to find an embodied position for both subjecthood and absolution.

### **Rituals of Control:**

#### **Fiona, Knott, and the Erotics of Disability**

Not only does the film portray Fiona as desiring disability, it also depicts an erotics of disability that negotiates power. Her desire for disability is in part a sexual *desire*. When she reveals to Knott that she is a part of this subculture, she walks out of her room wearing

lingerie, braces, and canes. Knott replies, “So this is a sexual thing for you mainly.” Fiona disagrees, but she continually sexualizes him and herself through disability. When Knott first rejects Fiona’s advances, she assumes, just as Sachs does in the Lincoln Rhyme series, that it is because he is incapable of having an erection and thus cannot have sex. This reflects the traditional notion that persons with disability are not sexual and that there is only one “normal” depiction/activity of sex. Knott corrects her and explains that he is turning her down for completely unrelated reasons (he is not over his recent break up with his long-time girlfriend). She wants their sexual encounter to be wholly about disability. She understands sex, herself, and her sexual partners through cultural discourses of disability.

Fiona is both a devotee and a wannabe. A “devotee” is a person who feels sexual desire towards persons with disabilities, usually amputees but also other varieties of physically disabled persons. In most research done on devotees, the devotee is a man and the object of his sexual interest is a women. According to J. Aguilera, “much of the scholarship in this area has unequivocally painted devotees as predators exploiting disabled women” (260). Per Solvang notes that desiring the amputee body could offer potential for aesthetic appreciation of anatomical variations as well as liberation for disabled women who have been stigmatized as asexual or ugly. Solvang notes that this potential has thus far been very limited in the devotee community because many of their attitudes confirm and strengthen the current social order. The film reverses the gender positions common in devotee communities by making Fiona the devotee and Knott the sexual object. This of course reverses the common sexual dynamic of the man as the sexual subject and the woman as the sexual object. Part of the reason why Fiona is a devotee is because she is projecting her own desire to be disabled onto her object of desire. Thus, she wants to be the object of desire.

When Fiona first approaches Knott as a tipster, she uses the pseudonym “Ancient Chinese Girl.” The film justifies Fiona’s nickname as she is an antiquities expert who works at a museum cleaning up ancient Asian artifacts. The correlation between Orientalism here and disability desire is notable and amusing. Presumably this is a reference to the Chinese practice of footbinding, which did indeed voluntarily cultivate disability in women as both a status marker and for erotic purposes. The beauty and eroticism of footbinding was integrated with its pain and violence; the woman who binds her feet shows her willingness to endure pain in order to please another. In *Chinese Footbinding: The History of a Curious Erotic Custom*, Howard S. Levy notes that part of the appeal of footbinding is that the bound foot was a mystery “washed in strictest privacy and bound in the intimacy and inaccessibility of the boudoir. Male curiosity was aroused” (32). Furthermore, the fragility of it aroused in the “male a combination of lust and pity,” and men enjoyed the noticeable affect it had on the woman’s movements, her “swayed walk” and protruding buttocks (Levy 32-33). These narratives of taboo and secrecy, fragility, and making the body more visible speak to eroticism of impairments as well. As abnormal bodies are more visible, impairments draw attention to the body and communicate the larger cultural system of power.

When they have sex for the first time, Fiona is in a wheelchair and she approaches Knott in his wheelchair. They are presented in equal positions with equal power. She initiates and strokes his chair and his legs, eroticizing him through the visible signs of his disability. Quickly she takes the upper hand, corners him where he cannot move and then pushes him back onto the bed, taking a dominant position by crawling on top of him. In the

middle of sex, while she is moving on top of him, she moans again and again, “I can’t move. I can’t move.” She identifies with his disability and uses it to see disability in herself.

If, as some critics have suggested, sex is a power exchange, then these positions of identity, defined in part by cultural power, are a part of the power play during sex. Angela Carter writes, “We do not go to bed in simple pairs; even if we choose not to refer to them, we still drag there with us the cultural impedimenta of our social class, our parents’ lives, our bank balances, our sexual and emotional expectations, our whole biographies – all the bits and pieces of our unique existences” (9). The sexual situation between Fiona and Knott clearly involves their positions as disabled and abled characters. Because of the cultural discourses surrounding the positions of persons with disabilities, disability gives Fiona a location in which to engage with Knott. She can take power from him as an abled person over a disabled person, but she can also give over power by pretending to be disabled in a controlled environment.

Her sexual and fetishized dominance of Knott is a structured scene of BDSM. In her seminal essay “Maid to Order: Commercial Fetishism and Gender Power,” Anne McClintock explains that “S/M’s characteristics is the eroticizing of scenes, symbols, contexts, and contradictions which society does not typically recognize as sexual: domestic work, infancy, boots, water, money, uniforms, and so on” (224). His wheelchair and her braces are sexualized representations of non-sexual symbols of power. By playing with these power symbols in a sexual fashion, Fiona can reverse their power positions. Foucault describes S/M as “a massive cultural fact which appeared precisely at the end of the eighteenth century, and which constitutes one of the greatest conversations of Western imagination; unreason transformed into delirium of the heart” (*Madness* 210). Thus,



McClintock, quoting Foucault, asserts that “consensual S/M ‘plays the world backwards.’” (87). Fiona can pretend control of herself through their sexual exchanges. When this becomes once again dissatisfying to her, she moves past the consensual sexual boundaries to harm Knott. After their last sex scene, Fiona stands in the bathroom crying as she holds his shoes hostage. He asks “Are you gonna make me crawl?” She tells him that she’ll give his shoes back after he helps her become a “T12 paraplegic” because “it’s important to be an authentic person, if at all possible.” She has continued their power exchange after their sexual play. She even runs away with his shoes after she has turned his chair upside down and stuck a stick through the wheels so he cannot chase after her. Only through his disability does she have some semblance of control. Their give and take is important. She cannot paralyze herself; it must be done by Knott.

S/M, according to McClintock, “publically performs the failure of the Enlightenment idea of individual autonomy, staging the dynamics of power and interdependency for personal pleasure. As such, S/M rituals may be called *rituals of recognition*. In these rituals of recognition, participants seek a witness – to trauma, pain, pleasure, or power” (109). Fiona, as she cries that she is unable to move while they are having sex, seeks recognition from Knott about her trauma and her request for absolution for her sins. She wants to be seen as disabled so she is not burdened by guilt anymore. Fiona’s fetish act is an act of S/M, a “theater of signs, granting temporary control over social risk. By scripting and controlling the circus of signs, the fetishist stages the delirious loss of control within an extreme control” (109). Fiona wants to gain the position of victimization that a person with a disability has because she believes it will give her access to power. Yet, Fiona accesses this

identity power from her dominant position as an apparent victim because that gives her more actual control than her identity position as the marginalized position as woman.

In both *Quid Pro Quo* and the Lincoln Rhyme series, women eroticize the disabled man's body. Although she is turned down at first, Fiona exerts power through sex. Fiona's depiction as a femme fatale is tied to the film's depiction of sex and disability. The lingerie and brace scene very closely resembles the classic noir depiction of the femme fatal as she struts into the detective's office and tempts the detective into a dangerous and selfish scheme. She stands in the doorway, framed by shadows, hip cocked, looking sultry and curvy with platinum blond hair that looks remarkably like Veronica Lake's. The femme fatale is usually only an apparent victim, not an actual one. Similarly, Fiona is pretending to be disabled. In both situations, power is actually gained by pretending to adopt a marginalized position, not by the actualized reality of the marginalized position. Her cripface gives her sexual power and confidence. The other two times that she makes sexual advances toward Knott are after her day spent in her wheelchair in public and when Knott admits, in the face of her breakdown about her wannabe status, that he can walk only because of special shoes. In all of these situations, Fiona feels as if she and Knott are on the same level since they are both disabled. When Fiona gains power from presenting her disabled identity position, she is confident enough to be sexually aggressive.

While the traditional femme fatale may superficially be in the position of power over the detective, the narrative of the femme fatale is nonetheless one in which she is in service to men and masculinity. Jans B. Wager says that the femme fatale "resists a society that requires her containment in marriage and domesticity" (20). But Julie Grossman and other critics have argued that depictions of femme fatale "call attention to the *many* female

characters in original-cycle noir who are shown to be limited by, even trapped in, social worlds presented as psychotically gendered” (21). The structure of the femme fatale allows women’s weaker, feminine body to be a source of power; however, this construction is still contained in a hierarchy that controls women. *Quid Pro Quo* complicates the femme fatale gender struggle in film noir with the depiction of the struggle between able-bodied and disabled persons. Fiona is the sexual aggressor. Although she would not see it this way, Fiona is framed as partially empowered because she is abled. In the first sex scene between Knott and Fiona, she engages with him at the beginning wheelchair to wheelchair. She wheels up to him, strokes his face, and kisses him from her seated position. However, as they continue, she rises from her chair, pushes him back, and climbs on top because she is able to do so. Carter writes that in the missionary position, the woman is equated to “the passive receptivity of the soil” (8); but in this scene, the missionary position is reversed. The woman assumes the dominant role because of her abled physicality. This starkly contrasts with a classic noir, such as *Maltese Falcon*, in which most of the physical initiation comes from the detective, the man, although the femme fatale might initiate sexual flirtation (e.g. wordplay, provocative dress). The hierarchy of bodies constrains the power dynamics between the two characters.

Even if the femme fatale is allowed some sexual agency, this agency is limited or contained within a larger narrative about men. Nancy Waring states, “Hollywood films are shaped by male fear of female sexuality . . . Men dominate the representational system to reduce their feelings of dread. Women’s bodies are objectified, their voices silenced, and their desire is thus subjected to men’s” (96-97). In this regime, women’s bodies are perceived as already disabled. In hard-boiled detective texts in which the detective remains

in control at the end and keeps his personal ethics, the femme fatale is subjugated to him. Some film noir (e.g. *Double Indemnity* with Walter Neff and *The Maltese Falcon* with Miles Archer) depicts the death or ruination of a man because the sexualized female is a “force of danger.... The male is her dupe” (Kay 96). While Fiona gets to explore some sexual agency through her dominance of the disabled body of Knott, their sexual play is contained by the film’s overall narrative in which Knott is the one who has always been in the position of power; he just needs to be able to walk to realize that power. Barbara Hales writes that “one can understand the femme fatale as a marker of loss and the exile’s inner turmoil” who “reveals less about the divided nature of woman than about male identity in transition” (235). The theme of *Quid Pro Quo* could also be described as exchanges of power. Fiona has taken power from Knott as she has made him disabled, so she wants him to make her disabled in return. She has also suffered guilt and lost power since the time of the crash. And because she has lost so much to his tragedy, she wants to take some sort of power and retribution from him in payment for her life of submission.

Fiona does not become disabled, and her story becomes subordinate to Knott’s story. Fiona’s exploration of a dominant person (as abled) who affects victimization (as disabled) teaches Knott that he can become abled and privileged. After one last power exchange where Fiona violently dumps Knott out of his chair then gives him his shoes and opens the curtains of his apartment so the sunshine comes glaring in, she disappears from the movie entirely. He says, “That was the last time he saw her.” The last scenes of Knott are of his abled body walking through a hallway, and Knott telling the story. Knott is the only author of his story as well as Fiona’s story. He sums up the entire narrative of the film: “This is the second time in my life she’s crashed into me and then vanished. I find myself going back to places we’d

been together—Not in the way you do when you can't get over someone, I just go to think about her and to feel... restored." Fiona's narrative is used not by Fiona but by Knott.

Fiona's ritual of recognition is Knott's ritual of recognition. Knott becomes the dominant figure who is served by Fiona. Fiona disappears, presumably still "crazy" even though she has given Knott what he needs, an able body and reclamation of power.

*Quid Pro Quo* recognizes, but does not linger on, the larger systematic dimensions of disability. Knott struggles with never being able to catch a cab, some people baby him because of his disability, and others treat him poorly—or as he explains, like a "gimp." When Fiona is in crippage, she complains about the poor access a building and yells at "some city guy for more curb cuts." These moments in the film all depict the cultural struggles that a person with a disability faces. Brooks explains that

[w]e treat the subjects in a really enlightened way. People who were disabled were involved in a facets of making it [sic]. There's a lot of commonality, but that's as political as it gets. I wonder if people will have a knee-jerk reflex to look at this in a political light. Hollywood is historically horrible at showing people with disabilities, and I think it conditions people to look at that subject matter in a politically correct arena. They want to be sure that they're on the right side of it. This is taking it way beyond that—I'm just writing about people.

Some reviewers disagree that the film deals with disability in an enlightened way. Kyle Buchanan says that the movie is "certainly" exploitive, which is "part of its B-movie allure, but the movie pulls off its high-wire act thanks to Farmiga's brave, boisterous performance"

(*Advocate*). Other reviews are harsher, calling the movie “exploitative trash.”<sup>73</sup> Tod Browning’s *Freaks*, one famous example of the Hollywood films about disabilities to which Brooks refers, has received similar attention for being exploitative. Critics have praised the film for casting actual persons with disabilities instead of using prostheses and makeup, calling attention to the exploitative nature of sideshows, and showing the “freaks” as good people and the abled body people as the villains. However, it has been criticized for the menacing horrific representation of the freaks. For example, it was billed as “the most startling horror story of the abnormal and the unwanted,” and these horror images come from the images of disability (*Freaks*).

Although Brooks feels like he is presenting disability in an “enlightened way,” he ignores the systemic dimensions of marginalized identity and privileges the personal over the political. This erases systemic differences and contexts between people. Robinson writes that the “conflict between individualism and collectivism often gets coded as a conflict between the personal and the political, the ‘authentic’ and the sham” (8). Brooks’ insistence that he is writing about “people” uses the same division of the personal and political. In the quote from the last paragraph, Brooks expresses the sentiment that to talk about people is authentic but to talk about disability politics is a sham. As in *The New York Trilogy* and *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, *Quid Pro Quo* specifically uses a disability narrative and politics of disability identity to reach its final conclusion about “disembodied, unmarked, abstract personhood,” which by its nature is the “neutral” and invisible position of the white, able-bodied man (Robinson 21).

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<sup>73</sup> DeadDerrick’s reviews.

In the film, Fiona announces that the “disorder is order. This is a strange new American dream.” She claims that the disorder, the abnormal, is the new order, the normal, but really, it is not. The representation of disability is used to tell the story of rehabilitation to a normal body. The marginalized character gains some type of new access only to be appropriated by the dominant in order to re-dominate. As Robinson writes, representations of a “hysterical, masochistic, or wounded white male body” work “to recenter white masculinity, to carve out a new place for white men in relation to changing notions of normativity” (190). In this film, Fiona’s description of paraplegic desire clearly depicts a desire for a certain type of identity and not just a desire for a specific impairment.

*New York Trilogy*, *Resuscitation*, and *Quid Pro Quo* use postmodernism and the detective narrative to recenter the unmarked male subject; like other detective texts, the detective still uses a narrative of the body in order to exert social control. These disability detective texts use narratives of the disabled body to reject positivism in favor of embodied experience and reject intrinsic identity in favor of processes of identification. However, they mourn the loss of positivism and authenticity and place their anxiety about it onto the disabled body. These postmodern texts displace “themes of disunity and instability from sociohistorical context to textuality and culture (from ‘context’ to ‘text’)” (Dunn 6). Whether in Auster and Johnson’s works, which reduce disability to utter fragmentation, or in Brooks’ film, which accesses power dynamics through the disabled body, social position and embodied reality have been removed from these disability narratives. Ultimately, they all create narratives in which the disabled body disappears. In its wake, what is left is the privileged postmodern quest of liberation and the abstract individual.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Almost as long as we've known his name, we've known that Adam Lanza struggled with some sort of mental illness. Soon after the shootings, it was reported that Lanza had been diagnosed with Asperger's, and many wondered if that was the whole story. Asperger's, after all, is not typically linked to violent behavior, certainly not the level of violence that Lanza unleashed on Sandy Hook Elementary School, so many wondered if there was something else going on. Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, psychosis — something must've tripped a wire in his brain and made him snap.

---Adam Estes<sup>74</sup>

What Sherlock Holmes offers isn't just a way of solving crime. It is an entire way of thinking, a mindset that can be applied to countless enterprises far removed from the foggy streets of the London underworld. It is an approach born out of the scientific method that transcends science and crime both and can serve as a model for thinking, a way of being, even, just as powerful in our time as it was in Conan Doyle's.

---Maria Konnikova<sup>75</sup>

The narratives of disability that I have analyzed through this dissertation appear not only in detective fiction but in more general culture narratives. They appear in the news, when discussing persons with disability, and in narratives intended for action such as self help books and legislation. As the two epigraphs demonstrate, the actions of crime and consciousness, what Maria Konnikova refers to as “ways of being,” are often conflated. These two contemporary examples, the public reaction to Adam Lanza and a recent self help book using Sherlock Holmes, demonstrate how an othering narrative of disability and

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<sup>74</sup> Estes, Adam. “Revelations about Adam Lanza’s Mental Health Still Don’t Explain the Violence.” *The Atlantic Wire*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, 9 Feb. 2013. Web.

<sup>75</sup> Konnikova, Maria. *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Viking, 2013) 20. Print.



dis/order plays out in real and relevant ways. In such a conflation, crimes are committed by those who *are* different. These people are viewed as fundamentally abnormal and frequently faulty. Such othering narratives, like the ones at the heart of detective fiction, use a concept of the disabled body to order and stabilize the world.

On December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza killed his mother and then drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School and fatally shot twenty children and six adult staff members in Newtown, Connecticut. Understandably, in response, people began asking why it happened. One of the suggested answers is that he was mentally impaired in some way and, because he was mentally impaired, he became a mass murderer. After the shooting, toxicological tests, genetic analyses, and an analysis of the brain were all run on Lanza's body. No brain deformities were found and the toxicology and DNA report are not publically available (Harrington, Lauerman). Investigators and the public at large have looked to Lanza's body to find answers. In particular, they have tried to find bodily abnormalities and observable evidence to explain why it happened.

Time and time again news articles about the Sandy Hook tragedy report that Lanza had been diagnosed with Asperger's Disorder. Adam Estes's article "Revelations about Adam Lanza's Mental Health Still Don't Explain the Violence" points out that Adam Lanza's two diagnosed mental disorders, Asperger's and sensory integration disorder (SID), are not linked to violent behavior. He notes that many people have attempted to make sense of such horrific situations through narratives of mental impairment (Estes). In these narratives, if Asperger's does not make people violent then something else diagnosable, quantifiable, and conclusive must have been wrong with Lanza. Autism and disability advocates have pointed out that this narrative of disability stigmatizes the autistic population

and people with mental disorders as a whole (Estes). Even so, politicians and activists alike have used the Newtown tragedy to try to promote mental health counseling and mental health services (Hill). Pro-gun groups such as the National Rifle Association and the National Shooting Sports Foundation as well as individuals such as Senator Kelly Ayotte have also used a mental health narrative in order to steer attention on the Newtown tragedy away from gun control and onto the mental health system and the mentally ill (Siddiqui). The world makes more sense to many people when they can blame these tragedies on people they define as broken, and dysfunctional; Lanza did it because he was ill, and if we can contain the illness, then such tragedies will stop. Furthermore, this narrative is the most comforting when the sense of *wrong* is an intrinsic characteristic of the person that can be observed.

Another narrative in contemporary culture is the popular attitude that observational judgment of people's behavior can be used in order to think and live better. Furthermore, detective fiction is used as its ideal narrative form. Holmes has overcome the divide between the fictional and the nonfictional in Western consciousness. The character has received awards that are normally given to actual people, and books such as David Acord's *Success Secrets of Sherlock Holmes* and James O'Brien's *The Scientific Sherlock Holmes: Cracking the Case with Science and Forensics* treat Holmes as if he were a living authority. Similarly, Konnikova uses Holmes as a model for our minds in *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes*. Konnikova recommends a "scientific" method through which people can improve their lives by improving the way they observe and think: they should use external signs to comprehend everything. Her narrative suggests that the objects we evaluate—

including people—are consumable, reducible, and identifiable, and therefore fixed; we just need to be more objective, like Holmes, in order to identify them correctly.

Konnikova holds up Holmes as the ideal observer who orders everything through science. She hopes to teach people how to be like Sherlock Holmes since he “was meant from the onset to be an embodiment of the scientific, an ideal that we could aspire to, if never emulate altogether” (21). If Holmes is a “model for thought, for decision making, for how to structure, lay out, and solve problems in our minds,” then his use of marked, visible bodies (racial bodies, gendered bodies, and disabled bodies) as clues is a model for everyone else as well (Konnikova 20). According to Konnikova, Holmes takes the scientific method a step further than most scientists because he “applies the same principle to human beings: a Holmesian disciple will, ‘on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man and the trade or profession to which he belongs’” (Konnikova 25).<sup>76</sup> Konnikova recommends making assumptions and reducing people to types based on their visible identifiers. Holmes “understands that everything is part of a package and could just as well stem from character as from circumstance, irrespective of valence” (57). Konnikova demonstrates the belief in the traditional detective fiction’s narrative that identifying an object’s interiority through external observations is essential to ordering the world.

The contemporary examples of the narratives of Lanza and Konnikova’s self-help book demonstrate the following concepts at the core of the detective canon: 1) the visual consumption of disability and 2) the projection of social instability onto visible markers including impairment. Disability is used as the visible marker in the texts because of the positivist ideology that all of the texts use, adapt, or diverge from.

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<sup>76</sup> Konnikova is quoting Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* that correlates to my text’s page 15.

Arthur Conan Doyle created the perfect positivist and inspired a genre of fiction that revolves around this ideology. However, the perfect positivist is a fantasy that ignores the active process of perception in which individuals *interpret* the environment. Objective reality is beyond people since individuals filter the world through perception. Still, the texts' romantic articulation of science and law has had a lasting impact on the detective genre and the concepts in its purview. The fantasy is quite appealing: it gives us certainty. Not only can society be ordered based on absolute, infallible rules, but an individual—the Western hero—can be the one to do it. The positivist narrative feeds a god complex, and the ideological consequences for this are great: all objects within this narrative are consumable, fixed, and given a voice only through the detective god.

Despite its positivist roots, the detective canon also contains within it the seeds of a discourse that Lennard J. Davis terms *dismodernism*. The detective is portrayed as incomplete without his pawns; he is a broken and abnormal body who only becomes functional through other abnormal bodies. The detective narrative exhibits a continual need for stabilization and hints at the fact that normal is a fantasy that does not actually exist. All bodies are incomplete and can only be ordered through a cultural process, a narrative that we create and can alter. Such a narrative suggests that subjects are objects and that objects are subjects as well. The texts that I examine in this dissertation all depict various roads exploring the terrain between positivism and dismodernity. Davis suggests dismodernism as a new way of thinking. I argue that disability detective fiction proposes similar dismodernist concepts in significant ways. In disability detective texts, detectives function differently, and the texts realize that we are all victims.

Positivism is abling, discriminatory, and hierarchical; in dismodernity, the ideal is “not a hypostatization of the normal (that is, dominant subject), but aims to create a new category based on the partial, incomplete subject whose realization is not autonomy and independence but dependency and interdependence” (30). Dismodernism starts with the concept of the disabled body and proposes an ideology of “caring about the body” where “subjectivity is not organized around wounded identities; rather, *all* humans are seen as wounded... Protections are not inherent, endowed by the creator, but created by society at large and administered to all” (30). In this way, the trend towards disability detective fiction complicates the positivistic message through representations of wounded detectives. It is not merely the villains, the femme fatales, and the victims who are bound by their bodies and at the will of society, but the detectives as well. By working to make their narratives of disability more visible, the texts throughout this dissertation slowly move towards a dismodern representation.

As Davis asserts for dismodernism, in these detective texts “impairment is the rule, normalcy is the fantasy. Dependence is the reality, and independence grandiose thinking” (31). The detective as a dismodernist subject is disabled, a subject who is

only complete by technology and by interventions. Rather than the idea of the complete, independent subject, endowed with rights (which are in actuality conferred by privilege), the dismodernist subject sees that metanarratives are only ‘socially created’ and accepts them as that, gaining help and relying on legislation, law, and technology. (Davis 30)

The Lincoln Rhyme texts raise the question of prostheses and point out the universal need for technology. The hardboiled and postmodern texts highlight again and again the extent to

which metanarratives are socially created. All of the texts emphasize that the detective is not an independent subject but a subject negotiated in society. However, dismodernism forces us to consider the “commonality of bodies within the notion of difference. It is too easy to say, ‘We’re all disabled.’ But it is possible to say that we are all disabled by injustice and oppression of various kinds” (Davis 32). Privilege, access, and context need to be considered on the path towards dismodernist thinking.

These texts use disability as a narrative prosthesis; that is, the representations of disabilities are used as a contrivance to aid in characterization. Mitchell and Snyder point out that in the history of literature there has been a clichéd use of disability to represent the frailty of the human condition, and these detective texts all participate in this history. Disability is both an identity position and accessibility abstracted. Disability is still commonly used in media and everyday conversations to refer to something, e.g. “whiteness must be reckoned as a disability,” completely disconnected from physical impairments or mental disorders.<sup>77</sup> Mitchell and Snyder point out that while there have been numerous disabled characters throughout literary history, the social and political dimensions of disability have been largely ignored. The texts from the third, fourth, and fifth chapters all take up these dimensions of disability. Most of them are interested in the lives of characters with disabilities and in how disability is constructed. In these texts, all appearances of disability are images of disability “made through the social act of interpretation” (Titchkosky F75).

By using a quadriplegic as the main detective in the Rhyme series, Deaver calls attention to many contemporary political dimensions of disability. For example, the texts

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<sup>77</sup> Tanner Colby’s “Can a White Author Write Black Characters?”

engage in a conversation about how disabled persons are seen as inferior and thus suffer job discrimination. The series also addresses sexuality and stereotypes of disability, even if the handling of it is inept at best. Similarly, the series frequently portrays questions about prostheses. Most people only see equipment as prosthetic, thus as stigmatized if it is for a disabled person; however, different types of people use all different types of prosthetics.

By questioning objective reality, the hardboiled texts highlight how perception and qualitative judgments infuse narratives of disability. Lethem and Tremblay's texts emphasize that persons with disabilities are not human despite their impairments but unique, functioning, and powerful individuals with their impairments. Furthermore, the texts address how the stigma of impairment is defined by culture and community, not by objective reality. *Memento* similarly questions objective reality by demonstrating just how wrong everything can go when a man believes in an objective reality and such a reality clearly does not exist.

While the texts in Chapter V erase the embodied reality of persons with disability, they, more than any of the other texts, emphasize the performative and mediated nature of representations of disability in written and visual texts. The world only exists through narratives that a person creates, including—perhaps especially— disability; the real is inaccessible, and everything is mediated through language.

There is further work to be done in identifying the problems in narratives of disability within detective fiction. For instance, each of the texts that I included in this dissertation are written by an author without the impairment and disability of which they write or any impairment at all. What could biographical analyses of the authors bring to this conversation? Able-bodied people are still the most prominent voices even when writing about disability. Are these cross-cultural depictions successful? Do they discourage the

voices of persons with disabilities? All disability detective texts that I am aware of are written by persons without impairments, with the sole exception of Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to continuing to analyze how representations of disability are used, future work could examine why disability offers so much to the texts and what the resulting ideological constructions are. As Davis says, "disability offers us a way to rethink some of these dilemmas [about identity construction, performativity, and embodiment]" (13). Thus, future work could further analyze the links between disability and other identity positions. For example, why does Johnson's *Resuscitation for a Hanged Man* tie a gay, lesbian, transsexual identity to the identity of the psychotic detective? Because disability is such a fruitful place to look at shifting identities, embodiment, and cultural construction, further work could use disability analysis to open up considerations of marginalized identities in other detective subgenres.

This dissertation has investigated how disabled bodies act as zones for negotiating order in detective texts. By focusing on disability, the texts impart the following idea, summarized by Davis: "What is universal in life, if there are universals, is the experience of the limitations of the body. Yet the fantasy of culture, democracy, capitalism, sexism, and racism, to name only a few ideologies, is the perfection of the body and its activities" (Davis 32). The textual studies in this dissertation add to a growing body of work that analyzes the narrative and ideological formulations in detective fiction as well as the emerging engagement between disability studies and literary criticism. On one hand, by incorporating

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<sup>78</sup> *The Singing Detective* is about a detective fiction author with psoriatic arthritis who hallucinates new adventures as a result of fevers and the pain of his condition. Potter had psoriatic arthritis and intentionally included autobiographical elements about his experiences with his impairment (Corliss).



disability into a genre that is obsessed with fixing the world, the texts try to fix impairments and persons with disabilities. On the other hand, the texts also reframe detective fiction through the use disability and shift how the concept of disability is perceived. Perhaps conversations, those about Adam Lanza, those about making you the best you possible, and those about Miss Scarlet in the library with the candlestick, can continue to be reframed to not just trade in bodies but to care about embodied people.

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APPENDIX A

ADA AMENDMENT ACT OF 2008:

SEC. 4. DISABILITY DEFINED AND RULES OF CONSTRUCTION

(a) DEFINITION OF DISABILITY.—Section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12102) is amended to read as follows:

“SEC. 3. DEFINITION OF DISABILITY.

“As used in this Act:

“(1) DISABILITY.—The term ‘disability’ means, with respect to an individual—

“(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual;

“(B) a record of such an impairment; or

“(C) being regarded as having such an impairment (as described in paragraph (3)).

“(2) MAJOR LIFE ACTIVITIES.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of paragraph (1), major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.

“(B) MAJOR BODILY FUNCTIONS.—For purposes of paragraph (1), a major life activity also includes the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.

“(3) REGARDED AS HAVING SUCH AN IMPAIRMENT.—For purposes of paragraph (1)(C):

“(A) An individual meets the requirement of ‘being regarded as having such an impairment’ if the individual establishes that he or she has been subjected to an action prohibited under this Act because of an actual or perceived physical or mental impairment whether or not the impairment limits or is perceived to limit a major life activity.

“(B) Paragraph (1)(C) shall not apply to impairments that are transitory and minor. A transitory impairment is an impairment with an actual or expected duration of 6 months or less.

“(4) RULES OF CONSTRUCTION REGARDING THE DEFINITION OF DISABILITY.—The definition of ‘disability’ in paragraph (1) shall be construed in accordance with the following:

“(A) The definition of disability in this Act shall be construed in favor of broad coverage of individuals under this Act, to the maximum extent permitted by the terms of this Act.

“(B) The term ‘substantially limits’ shall be interpreted consistently with the findings and purposes of the ADA Amendments Act of 2008.

“(C) An impairment that substantially limits one major life activity need not limit other major life activities in order to be considered a disability.

“(D) An impairment that is episodic or in remission is a disability if it would substantially limit a major life activity when active.

“(E)(i) The determination of whether an impairment substantially limits a major life activity shall be made without regard to the ameliorative effects of mitigating measures such as—

“(I) medication, medical supplies, equipment, or appliances, low-vision devices (which do not include ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses), prosthetics including limbs and devices, hearing aids and cochlear implants or other implantable hearing devices, mobility devices, or oxygen therapy equipment and supplies;

“(II) use of assistive technology;

“(III) reasonable accommodations or auxiliary aids or services; or

“(IV) learned behavioral or adaptive neurological modifications.

“(ii) The ameliorative effects of the mitigating measures of ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses shall be considered in determining whether an impairment substantially limits a major life activity.

“(iii) As used in this subparagraph—

“(I) the term ‘ordinary eyeglasses or contact lenses’ means lenses that are intended to fully correct visual acuity or eliminate refractive error; and

“(II) the term ‘low-vision devices’ means devices that magnify, enhance, or otherwise augment a visual image.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) is further amended by adding after section 3 the following:

“SEC. 4. ADDITIONAL DEFINITIONS.

“As used in this Act:

“(1) AUXILIARY AIDS AND SERVICES.—The term ‘auxiliary aids and services’ includes—

“(A) qualified interpreters or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments;

“(B) qualified readers, taped texts, or other effective methods of making visually delivered materials available to individuals with visual impairments;

“(C) acquisition or modification of equipment or devices; and

“(D) other similar services and actions.

“(2) STATE.—The term ‘State’ means each of the several States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands of the United States, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.”

(c) AMENDMENT TO THE TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents contained in section 1(b) of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is amended by striking the item relating to section 3 and inserting the following items:

“Sec. 3. Definition of disability.

“Sec. 4. Additional definitions.”

## APPENDIX B

### “WHAT IS A MENTAL/PSYCHIATRIC DISORDER? FROM DSM-IV TO DSM-V”:

#### DSM-IV DEFINITION OF MENTAL DISORDER

##### *Features*

A a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual

B is associated with present distress (e.g., a painful symptom) or disability (i.e., impairment in one or more important areas of functioning) or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom

C must not be merely an expectable and culturally sanctioned response to a particular event, for example, the death of a loved one

D a manifestation of a behavioral, psychological, or biological dysfunction in the individual

E neither deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) nor conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict is a symptom of a dysfunction in the individual.

##### *Other Considerations*

F no definition adequately specifies precise boundaries for the concept of “mental disorder”

G the concept of mental disorder (like many other concepts in medicine and science) lacks a consistent operational definition that covers all situations. (Stein et al. 1765)