Exploring representations of physically disabled women in theory and literature.

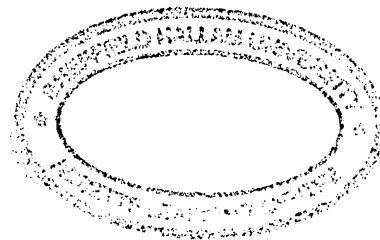WRIGHT, Diane J.

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Exploring representations of physically disabled women in theory and literature

Diane Wright

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Abstract

Over the course of the twentieth century feminist and disability discourses have become more intertwined: both focus on the body, both contest notions of passivity, amongst other things both examine issues surrounding patriarchy, and, most importantly, both consider the power of representations in literature. This enables a cross-functional approach to reading representations (i.e. from a feminist and disability viewpoint) of the physically disabled female characters and has implications for our understanding of the body.

Drawing on a range of theoretical approaches, the thesis focuses on the way in which physically impaired (or non-normate) female bodies are represented in literature. It interprets cultural constructions of such bodies in relation to discourses of surveillance, femininity and disability. The arguments are underpinned by notions of power, discourses and the body proposed by Foucault (1970/1966, 1977/1975, 1981/1976). However, because he posits the body as a site of discursive construction, Foucault's work is supplemented by Bourdieu's (1991) idea of the body as agentive in its own right. The ways in which feminist and disability researchers' have applied or critiqued Foucault and Bourdieu's work is also explored (e.g. Bordo 1993a; Shildrick and Price 1999b; Wendell 1996). The thesis appropriates aspects of disability discourses, for example Mitchell's (2002) notion of disability as narrative prosthesis in novels is extended to encompass research on femininity and female embodiment. The resulting discussion of specific characters indicates that this concatenation acts as narrative prosthesis in ways that disability alone cannot. For example, how representations of physically disabled women indicate they are both the object of and subject to heightened surveillance – i.e. they become ultravisible. Moreover, account is taken of the fact that such representations should be read in relation to the dominant ideology presented within the texts as well as historico-cultural perceptions of the non-normate body.

The extent to which fluctuating femininity and the mutability of physically disabled women's bodies are related to the ways that bodies are 'idealised' is apparent in fictional representations. Such representations often serve to delineate the fluctuating normate yet increasingly idealised body. In this investigation, characters who become impaired appear to lose their femininity, while other similar characters have their femininity enhanced towards an 'ideal'. Conversely, characters whose impairment is cured can also appear to have their femininity denied. Gender issues permeate these characterisations, resulting in a situation whereby most non-normate female characters have their sexuality denied by other characters.

Finally, the thesis lays out the reasons for this cross-theory approach and the implications of putting it into practice for literary criticism, feminist and disability research.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Author's declaration

I confirm that this thesis is the sole work of the author.

Diane Wright

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my immediate and extended family: Linn and Bill, Colin and Margaret, Gary, Julie, John, David, Carol, Michael and Richard plus in-laws, out-laws and offspring; but most especially Mike and Peter Adcock who have been there for me throughout and gave encouragement when it was most needed.

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place amongst the elements.

Morning Song, Sylvia Plath

Chapter 1: Introductions

Representations of bodies abound in contemporary culture – both as sites of power and subject to power. Any body – irrespective of gender – can be presented as a metaphor (for example, for the health of a nation), but gendered bodies are now recognised as culturally constructed – i.e. femininity is performative. Predominantly, such metaphorical representations construct the body as a functioning whole, with what are posited as clear boundaries to delineate and constitute that body's integrity. However, such integrity of bodily boundaries and the way they are presented is questionable, especially in bodies that deviate from a so-called 'norm'.

In problematising representations of the body, this thesis investigates the ways in which intersections between the development of discourses on disability and cultural representations has affected and been affected by feminist research on the body. It focuses on literary representations of physically disabled women in relation to cultural conceptions of the female body in general and 'impaired' bodies in particular. In so doing, issues related to gender (e.g. sexuality, femininity, passivity), that arise in representations of physically disabled women, and the ways that they have been perceived as deviating from a 'norm' are explored. It establishes that some stereotypical representations deserve fuller investigations, to tease out issues related to femininity. This introduction outlines the focus, the approach, the texts investigated and the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The focus

My work will investigate the way in which physically disabled women, whose bodies are perceived as deviant (non-normate) and whose bodily and personal boundaries are often represented as irruptable or eruptive are represented in a variety of texts. The paucity of representations of disabled women in works of fiction has been discussed and contested by

women who are themselves disabled (Morris 1989, 1991, 1993, 1996). Moreover, female disability researchers and fiction writers (Lorde 1983, 1999; Morrison 1997; Walker 1976) have asserted that feminist research on the body must take account of those perceived as 'other'. In my work I intend to draw on and draw out the connections between feminist studies (Bordo 1993a; Butler 1993) and disability research (Fine and Asch 1988; Garland Thomson 1997a; Morris 1996). I will also draw on discourse theory (Bucholtz 199b; Mills 1997) in relation to perceptions of the physically disabled female body as well as theorists Foucault (1970/1966, 1973/1963, 1977/1975, 1981/1976, 1988/1961, 1988/1984) and Bourdieu (1991).

1.2 The approach

This thesis engages with theoretical work on conceptions of the body and disability. My starting point is Foucault's work (1970/1966, 1973/1963, 1977/1975, 1981/1976, 1988/1961, 1988/1984), which has helped disability researchers elucidate the way that disability discourses are historically constructed through medicine in order to produce a knowledge of bodies (Sawicki 1991; Corker and French 1999). I will discuss how they demonstrate that this knowledge was utilised to set up a hierarchy of what could be termed 'norms', which enabled the non-disabled to limit the activities of those with physical, cognitive or sensory impairments (Ehrenreich and English 1976, 1979) and how this has been represented in, for example, fiction and film (Kent 1988; Shakespeare 1999). I will also look at the ways in which feminist researchers have demonstrated how Foucault's analysis of relations of power form an integral part of cultural representations of the female body (Bartky 1988), but that only in recent years have they begun to take account of the so-called disabled female body (Evans 2002; Lee and Jackson 2002). Thus, the focus of my work is representations of disabled women, because, it is argued, women with disability experience a 'double oppression' – in terms of their biological, social and gender roles as well as in terms of their impairment (Fine and Asch 1988) and, when issues of race or sexuality arise, the oppression becomes multi-layered (Begum *et al.* 1994). In essence, I use

a new historicist approach or, to paraphrase Brannigan, investigate texts from the viewpoint of 'How do the discourses of disability function in this novel?' and 'How do the stories participate in the general economy of perceiving disability?' (1998: 156). My discussions of the novels in Chapters 4 and 5, examine the relationship between the representations and the prevailing discourses on disability and indicates to some extent the ideas and values assigned to – in this case disability and femininity – that circulated previously or at the time the text was produced. I demonstrate how some novels can be read as indicating that 'disability is situated more dynamically within the culture they were produced' (Mitchell and Snyder 2001: 203).

I intend to draw on the work of disability researchers to demonstrate how the counter discourse of the late twentieth century gave rise to the concept of a social model of disability (Oliver 1990). (I describe this as a counter discourse (see Foucault 1970/1966), because the medical model equates the disability with the individual whereas the social model describes disability as constructed by societal beliefs and behaviour.) Rather than trace how these discourses relate to a chronology of representations in literature from, for example, the seventeenth century onwards, I intend to demonstrate how such historical imperatives have given rise to representations of disabled women in literature of the twentieth century.

Other research that is not focused on disability, but which has had an impact on disability research, will also be drawn on in my discussion. This includes Goffman's (1963) work on stigma and Douglas's (2002/1966) work on dirt and taboo, enable an investigation of the ways cultural and societal beliefs and behaviour rule our conceptions of bodies, bodily boundaries and so called 'norms', and influence our perceptions of physically disabled bodies. Likewise, I will draw on the discussions of the ways women tend to be objectified to a greater extent than men, and female bodies have been conceived of as looser and less bounded (e.g. Wolf 1991; Shildrick 1997). Similarly, the work of feminist researchers on the impact of western culture on conceptions of the female body has implications for my work. Bordo (1988), for example, has discussed how conceptions of the female body can lead to

behaviour (e.g. anorexia, bulimia) that can become disabling. This has had implications for representations of the bodies of physically disabled women (Davis 1997a,b). Briefly, I will demonstrate how these influences can be found in fiction from the twentieth century in ways that are different from those that focus on disabled men.

This thesis will discuss and evaluate representations of women with physical disabilities in a number of literary texts. I intend to draw attention to those that adhere to and those that challenge historical imperatives, but this will not be a simple comparison. My work will show the ways in which texts that include representations of women with physical disabilities can be influenced by discourses on representations of women and men in general, and the fluctuating terms of discourses on disability in particular (Garland Thompson 1996a; Mitchell and Snyder 1997b). At this time, because there has been an expansion of the inclusion of portrayals of disabled women and because these representations are increasingly read in a variety of ways (e.g. positive or negative), it is important to relate the discussion to other cultural products (see Wilde (2004) on television, and Snyder (2002) on artistic traditions).

1.3 The texts investigated

Disabled people have always written about their disability, however directly or obliquely (Mallett and Wright 2005); but this thesis focuses on particular novels from the twentieth century.[1] As Brannigan has pointed out, all texts are 'the representations which a society produces of itself' (1998: 132); therefore, in order to investigate them, one must be both selective and exclusive. Here, I admit to being selective in that I have chosen texts that help me to contest or illustrate a particular theoretical viewpoint; I decided to pair the novels for the same reason. In Chapter 4, I analyse two texts that have women of short stature as central characters: *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) and *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994). In Chapter

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[1] Disability is now seen to take many forms and extends to long-term and terminal diseases indeed the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 2005) extends the scope of the term to cover cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV.

5, I investigate three novels: first, *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911) and *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) not only because they illustrate the continuation of the stereotypical representation of acquired disability and femininity and passivity over 70 years of the twentieth century but also because I wished to explore how stereotypical representations are built up. As a twin to these authors, I selected *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) because I wished to discuss the notion of cure to counterpoint that of acquired disability in *Ethan Frome* and *The Bleeding Heart.*[2] All five of the novels were chosen for the specificity of their setting because I wished to investigate the way that this interacts with notions of femininity and of disability. In addition, Chapters 4 and 5 indicate the extent to which disability and femininity act as narrative prostheses in relation to the context of the plot in all five novels. In this thesis I have elected to explore women's novels because, as Bonner *et al.* state, from the early nineteenth century onwards the novel was 'seen as dominated by women writers [and] women's issues' (1992: 29; see also Gilligan 1990).[3] In addition, in a chapter on searching for a heroine, Kent (1988) cites a number of books by women, which made me consider my own personal reading preferences and provided the impetus for deciding to focus only on novels written by women.

I have also been exclusive in that I am concerned both with the ways in which the discourses surrounding disabled women's bodies can be seen to function in texts and how each text participates in the 'general economy' of disability (Brannigan 1998). Therefore, like Foucault's generalisations, my choices are 'indicative of certain trends rather than representative of a whole culture' (Mills 2003b: 116). Although I wished to illustrate specific themes or trends with texts written by disabled women themselves, this has proved difficult because works of fiction by disabled women were and are still rare.[4] Throughout

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[2] The idea of including the central character Honor Harris in *The King's General* (Du Maurier 1946) was also a possibility here, but Honor is a strong, independent woman who acquires an impairment, and I needed a character who is cured of her impairment by way of contrast.

[3] The emergence of women's poetry that deals with, celebrates aspects of disability and/or confronts stereotypes is a relatively recent phenomenon (see 'The Wolf' by Susan Hansell (1985) and 'Night' by Mandy Dee (1989) – both of which appear in Morris (1991)). In addition, there are a number of particularly striking representations of disabled women in plays written by men (e.g. Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* (Williams 1945) and Mag in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (McDonagh 1996)).

[4] One example of foregrounding an author's disability appears in *The Body's Memory: A Novel* (Stewart 1993); the author is shown on the inside front cover seated in front of a wheelchair with the byline 'is active in the

my research, I have found fewest depictions of disabled women in popular fiction (see also Kent 1987; 1988).[5] For reasons that are explained in Chapters 2 and 3, and will become apparent in Chapters 4 and 5, I have chosen to investigate novels that have physically disabled female characters as central to the plot. As Davis has pointed out: 'Rare indeed is a novel, play, or film that introduces a disabled character whose disability is not the central focus of the work' (1995: 156-7). In this thesis I will demonstrate how a disabled character's disability may form the central focus of the work as a celebration of difference, whereas in others this difference is positioned as negative, but that even this positioning can be critiqued in myriad ways.

Over the course of the twentieth century, feminist and disability discourses have, as I demonstrate, become more and more intertwined. Both have focused on the body; both have concerned themselves with passivity; both have examined issues surrounding patriarchy; both have considered the power of representations and so on. In investigating power and the body feminist and disability researchers have drawn upon each other's work. And this thesis provides just one example of the way this joint theoretical endeavour is developing. Here I draw upon Mitchell's (2002) notion of disability acting as narrative prosthesis (see next section for explanation) in novels and demonstrate that in the texts investigated both femininity and disability work together to act as narrative prosthesis in ways that disability alone cannot.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

In Chapter 2 I establish the 'ground rules' for the thesis, including, as it does, explanations of concepts that are referred to throughout the remainder of the thesis. However, at the

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disability rights movement'. Being able to identify disabled authors would result in my essentialising the disabled body – an issue that is discussed by Bauman (1997), which there is not space to engage with here.
[5] Popular British novels include a series of books by Fraser (1978-88) set on a fictitious island off the coast of Scotland which traces lives and deaths within a small community. However, unlike many of her contemporaries, Fraser often includes characters (both women and men) who are 'disabled', but who take as full a part in the life of the island of *Rhanna* as the so-called 'non-disabled' characters.

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heart of all of these concepts is the notion that none have rigid parameters: many terms, like notions of the body, are contestable. Disability models based on medical and societal constructs have been recognised as sites of establishing concepts of and maintaining discourses on people with disability (e.g. Williams 2001). Therefore the way in which these, and other developing models, intersect with cultural perceptions of the gendered body and bodily boundaries in terms of disability are discussed in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the work of Foucault on power and bodies, knowledge and the changing nature of discourses on disability and the disabled body in relation to 'normalising' procedures (Foucault 1970/1966, 1973/1963, 1977/1975, 1981/1976, 1988/1961, 1988/1984). Bourdieu's (1991) notions of bodily *hexis* and *habitus* as well as concepts of symbolic power are used in conjunction with Foucault's genealogy (1970/1966) to set the scene for analysing texts in which disabled female characters appear. This chapter draws on the work of a variety of disability researchers who have adapted Foucault's accounts of the way our conceptions of the body are shaped through 'scientific-medical' classification, economic and political theory and language developments (Darke 1994). Chapter 3 also examines the ways in which feminist and disability researchers have demonstrated how Foucault's analysis of the relations of power form an integral part of cultural conceptions of the disabled female body (Bordo 1999; Wendell 1999). But I posit further that, in communicating their findings, such researchers often overlook the parallels between the struggles for recognition by women and those of people with disability – those whose very bodily integrity may be at best misrepresented or at worst denied in cultural products – but which, along with notions of non-disabled bodies, are in a constant state of flux.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I demonstrate how representations of women with disability can be related to social perceptions of a lack of bodily integrity in works of fiction as well as to what is termed 'narrative prosthesis', which Mitchell describes as acting 'as a crutch on which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and social critique' (2002: 16).[6] In these two chapters I investigate a number of texts in relation

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[6] See also section 4.2 on narratives of and on the body and section 5.3 on disability, gender and femininity.

to representations of women (Mills *et al.* 1989) whose bodies are labelled disabled, their perceived bodily boundaries and the spaces they inhabit in the text. Although many representations are based on stereotype and myth, I demonstrate how some can be read as going beyond these imperatives to challenge current conceptions of disabled women, while others deliberately challenge our conceptions of the physically disabled body by representing it as non-normate.

Thus as a whole, in this thesis I aim to explore representations of the physically disabled female body in relation to the theories of Foucault and Bourdieu and with reference to the work of feminist and disability researchers. I intend to highlight the overlaps between research into the non-normate body in areas such as disability, femininity and gender, in order to draw attention to the ways in which work in these fields can contribute to our understanding of the body.

Chapter 2: Disabilities and representations

2.1 Introduction

This chapter defines and discusses the variety of concepts that underpin the thesis. The first section reveals some of the meanings behind disability and disability terminology. However, as this section demonstrates, the use of specific disability-related vocabulary can be described as unstable in the sense that it is constantly evolving, is often contextually related and/or individually preference based. Next, I look at how this impacts on the concept of normate/non-normate characters in novels. Contestation – in all its guises, but especially in relation to representations of physically disabled women – of such concepts is then discussed. Following this, different representational practices are outlined and the ways in which representations participate in discourses on the 'self' and 'other' are investigated. The way these discourses relate to disability is demonstrated through a discussion of how models of disability become established and are then in turn contested. I then briefly discuss the increase in contemporary society of fetishising practices based on the dis-embodiment of the female body. And in the final sections, I outline why I have chosen to concentrate on discussing the representations of physically disabled women in relation to theories of the body.

2.2 Defining terms

2.2.1 Disability

The root of the word disability, 'able', is defined as 'having the capacity or power' and 'having great ability; clever, skilful' (*OED*). These definitions are aligned to mental or

physical capacity, and both indicate enhanced activity in relation to power and knowledge. Immediately this sets up an expectation that anyone who cannot carry out a specific activity is un-able. Again, according to the *OED* the prefix 'dis': 'expresses negation' and 'indicates the reversal or absence of an action or state'. Any individual labelled dis-abled is, one could argue, intrinsically seen in negative terms and inherently perceived as unable to perform most of the activities that one who is labelled able can. Most people labelled disabled are also perceived as having no great ability and, until recently, very few people were perceived as clever or skilful and disabled (apart from savants and blind musicians perhaps) (Bates 1998).[1] Thus, the terms disabled, disability and disabling set up expectations in anyone encountering them in texts because they appear as such in everyday language.

Attempts to define disability have been and continue to be challenged, for example, according to Corker 'disability' is itself polysemic, i.e. it is 'ambiguous and unstable in meaning – as well as a mixture of "truth" and "fiction" that depends on who says what to whom, when and where' (2000: 115). Mallett (2007a) has observed that the terms disability and disabled are variously used in language: where disability is used as a noun, i.e. 'the disabled', it objectifies disabled people. In addition, the use of 'disabled' can act as an 'adjective in terms of the deprivation of, or having reduced, power to carry out certain activities, as well as disabled as a verb, in other words as a process by which people are rendered unable, or are deprived of their ability, to function' (Mallett 2007a: 87). Nevertheless, it is used as an encompassing term to group disparate individuals. The term 'disability' can appear together with 'impairment' in many national laws (Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, 2001) and in international declarations. The United Nations, for example, distinguishes impairment, disability and handicap thus:

> *Impairment* [is] Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function.
> *Disability* [is] Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

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[1] See Swain and Cameron (1999) on labelling and identity.

> *Handicap* [is] A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment
> or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal,
> depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors, for that individual
> (UN 1983, quoted in Wendell, 1997: 262).

According to the UN definition, 'impairment' is embedded within the disabled body; the

disabled body is recognised first and foremost in terms of impairment, which then affects

its usefulness or functioning according to an externally imposed 'norm'. Under 'handicap',

impairment and disability appear to become interchangeable, which is generally the way that

society often perceives these two terms.[2]

Such distinctions tend to reflect the medical model of disability – i.e. they are based around

an individual's capacity to perform activities or otherwise. This indicates a focus on the

physical usefulness of the body; it also counts the disability as emanating from individual's

impairment and discounts or ignores external societal and physical influences. Contrast the

UN definition with that produced by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against

Segregation:

> *Impairment:* [is] Lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or
> mechanism of the body.
> *Disability:* [is] The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary
> social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical
> impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of
> social activities (UPIAS 1976: 14).[3]

There are a number of points that need to be drawn from this definition. First, it identifies

impairment 'as a physical characteristic' whereas disability 'is reconstructed as a social and

political process' (Swain *et al.* 2003: 23). Second, the UPIAS definition of impairment is

couched in terms that do not posit the impairment as deviating from the 'norm', nor does it

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[2] In North American disability studies the terms 'impairment' and 'disability' were used interchangeably, and in 1980 World Health Organisation parlance 'handicap' was an umbrella term for 'a disadvantage ... resulting from an impairment or a disability' (cited in Altman 2002: 109; see also Amundson 2005). See Bury (2000) on the ICIDH; and Enright (2002) on disfigurement and disability and legal protection. Altman (2002) provides an overview of disability definitions and their application; Admundson (2005) provides an alternative reading of handicap and Devlieger (1999) discusses changing language use and cultural meaning in the US.
[3] According to the DAA website (see Light n.d.), the UPIAS definition refers only to people who have physical impairments because that was the focus of the organisation at that time.

relate this to the individual 'performance'. Instead, impairment is a stated fact of the body. Third, here impairment is not related to any previous state of embodiment – as is implied by the UN's use of the word 'loss' (but the use of 'lack' implies a preferred state). Fourth, and most important for social modelists (see the discussion in section 2.9 below), the UPIAS definition recognises the influence of society's attitudes and behaviour in constructing disability.

Wendell argues that attempts at definitions result in 'a shaky distinction between the physical and the social aspects of disability'; efforts to establish a universal paradigm of human physical ability are flawed, and thus, 'disability' (like gender) is intrinsically 'socially constructed from a biological reality' (1997: 263). Furthermore, definitions such as these attempt to essentialise disability, whereas, as Davis (2001) has pointed out, although disability can be somatised it cannot be essentialised in the ways that gender and ethnicity can, because unlike gender and ethnicity, disability is not 'biologically determined' (by gender, I take Davis to mean biological sex). In this thesis, I wish to argue that disability is also culturally constructed, i.e. that as well as societal influences, our attitudes and behaviour can be affected by the cultural practices embedded in, for instance literary texts and works of art, which include representations of disabled people. For example, in the late twentieth century texts by 'disabled' people can be said to ground, what is after all an abstract concept, in their own lived experiences (see Thomas 1999a) and may result in disability being re-perceived and thus re-presented in subsequent texts. In such texts the age, sex and societal and cultural role of a 'disabled' character are as important for the reader's perceptions as her disability. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will discuss the ways in which these concepts of disabled bodies are mirrored in fictional texts.

2.2.2 Disabled women

I have chosen to adopt the term 'disabled woman' (or person) throughout this thesis in preference to women (or people) with disability. My reasoning is that the former suggests that the disability may be constructed 'without' the individual, whereas the latter indicates that disability is something the individual 'owns' (see also Disability Rights Commission

website; Haller *et al.* 2006). However, I acknowledge Corker's argument that the term 'people with disabilities' is preferred by some for three reasons: it puts people first and engenders a positive image; it creates a distance from the idea of a 'collective view'; and the individual 'self' is effectively denying the impairment (2000: 117), but I view this as subjective.[4] My position reflects that of other disability researchers, that disability has become culturally constructed through historical imperatives (Braddock and Parish 2001; see also Davis 1997c); and I view the notion of 'ownership' of a disability is contestable in that it can be construed as a product of societal 'norms' (an issue I return to in Chapter 3).

2.2.3 Ideology

What constitutes a 'norm' is most often invisible, accepted and taken for granted or (as this thesis shows) idealised. Male corporeality, for example, is traditionally posited as a 'largely idealised and unscrutinized' norm and, therefore, it becomes invisible (Sheldon 2002: 16). In the west, since Ancient Greek times, the white heterosexual male, has been posited as the 'norm': in sexuality, behaviour, attitudes, and most importantly (for this work) physical embodiment (Stiker 2000). Anything deviating from this 'norm' has come under scrutiny, including: women (in terms of biological gender), homosexuals and lesbians (in terms of sexual preference), black people (in terms of 'race') and the disabled (in terms of impairment). Foucault has pointed out that this was certainly the case in the eighteenth century when 'the sexuality of ... mad men and women ... the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex' were scrutinised (1981/1976: 38).

Over time the 'norms' have altered, for example, in Britain during the nineteenth century, they were extended to include 'class' – the middle-class white heterosexual male becoming the 'norm' (see Davis 1995 for a discussion of the fluidity of norms). In addition, 'norms' have been conceptualised in a number of different ways. For example, in drawing on Foucault, Butler claims 'the category of "sex" is ... normative', it also acts as a 'regulatory ideal' or 'part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs' (Butler 1993: 1).

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[4] One example of this is sign language users, who define themselves as 'proud of [their] status as a member of a linguistic minority' (Hahn 1997: 55).

The latter tends to indicate that the regulatory 'ideal' or idealised body may be unattainable: in common with most 'norms', the concept of sex is not static, rather it is forcibly reiterated through increasing ideals 'which bodies never quite comply with' (Butler 1993: 2). For 'sex' we need to read 'femininity', 'class', 'race' or 'disability' - all of which are 'performative' in the sense that to be realised and reiterated they must be repeatedly 'performed' or perceived as being 'performed' (Young 2003). However, reiteration in whatever form only lends a concept a temporary existence, thus the process must be constant.[5] Butler has argued that 'gender performativity ... constitute[s] the materiality of bodies ... more specifically [it] materializes the body's ... sexual difference [and serves to consolidate] the heterosexual imperative' (1993: 2). Similarly, in many representations of disabled women in literature, in addition to her gender 'performativity', the female character's physical impairment tends to constitute the materiality of her body and, as such, serves to consolidate the 'non-disabled' imperative – or the 'norm'. Therefore, as Chapter 4 indicates, the physically disabled female character is represented as 'non-normative'.

The irony is that for the concept of 'norm' to become established within societal discourses there must always be those that are perceived as 'other', whose very 'otherness' may lie in their gender, their race, their sexual preference, or their impairment (Davis 1997a; Shildrick 1997). However, while they are perceived and presented as a deviation from the dominant ideological 'norm', cultural and societal practices and attitudes establish 'norms' within each of these categories of 'other'. Cultural products, such as texts, tend to both reflect and reiterate these practices and attitudes – thus privileging the embodiment of those who are not 'Other'. As Garland Thomson has observed:

> In [the] economy of visual difference, those bodies deemed inferior become
> spectacles of otherness, while the unmarked are sheltered in the neutral space of
> normalcy. [Furthermore] the cultural visibility of figures of otherness neutralises
> 'the normative figure' (1996a: 8-9).

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[5] Reiteration may include representations in cultural products. Nead (1988) demonstrates how idealised 'norms' of chaste femininity and its polar opposite, the deviant and immoral prostitute, appeared repeatedly in nineteenth century art.

In other words, the 'other' or 'otherness' is intrinsically linked to inferiority; whereas those perceived as being the same become the 'normative' or neutral, increasingly, there is also the presentation of a superior or idealised body that is unattainable. (See also section 2.8.) As I will demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5, very few texts explore the 'norms' established for individuals 'othered' in terms of their bodily impairment and some valorise the idealised femininity. To clarify this, I would like to discuss the concept of normate/non-normate in relation to stigma.

2.3 Normate/non-normate and the stigmatised character

The concept of a normate character or person is both limited and limiting. As Garland Thomson indicates:

> the term *normate* usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. [But peel] away all the marked traits within the social order at this historical moment, what emerges is a very narrowly defined profile that describes only a minority of actual people (1996a: 8).

Furthermore, as Shildrick points out, 'what counts as normative … is always caught up in historically and culturally specific determinants' (2000: 307). On a practical level, as Kuppers (2003) observes, 'There is nothing *normal* or necessary about steps as the main way of dealing with elevation, about visuals as the main form of contemporary communication … or chairs designed for a narrow idea of "normate" individuals' (see also Abberley 1993 on disabled people and normality; Shildrick with Price 1999a on normativity and the discussion in sections 3.4 and 3.5). The non-normate are then perceived as those individuals who have a trait (or series of traits) that 'marks' them out as different from the definitive – as Garland Thomson (1996a) points out, those who are not marked in some way (be it physical, sensory or mental), are in the minority. Moreover, as Chapter 4 indicates, the concept of non-normate is historically situated.

Goffman uses the term 'normal deviant' (1963: 157) to describe a stigmatised person because the deviance is from a norm previously known. He also argues that 'Normals and stigmatised ... are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of internalised norms' (1963: 163). Furthermore, as Coleman has observed, 'societal norms ... establish a subordinate and dependent position for stigmatised people' (1997: 224). I contend that Goffman's 'internalised norms' and Coleman's 'subordinate and dependent positions' can be found and are represented in literature. In relation to the framing of the non-normate body for instance, by freak shows (*Geek Love*, Dunn 1989) as simultaneously 'fascinating and repulsive, enticing and sickening' (Grosz 1996: 56); under Nazism (*Stones from the River*, Hegi 1994); and in bodies that become stigmatised after impairment is acquired (*The Bleeding Heart*, French 1997/1980; *Ethan Frome*, Wharton 1911). As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, these texts reveal 'complexities in the relations between those who assume the normate subject position and those whose bodies are enlisted to define the borders of that identity' (Garland Thomson 1996a: 136). Although (as Chapter 4 shows) the borders of normate identity may have appeared to freak show audiences and to the Nazis to be solid, such notions remain questionable. In the novels discussed, non-normate is used to define normate. However, as the novels show, the concept of non-normate has different parameters in different contexts. It is thus too 'fuzzy' to use as a yardstick. Within the novels investigated in this thesis there are examples of the non-normate characters repositioning of norms in relation to freaks (Dunn 1989 – see Chapter 4); a questioning of what is and what is not normate according to the Nazis in terms of appearance (blonde hair, blue eyes – Hegi 1994 and Chapter 4); and issues related to the colonial/post-colonial body (impaired/cured – Kingsolver 1998 and Chapter 5).

2.4 Challenging concepts

As will become apparent in Chapters 4 and 5, some literary representations of disabled women can be seen to both adhere to and to challenge the dominant concepts of disability that have built up within the theoretical discourses detailed in Chapter 3. Some narratives are framed by authors so as to engender a specific response to a specific 'impairment' from

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the reader (an attempt at consolidating rather questionable notions of disability), while others present disability as related to social and cultural constructs.

Disability discourses include investigations of representations of disabled women in general as well as specific statements about particular texts. Here the exploration, which may have positive, negative or neutral implications (or combinations of all three), is undertaken by disability researchers and effectively widens the remit of the discourses (Hevey 1993; Kent 1987, 1988; Kriegel 1987; Longmore 1987). Such investigations tend to focus upon challenging and/or affirming aspects of disability discourses in relation to concepts of the embodied self from the viewpoint of the disabled person. These disability researchers have argued that the way they present traditional representations of physically disabled female characters have been stereotypical or based on myth is more academic,[6] whereas this thesis also argues that some more recent representations can be said to be intended to deliberately challenge readers' pre-conceptions of the 'disabled' body. Nevertheless, Shakespeare asserts that 'shallow readings and disability correctness have lead to misleading evaluations of [particular] films' (1999: 167), and the same could be said for readings of literary representations.

Authors may include characters with physical impairments to illustrate the reality of living with disability and the ways that disabled women deal with many of the issues that non-disabled women (i.e. women who do not have an impairment) face. This shift in literary aspirations may be indicative of the interplay between the activities of, in this case, the disability rights movement and what is 'acceptable' to readers in a given society at a given time.[7] In essence, it indicates a change in what can be discussed and by whom, and the prevailing attitudes on specific issues (such as disability) may relate to 'political correctness' or to re-appropriating previously denigrating terms. Political correctness involves adopting language practices designed to avoid offence in terms of, for example, gender or race; but is

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[6] However, Bolt has argued that 'the most fundamental [absence is] that disability is implicitly and/or explicitly present in all literary works, but too frequently absent from literary criticism' (2007: i).

[7] Barnes and Mercer (2001) have pointed to a link between raised consciousness of the disability rights movement and the increase in writings about disability – especially in terms of self-identification.

fraught with danger as some supposedly inclusive terms are perceived to be offensive.[8] There have been arguments that this approach dilutes freedom of speech and, more importantly for this thesis, that it tends to avoid a discussion of social issues (see also Mills 2003a). Re-appropriating previously denigrating terms as language practices is a form of resistance, and often such an approach is deliberately ironic (Bucholtz 1999a; Lisicki 1990; Singer 1999). It is in essence a form of *re*presentation.

2.5 *Re*-presentations

Hall describes representation as 'the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language', and comments that a system of representation 'consists of different ways of organising, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them' (1997: 17). Moreover, Gledhill claims that '*[r]epresentation* is a key site … in the to-and-fro of negotiation between competing social, political and ideological forces through which power is contested shifted or reformed' (1997: 348; emphasis in original). Hall (1997) outlines three theories of representation and takes a loosely Foucaultian genealogical approach to tracing their development. Reflective (or mimetic), intentional and constructionist approaches are thus placed within a matrix of influences on ways in which we theorise the 'truth' of representations.

Hall (1997) states that in *reflective* (or mimetic) practices, language acts as a mirror reflecting true meaning inherent in an object, person, idea or event. Such practices are, according to Pollock, questionable in the sense that 'complex representational practices [can be] misrecognised as reflections of reality' (1988: 94). The language and conventions of auto/biography, although presented as such, do not signify a true-to-life story. In a study of the ways in which students chose to report on a woman who reputedly had a mental illness, Smith reports how the students ordered events 'foregrounding some and backgrounding others … presenting the picture of mental illness [to] provide a coherence

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[8] There are issues related to the term 'political correctness' because it usually means avoiding denigratory language, but can, in itself, be seen as a denigratory practice.

for the reader' (1990: 17). Such reflective representational practices then are constructed for the reader in the sense that they are selective.

Representation may be described as *intentional*. Nead (1988) indicates how 'popular' nineteenth-century art focused on female chastity and established the subject-position of the viewer as condoning this view. Similarly, Gledhill points out how, in classic Hollywood films, the central narrative often revolves around 'the glamourised image of woman as object of the male hero's search or investigation' (1997: 373). As well as social conditioning, these instances indicate gendered subject-positioning and therefore intentionality at work. However, Cowie (1978) opposes using intentionality as a basis for theorising representational practices, because such a view implies that the author/artist is representing some kind of inherent truth about women.

The *constructionist* approach is, according to Hall (1997), closest to Foucault's (1970/1966) discussions of discourses as systems of representation. Hall (1997) asserts that a study of the discourse on representations of madness would include: *statements*, which give us a knowledge about madness; the *rules* that govern 'talk' about madness; subjects who *personify* the discourse itself; how knowledge of madness acquires *authority* and how this is *historically specific*; *practices* for dealing with those deemed mad; and an acknowledgement that new *discursive formations* arise constantly (Foucault 1988/1961). This indicates that representational practices and ways of interpretation can never be fixed and relate to specific social instances.

In order to relate this discussion to the body, I refer to Garland Thomson who describes representation as 'the organisation of the perception of [actual bodily differences] into comprehensibility, a comprehensibility that is always frail, coded, in other words, human ... representation attaches meaning to bodies' (1996b: 5). To comprehend the body, we need to bear in mind these codes (perhaps even Foucaultian discursive 'rules'). If meaning is attached to bodies through representational practices, but this meaning is itself constantly mutating, little wonder that our comprehension of them is frail.

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The position in this thesis is that reflective, intentional and constructive approaches to gendered representations are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, I will explore fiction that focuses on the disabled woman in terms of the way in which such characterisations can be said to *represent* the lives of disabled people, and the extent to which their meaning can be said to be *intentioned* by the author, as well as how the meaning from such texts can be said to be *constructed* in a specific way by the author and the reader.

2.6 Representations and their participations

Although 'the term fiction suggests a separation from real life' (Gledhill 1997: 340) representations of women do not operate in isolation from other cultural practices. Gledhill demonstrates how 'popular fictions participate in the production and circulation of cultural meanings, especially in relation to gender' in soap operas (1997: 339). Similarly, Cowie has argued that we should 'recognise that a system of representations is a point of production for definitions [which is] neither unique and independent of, nor simply reducible to, other practices defining the position of women in society' (1978: 52). Smith's investigation of students' representation of the 'facts' about a purported mentally-ill woman, led her to conclude that 'there must therefore be some set of rules or procedures for representing behaviour as mentally ill types of behaviour' (1990: 15). This, Smith argued, requires a matching operation 'to criteria of class-membership assumed to be known at large' (1990: 16). This indicates that representations in their various guises are constantly being influenced by societal practices and by other cultural products. They do not circulate in isolation rather representations participate in discourses on a subject, in this case: the body.

If we accept that meaning is attached to bodies through representational practices, and that literary texts are just one convention; I would argue that they are important because 'Literature is a "special" kind of language, in contrast to the "ordinary" language we commonly use' (Eagleton T. 1996: 4). Eagleton (T) also posits that philosophers might define literature 'as *functional* rather than *ontological* ... it tells us what we do, not about the

fixed state of things' (1996: 8). This is an important point in a discussion of representations, because representations function in specific ways and at specific times; they do not present truths, they do not reflect them; they are simply authorial strategies for presenting and re-presenting what we do – 'stories are by definition only stories; they are not real life' (Gledhill 1997: 340). Nevertheless, authorial strategies should be evaluated in relation to other 'mutually reinforcing discursive and institutional practices across whose varying processes [terms] are produced, renegotiated and fixed in relative hierarchies' (Pollock 1988: 96). Although representational practices deal with the mundane, the everyday, as Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, they do so through a language that goes beyond the ordinary, the everyday, and they enable us to renegotiate and perhaps question existing discursive and institutional practices.

2.7 Stereotypes and representations

According to Dyer, in an aesthetic and social functional perspective, stereotypes form 'a particular sub-category of a broader category of fictional characters' (2002: 13). Furthermore, Davis has pointed out that, 'stereotyping requires that a person be categorised in terms of one exclusive trait' (1997a: 10). Stereotypes, then, like notions of femininity and disability (discussed in Chapters 3 and 5) are socially constructed – and often underpinned by aesthetic imperatives, often in idealised terms. To some extent stereotyping is at work in the discussion of normate/non-normate above, in that it is a form of categorising our world and the people in it. Indeed, in 1956, Lipman described stereotypes functioning as '(i) an ordering process, (ii) a "short cut", (iii) referring to "the world", and (iv) expressing "our" values and beliefs' (cited in Dyer 2002: 11). One can see how this extends from the separation of 'self' and our definitions of 'other' as outlined in Chapter 3. As individuals we use stereotypes as 'short cuts' to order anyone we designate as other within 'the world', as well as to express our 'values and beliefs'. Notions of power also enter the equation: because 'it is not stereotypes [per se], as an aspect of human thought and representations ... but who controls and defines them, and what interests they serve that is of interest' (Dyer

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2002: 12). In Chapter 4, I engage with the issue of stereotypes in relation to representation of female disabled characters' bodies and power.

Referring back to the issue of the circulation and maintenance of specific types of representation disability researchers, like their antecedents, feminist theorists, have often criticised the media for the continued inclusion of stereotypical or negative images of disabled characters or people in newspapers, television and advertising as well as in literature (see Biklen 1987; Furner 2005; Hahn 1997; Hevey 1992; Haller 2001; Mitchell and Snyder 2001; Pointon and Davies 1996; Shakespeare 1996; Wilde 2005).[9] Some feminists' viewpoints have been underpinned by the notion that the positive 'psychologically rounded character' would 'guarantee truth to human nature'; but this view is underpinned by 'mimetic' assumptions (Gledhill 1997: 346) (see section 2.5). In discussing literary representations, I intend to go beyond the negative/positive binarism, because, as Betterton has argued about images of women (and here I apply her assertion to representations of physically disabled women), 'it is necessary to argue that some forms of representation *are* better than others, on the basis that they offer [physically disabled] women images of themselves which are not humiliating or oppressive' (1987: 218) (an issue I return to later in this and succeeding chapters). I acknowledge that such evaluations of representations are value-laden and that 'value-judgements are notoriously variable [and] we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns' (Eagleton T. 1996: 9-10). However, my intention is to ensure that this evaluation goes beyond my own immediate concerns and deals with a societal-wide issue in that disability is both a social category (often imposed from outside) and is 'experienced subjectively as part of our understanding of who we are' (Betterton 1987: 221). In problematising representations of physically disabled women's bodies, I am entering the arena of problematising representations of women's bodies (in terms of representations of femininity) from an often-overlooked perspective. As Schwichtenberg states, 'the connections between everyday life and cultural analysis [are] significant to the ways in which we understand, interpret, communicate and use the resources of popular culture' (1993: 2). In other words, unpicking fictional

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[9] Stereotypes, negative imagery and disability discourses surrounding media images are all dealt with later in this chapter.

representations of the, often 'othered', disabled female character provide ways into looking at how 'popular culture can enable or constrain us' (Schwichtenberg 1993: 2) as well as allowing us to problematise representations of such characters from realist (Belsey 1980) and postmodernist positions.

2.8 Changing 'others'

A sense of self is fundamental to our development; this is achieved through a separation of self from others during childhood (Lacan 1998/1949). However, according to Ahmed 'there is no generalisable other which serves to establish the illusion of bodily integrity' (2000: 90). In essence, not only is individual embodiment uncertain for everyone; but our concepts of self also has its limitations. Instead we must constantly refer to the embodiment of those around us for reassurance of our own state of being. However, as Haraway has argued:

> The proper state for a western person is to have ownership of the self, to have and hold a core identity as if it were a possession. That possession may be made through cultural production or one may be born with it. [This] sense of self as 'one' not dominated, autonomous, powerful [is yet] an illusion (1991: 135).

In the process of attempting to own our core identity, we utilise cultural taboos and what I would refer to as 'markers' or points of reference – whether these relate to individual embodiment or cultural representations (Goffman 1963; Douglas 2002/1966). We use these markers to distinguish our sense of self and our place in the world, and must constantly reiterate boundaries to reinforce our sense of self. According to Ahmed, 'the skin functions as a boundary or border … keeping the subject inside and the other outside' (2000: 91) – i.e. it helps us delineate and mark other embodiments as 'other'. However, as Haraway has pointed out: 'to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundaries, frayed and insubstantial' (1991: 177) and, for some, this sense of being multiple, can be liberating. Authors who have overtly perceived themselves as 'othered' assert that such labels enable them to question norms and claim the right to engender new cultures (see Anzaldua (a

lesbian/Mexican/homeless) in Eagleton M. 1996), and it is largely what has been argued by Foucault (1981/1976) in relation to children's sexuality and to homosexuality. In any discussion of core identity it is essential to consider subjectivity.

In *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, Shildrick argues that 'subjectivity cannot be said to be transcendent but is marked by the continual process of the body' (1997: 44).[10] We cannot then transcend and once-and-for-all delineate our own and others' bodies, because bodies are in a constant process of creation and recreation. This concept can be seen to be operating in cultural representations, as the discussions of the non-normate characters' bodies in the novels investigated in Chapter 4 indicate. The notion of transcendence is heightened because within the setting of each novel, 'unexpected disruptions not only contest [the body's] apparent limits ... but mark the instability of the normative identities of those who are blind, deaf, disabled and so on' (Price and Shildrick 1998: 241). I would claim that such novels also help to indicate the extent to which the body is 'a discursive construction ... given to us only in our texts' (Shildrick 1997: 15), and these ideas underpin my discussion of representations of the non-normate and the physically impaired female body in both Chapters 4 and 5.

One of the ways in which we reiterate our sense of 'self' and 'other' and our place in the world is to look for similarities and differences in works of art, on television and radio. Representations that engender the greatest emotions in us as readers or listeners or viewers, can assume huge importance in our lives (Brownstein 1982; Keith 2001; Kent 1988; Morris 1991). As cultural behaviours and beliefs about 'others' change with changing discourses, cultural events, such as nineteenth-century freak shows (Bogdan 1996), became less acceptable ways of consuming the 'othered' body, as I demonstrate when I return to this discussion in Chapter 3.

In the preceding sections I have indicated the ways in which the concepts and terms used in this thesis has evolved over time and its influence on the discourses surrounding disability.

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[10] Douglas (2002/1966) has also demonstrated the leakiness of bodily boundaries, in relation to our conceptions of purity, pollution and acts of taboo.

Now, to bring these two strands together, I turn to the ways in which the disabled body has been theorised in disability research. And, in the final section in this chapter, I look at the ways in which models of disability have contributed to discourses on representations. I argue that cultural representations in texts have informed and been informed by discourses surrounding disability models.

2.9 Discourses and disability

According to Mills, discourse 'structures both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity' (1997: 15). Foucault (1981/1976) demonstrates how, within a discourse, there will exist 'subjects' – figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces – as well as a *place for the subject* – i.e. the reader or viewer, who is also (even if unaware) 'subjected to' discourse. In addition, within a discourse the reader or viewer may wilfully or otherwise take up a subject position (see also Bucholtz 1999a,b), as Mills has observed:

> Psychoanalysts describe the wide range of subject positions which individuals inhabit precariously, sometimes wilfully adopting particular subject roles and sometimes finding themselves into certain roles because of their past developmental history or because of others (1997: 34).

However precarious, subject positions within discourses (including disability discourses) are constructed for the reader/viewer (Hall 1997). There is insufficient space to discuss all aspects of disability discourses here;[11] therefore, I limit my discussion to a brief overview of the emergence of disability representations as a field of investigation in its own right and the factors within disability discourses that have influenced it.

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[11] For wider discussion of disability discourses, see Barnes and Mercer 2003; Corker and French 1999; Fawcett 2000; Marks 1999; Oliver 2001.

2.9.1 Disability discourses and models

Disability discourses have had a number of influences but, essentially, they emerged from the work of medical practitioners during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Seventeenth-century medical 'research' was, therefore, the precursor to today's 'science of medicine'. Foucault (1973/1963) has described how, from the seventeenth century onwards the workings of the human body came under scrutiny as medical practitioners sought to establish the function of each internal organ, limb, sensory organ, etc. As Foucault has observed, establishing the functioning of body parts and of the mind enabled medical practitioners (taking the standpoint of the normative 'objective' observer) to separate individuals who they considered deviated from the 'norm'. Disability then was discussed in these terms throughout the early part of the twentieth century in psychology, often linking physical handicaps and personality disorders (Kammerer 1940, cited in Abberley 1993: 107).

Inevitably, the focus of medicine to 'treat' impairment has influenced discourses on disability, as have the definitions and distinctions used by the United Nations (see section 2.2.1). Together these help to indicate the historical basis on which people were categorised. Oliver (1990) has argued that this categorisation resulted in what was termed the 'medical model' of disability.[12] During the 1980s, Oliver (1983) – who distinguished the individual (medical) from societal notion of disability – and others proposed a different way of conceptualising it: the 'social model of disability'. The social model is based on the premise that influences external to the 'disabled person's' body construct their disability (Shakespeare 1996). For example, in the western world our very architecture is exclusionary in the sense that many buildings are inaccessible to people with impairments (Kitchin 2000).[13] However, it should be made clear that the social model was the result of myriad influences: Campbell describes the contribution that various disability groups (rights

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[12] Oliver (1990) also links the rise of capitalism and individual wage labour's effects to the emergence of disability; and Hahn (1997) links the emergence of industrialised society to the institutionalisation of disabled people.
[13] Government Acts (Disability Discrimination Act 1995, SENDA 2001 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005) have ensured that buildings designed for general public must be accessible to all and has resulted in adjustments being made to the entrances to buildings.

movements, access groups, arts) and researchers made to the emergence of the 'fundamental principles of the social model of disability' (1997: 79; see also Abberley 1997; French 1994b). Disability researchers have usefully applied the social model in a number of disciplines – in English to investigations of literary texts (see Chapters 4 and 5); in research on educational practices (Kelly 2006); and in geography to the built environment (Kitchin 2000). This kind of exclusion has directly affected the lives and self-esteem of disabled people, and as Tregaskis has observed the social model 'has been an emancipatory force' in the sense that it has challenged 'internalised oppression' (2002: 457) (see also Sheldon 1999).

Nevertheless, the social model is not without its critics. Notwithstanding its emancipatory effects, Tregaskis goes on to argue that in being materialist in nature, the social model ignores multiple oppression, e.g. gender, race, sexuality, age, and 'plays down the disabling effects of some impairments' (2002: 460). In addition, it tends to essentialise a disabled identity, whereas proponents of the social model should not assume that a:

> 'disabled identity' [is] shared by all people with impairment. [No one] is
> constructed as 'other' in all aspects of their existence [and our mixture] of
> identities may contract, interact with or inform each other, and thus be differently
> implicated within relations of power (Tregaskis 2002: 461-2).

Thomas and Corker have also critiqued the social model; first, because they claim there is a dominant 'masculinist anti-experiential perspective in social modellist work [which] has had the effect of privileging the "restrictions on doing" [over] "restrictions in being" dimensions' (2002: 19).[14] Second, they argue, social modellists have also 'paid insufficient attention to the ways in which different forms of impairment come to be associated with different forms of disablism' (Thomas and Corker 2002: 20). For example, wheelchair users continue to encounter public buildings to which they can only gain access 'round the back'. For some disability researchers, the divisive aspect of the social model, i.e. its proponents'

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[14] Others have sought ways of developing theories to discuss personal experiential aspects of living with disability, DePoy and Gilson (2003), for example, have outlined an approach which they have termed 'explanatory legitimacy theory', which looks for explanations that help to legitimise what is seen as atypical (or non-normative) behaviour.

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insistence that impairment should be dealt with as a separate issue from disability, is most disconcerting. According to the social model 'only people who *have* or are *presumed to have,* an impairment are counted as disabled. Thus, the strict division between the categories of impairment and disability which the social model is claimed to institute is in fact a chimera' (Tremain 2002: 42). Hughes and Patterson claim that the 'social model of disability proposes an untenable separation between body and culture, impairment and disability' and they go on to propose 'an embodied rather than a disembodied, notion of disability' (1997: 326). In countering the social model, disability scholars (some feminist) have argued that personal and experiential aspects are *as* important as investigating the social aspects of disability and disablement (Thomas 1999b, 2001; see also Crow 1996; French 1993; Morris 1991). This debate encouraged disability researchers to propose revised or alternative models, for example, the 'affirmation model' (Swain and French 2000).[15] It also encouraged disabled people to instigate research into specific aspects of cultural concepts surrounding disability (Wendell 1996, 1997, 1999). These have included gender and disability, the environment and disability, representations and misrepresentations of disabled people, medicine and disability.[16] Furthermore, disability writers contend that disability arts contributions should not be simply assimilated into the 'body' of literature, rather the intention of much of this work is affirmation of difference which in itself engenders its own culture (Morrison and Finkelstein 1996; Singer 1999). And Delin and Morrison (1996) have outlined how the experiences of disabled people cannot be viewed in terms of their homogeneity of experience nor taste. What some writers tend to do, however, is to conflate disability politics with writing by and about disabled people (Couser 2002), whereas I would argue that it should not be assumed that politics is necessarily the impetus for writing about disability or including disabled characters in fiction (see Chapters 3–5).

The debates over the social model outlined above indicate one way in which discourses on disability (both within and beyond academia) have evolved. Williams has observed that

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[15] The affirmation model is 'non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people' (Swain and French 2000: 569).
[16] Disability researchers have argued that misrepresentations of disabled people abound both in literature and in other cultural products (e.g. television, film, advertising) and some have demonstrated how many of these (mis)representations are based on medical models of disability (Casling 1994, Darke 1994; Hevey 1992; Kriegel 1987; Shakespeare 1994, 1997).

'one consequence of this Babel of discourses is that the study of disability lacks any unifying theory or perspective. No bad thing ... not having a unifying theory [could] be regarded as evidence of theoretical sophistication' (2001: 125). I would add that behind the debates on the validity and efficacy of various models is Foucault's notion of knowledge and power of and over the body itself.[17] The establishment of the 'medical model' was, undeniably, exclusive in the sense that it denied power to those who came to be labelled 'disabled'. The development of the discourse through the social model and beyond has involved re-questioning of what could be termed 'disability norms'. Aspects of representations of disabled women in texts have come to the fore (see Garland Thomson 1997a,b,c; Keith 2001; Morris 1991, 1996) and there has been a change in the way such representations are investigated. During the 1980s and early 1990s disability researchers discussed the dearth of representations of 'believable' female characters in literature (Kent 1987, 1988); as well as the prevalence of stereotypical disabled characters in film and on television (Longmore 1987; Harnett 2000) and in imagery (Hevey 1992). In British disability studies these evaluations have tended to be underpinned by the social model, and read as negative representations. However, by the mid-1990s other ways of assessing representational strategies began to emerge; for example, in 1994 Darke produced a fascinating Foucaultian analysis of the film *The Elephant Man* from a disability perspective. And within a few years articles and books devoted to representations of disability in literature and film were beginning to emerge. Adams (1996) 'An American tail: freaks, gender, and the incorporation of history in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*'; Garland Thompson's (1997) *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Fiction;* and Keith's (2001) *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls* provide examples of the ways in which the disabled female character's body is beginning to emerge as a subject worthy of study in its own right. (See also Eddy 2000; Frawey 1997; Gilbert and Gubar 1979; LaCom 1997; Miner 1997; Poor 2002; Stoddard Holmes 2002; and Whittington Walsh 2002.)

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[17] I will expand upon this issue in Chapter 3.

2.10 Disembodied 'idealised' females

In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, a rather alarming result of the changing discourses on the body has been the increase in focus on 'dis-embodying' practices on the female body and femininity in order to constantly present it as 'other'. Haraway (1991) has asserted that postmodern women are, ostensibly, constituted of disparate parts (see also Bordo 1993b). Ahmed has claimed that 'identifications perpetually fail to grasp "others" … subjects assume images … they cannot be' (2000: 90), and, according to Bordo such cultural ideology 'sexualises and commodifies women's bodies' (1999: 251). This is apparent in contemporary society: if you flick through today's women's magazines and you will encounter disembodied parts of the female body, often represented to the reader in close up and as flawless creations. Usually, the images have being electronically enhanced with all blemishes, differences in pigmentation and wrinkles on a model's face and body having been erased. Furthermore, some women's magazines are devoted to scrutinising the bodies of celebrity women for signs of pregnancy, excessive thinness or fatness. Alongside these disembodied images are adverts for clinics for liposuction and cosmetic surgery.

The fallacy that is the perfect often fragmented female body is one that assails us directly, as Grosz has pointed out: 'our pleasures and anxieties are always lived and experienced through models, images, representations and expectations (1994: 196-7). We encounter ourselves as often disparate, fragmented parts.[18] As Evans has asserted, 'the genre of advertising is thought to produce effects at the level of desire and to construct sets of viewer identity with the ideal' (1992: 139). Evans (1992) goes on to question what is at work in advertising of mental impairment – a kind of fetishising of the body. Furthermore, this kind of fetishising of the body finds its antecedents elsewhere. In discussing the use of Disability Living Allowance forms on disabled people, Shildrick observes 'the ever more detailed sub-division of bodily behaviour into a set of discontinuous functions speaks to a

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[18] In order to regain control of their bodies some women resort to such psychopathologies as anorexia nervosa, which, according to Bordo (1988) has historico-cultural connections with, for example, corseting.

fetishist fragmentation of the embodied person' (1997: 53). In effect, one could argue that the female body is now seen as permanently 'disabled', because if the 'norm' (and increasingly idealised) repeatedly presented to us is attainable only through unnatural medical practices (advertised in the back of the magazines) —any woman who has not subjected her body to these practices is 'other'.

Figure 2.1: **The Venus de Milo.** *130-120 BC Musee du Louvre, Paris.*   *Figure 2.2:* **Maty Duffy as Venus de Milo.** *Photo: Mary Duffy. 1*

This concept of female bodily perfection is not new. According to Berger, the fifteenth century painter '[Albrecht] Diirer believed that the ideal nude ought to be constructed by taking the face of one body, the breasts of another, the legs of a third, the shoulders of a fourth, the hands of a fifth and so on' (1972: 6). Similarly, the statue entitled, The Venus de Milo (Figure 2.1) is admired mostly for the sculptor's ability to render the idealised female body accurately. The viewer 'fills in' or skims over the missing limbs and scarified surface of the marble (Davis 1997b). Replace the statue with a human female in the same pose

19 See also Mary Duffy's website: www.maryduffy.ie/ and Alison Lapper online at www.alisonlapper.com/

(Figure 2.2) and most people would stare openly rather than gaze with admiration. This is borne out by Duffy's experience when she describes how through photography she began 'to create [her] own reality as a proud disabled woman' and on choosing to address a shocked audience stark naked, she asserts 'I have been stared at all my life ... it feels like I am holding up a mirror to your voyeurism' (1996: 183) (see also section 3.3). This indicates that the real disabled female's embodiment challenges an audience's sense of identity in ways in which a representation does not. I would argue that this is because the representational strategies at work here follow norms that are different from those operating in literary representations.

2.11 Physical impairments

Impairments can be perceptual (e.g. impairment of hearing or sight), illness-related (e.g. multiple sclerosis), physical (e.g. cerebral palsy), cognitive (e.g. Down's syndrome), psychiatric (e.g. chronic depression), mobility-related (e.g. quadriplegia) or environmental (e.g. sensitivity to allergens).[20] However, a bodily configuration that is obvious visually raises more issues related to power-knowledge and the body than, for example, a person with visual or a hearing impairment. A visually or hearing impaired person may, after all, 'pass' for non-disabled (i.e. they may choose to compensate for and/or minimise the effects of their impairment on other people's perceptions), or, claim to employ a different language (i.e. sign language is claimed as a minority language by Deaf people (Haualand 2005)). What is important for this study is how the physical embodiment of a disabled female character differs markedly from the non-disabled characters with wide-ranging consequences and effects. Often the very visibility of the impairment of a character drives the plot of a novel or short story, in a way that a non-disabled character may not. As LaCom has pointed out, disabled bodies began to appear [in the nineteenth century British novel] and to be constructed (often in opposition to "healthy" bodies) – with some regularity' (1997:190). I explore the ways in which authors have chosen to represent the physically disabled as

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[20] Recent legislation has extended this list to include 'a person who has cancer, HIV infection or multiple sclerosis is to be deemed to have a disability , and hence to be a disabled person' (DDA 2005: chapter 13).

different or non-normate or have used disability as a character trait, because I argue it may help shed light on work on the relationship between power and the body.

2.12 Literature and physically disabled characters

A number of researchers have analysed representations of disabled people in literature – for women see Kent (1987, 1988), and for women and men see Gartner and Joe (1987), Hevey (1993), Kriegel (1987) and Shakespeare (1997) – and their work indicates that there are many such representations in both men's and women's writing. This thesis predominantly investigates representations of physically disabled women because feminist and disability researchers have contested that the female body is more often the subject of objectification than the male (an issue touched upon above and that I return to in more detail in Chapter 3). And because, as Lonsdale has stated, 'Men with disability are often portrayed as villains (e.g. Richard III [in Shakespeare's (1623ff) play of the same name]) ... By contrast women with disabilities are hardly depicted at all' (1990: 59). Furthermore, a body of research into what has been termed 'female maladies' hysteria and madness and their representations already exists (see Rigney 1978; Gilman 1985: Showalter 1985).[21] Bodies in which the 'impairment' is not immediately apparent (e.g. deafness) can 'pass' for non-disabled, and thus be the recipient of the same kind of reaction as 'non-disabled' bodies, whereas perceptions of physically impaired or 'marked' bodies bring into play an overt sense of 'othering'. I argue that this sense of 'othering' is further enhanced by gender – effectively resulting in it being 'doubled'; thus I am interested in the ways authors represent the bodies of physically disabled female characters.[22] I demonstrate how the physical impairment will be foregrounded in a specific way to drive the plot, to act as shorthand for specific characteristics and to develop the interplay between notions of, for example, femininity or a lack thereof. Even in post-modern times, authors have a character become 'cured' of her disability when its usefulness as a mechanism for driving the plot has ended (see Chapter 5).

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[21] The *Yellow Wallpaper* (Perkins Gilman 1892) and *The Bell Jar* (Plath 1963) are just two texts that provide studies of mental disintegration.

[22] There are other groups who also experience a double oppression: on minority ethnic disabled people see Stuart 1993; or claim a multiple oppression – see Begum 1992; Begum *et al.* 1994.

One could read this as disability being imbued with special or extra-ordinary qualities – and once the character becomes 'accepted' into the 'norms' of society – her disability becomes unnoticeable, or that cure is a natural conclusion.[23] I would argue that, generally, within many societies, physically impaired people are perceived and represented as occupying a position furthest from the 'norm'. This has been reflected in literature throughout recorded history, and has appeared in other materials produced specifically for cultural consumption (for example, works of art, 'freak' shows, film and advertisements – see also section 4.3).

Furthermore, disabled women are more likely to be 'othered' than disabled men, or 'doubly dis-abled' (Shildrick 1997: 50; see also Deegan and Brooks 1985). Females, in general, are more likely to be objectified – i.e. presented as the recipients of the gaze, than males.[24] As discussed earlier (and in Chapter 3), disability researchers have argued that the impaired person is often the subject of the 'stare' rather than the gaze. My reading of feminist and other disability researchers' work leads me to the conclusion that the disabled female is the subject of a stare that is associated with an unbounded appraisal. As I discuss in section 4.10.1, there is a strong link between the association of women with disability resulting from disease; and men with disability resulting from conflict or accident (Asch and Fine 1988). Therefore, the female character is likely to be appraised more openly and with more associations attached to the origin of her physical impairment than a male character.[25] The fact that very few authors, for example, choose to include a disabled female in their novels unless she is the recipient of such a stare – be it metaphorical or literal – is very telling in terms of our societal beliefs and cultural behaviour (see Chapter 4).

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[23] The character of Adah in the novel *The Piano*, is an example of this kind of 'cure' ending (Campion and Pullinger 1994; see also Molina 1997). See also the discussion of the character Ada/Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

[24] The function of the gaze is discussed by, for example, Berger (1972) and Mulvey (1975) – see also Chapter 3. However, in the westernised world, there has been an increase in focusing the gaze on men and their appearance from the late twentieth century onwards.

[25] Compare, for example, the character Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* (Williams 1945), who is born with a club foot; with Ron Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July* (Kovic 1976), who becomes paralysed as a result of injuries sustained during the conflict in the Vietnam war.

2.13 Conclusions

This chapter has explained the reasoning and historico-cultural imperatives behind the concepts and terminology used throughout the remainder of the thesis. It has demonstrated how a clamour of voices (some institutional, some legal, some academic, and some 'minority' groups as well as individuals) have contributed to disability discourses. It has set the scene on how literary representations of disability can and have been read and debated. It has also provided some justification for the focus on physically disabled (or non-normate) female characters in literature. In so doing this chapter has set the parameters of the investigations in the following chapters.

In the next chapter I discuss the theories that have guided my investigations of representations of physical disabled female characters, which form the focus of Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 3: Writing and representing the body

3.1 Introduction

This chapter indicates how historical, social and cultural imperatives have come to constitute our notions of the body in general; and, in terms of Foucault's writing in particular (1973/1963; 1977/1975; 1981/1976; 1988/1961), have resulted in different conceptions of female embodiment and femininity in contrast to male embodiment and masculinity, especially in relation to disability. Utilising Foucault's genealogies of the body, discourses, power and knowledge allows for a multi-layered analysis of texts and bodies as texts. However, a Foucaultian approach is insufficient here – simply because, as I demonstrate, the physically disabled female body is often represented as agentive in its own right. Therefore, aspects of Bourdieu's (1991) work on power and knowledge about the body will be combined with the approaches of both the work of feminist researchers' work on notions of the female body and femininity and disability researchers' work on representations of the impaired body in order to indicate ways of investigating and discussing representations of the disabled female body.

I demonstrate that the impaired body is 'a site on which discourses are enacted and where they are contested' (Mills 2003b: 81). Within the disparate discourses discussed, it becomes apparent that the power/knowledge over and of the body is the linking paradigm. The more that is learned about the body, the more there is to be said; especially where the different theoretical approaches intersect and can be usefully applied to literary representations of the disabled female body.

First, Foucault's genealogies are related most specifically to concepts of intelligible (inscribed with meaning) and manageable bodies; and the ways in which *bio-power* and self-surveillance have come to be implicit in controlling bodies – especially in relation to

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gender.[1] I then demonstrate how feminist researchers and others (such as Bartky 1988; Bordo 1993a; Shildrick 1997) have drawn on the work of Foucault to argue that notions of the materiality of disabled women's bodies often echo historical conceptions about female embodiment and femininity. Similarly, others (Gatens 1996; Butler 1999; Lawler 2004) have indicated how Bourdieu's notions of *habitus* and *hexis* help indicate that bodies are not simply sites where power relations are enacted, but agentive in their own right. Taken together these perspectives indicate how knowledge production has become metaphorically located in the body itself. In the later sections of this chapter I discuss how discourses about the impaired female body have built up from those on female embodiment and femininity and disability researchers' work on representations of impairment. The later sections elucidate how these theoretical and practical viewpoints interlink and indicate their usefulness in analysing texts in which one of the main characters is a physically disabled woman. In Chapters 4 and 5, these are applied to novels that have a physically impaired (or non-normate) female character at the centre. First, though I outline the contribution of Foucault and feminist researchers have made to discourses on the body and power in order to demonstrate how this reflects some of the discussion of disability, the body and power (see section 2.9).

3.2 Foucault and feminists on bodies and power

Foucault suggests that since medieval times, power has permeated concepts of bodies; within feudal society the sovereign embodied absolute power because he had 'the right to decide life and death' over all his subjects (1981/1976: 125). This 'juridical form' of power was essentially 'a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself' (Foucault 1981/1976: 136). According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, this 'juridisco-discursive' power is:

> thoroughly negative … It lays down the law then limits and circumscribes …
> power is domination. All it can do is forbid [and] command obedience. Power is
> repression [and as] the law it demands submission (1982: 130).

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[1] Foucault's genealogical approach involves tracing the 'history' of the meanings ascribed to, for example, bodies and the ways in which these have shaped our conceptions of bodies.

However, by the seventeenth century this form of power over the body had been superseded by two forms:

> the first ... centred on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility ... the second ... focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity (Foucault 1981/1976: 139).

Foucault terms these powers disciplinary 'an anatomo-politics of the human body' and regulatory 'a bio-politics of the population' respectively, and claims that both were necessary for the administration 'of power over life' (Rabinow 1984: 262). This entailed the 'regulation ... supervision of the smallest fragments of life' (Foucault 1977/1975: 140). The resulting 'disciplinary society' then is one in which 'the body is approached as an object to be analysed and separated into its constituent parts' (Foucault 1977/1975: 136); behind which are the concepts of the body as useful in the sense that it can be regulated, and as intelligible in the sense that its operations can be controlled.

The notion of the body as both useful and intelligible are concretised in a technology of power or *bio-power*, which in effect constructs a 'non-existent object (sex) which can then be discovered' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 183). The functioning of the body is the object which, through the deployment of *bio-power*, is analysed and manipulated and thus rendered docile (Foucault 1977/1975). A docile body is one that is both active in terms of production and passive in terms of allowing itself to be subjected to certain practices; for example, a factory worker works at a specific speed for a set number of hours. Foucault describes the regulatory practices as imbuing every aspect of such individual's lives and 'giving rise to infinitesimal surveillance, permanent controls ... meticulous orderings of space' (Foucault 1981/1976: 145). Although, as Foucault demonstrates, such controls were concerned with the body, they had the effect of affecting the 'entire social body or groups taken as a whole' (1981/1976: 146).

Foucault describes how, during the eighteenth century these disciplinary and regulatory practices were further refined, and interest focused on the body 'at the individual (retail) rather than the mass (wholesale) level' (1977/1975: 137). Discipline over bodies was distributed through *enclosure* of individuals who were then disciplined (e.g. soldiers in barracks); *partitioning* in order to supervise individuals (e.g. prisons); within *functional sites*, or coded and regulated spaces (e.g. hospital wards); each of which was classified to allow for *ranking* (Foucault 1977/1975). These spatially-based disciplinary activities were also accompanied by temporal ones in which the body was 'embedded in time through gestures and acts' (Foucault 1977/1975: 151-2). This 'instrumental coding' also extends to objects that the disciplined body manipulates, e.g. there is a meticulous meshing between the body and, say, the gun carried by a guard, so that together these 'objects' 'constitute a body-weapon, a body tool, a body-machine' (Foucault 1977/1975: 154).[2] These kinds of practices resulted in what Foucault terms a 'mechanical' (1977/1975: 155) or disciplined body which became couched and viewed in positive terms, whereas the undisciplined body (i.e. one that is unable to operate at maximum speed and efficiency) is described as 'idle' and often viewed in negative terms. Foucault's observation that '[t]he instrumental coding of the body ... the parts of the body to be used in correlation with the instrument used' (1977/1975: 153) may also go some way to explaining attitudes toward prosthetics and mechanical aid devices.[3] Ravauld and Stiker have observed, such attitudes often involve rehabilitation of the impaired body 'to reduce [its] deviation from the norm ... The individual must act "like others," even if it requires ... prostheses' (2001: 507). Yuan has described such rehabilitation as a means to 'disguise the intolerable fact of the incomplete body' (1997: 75). The representation of the incomplete body in relation to a prosthetic (in this case a wheelchair) and body coding in relation to femininity is touched upon in my discussion of *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) in Chapter 5.

As the eighteenth century progressed, the mechanical body was superseded by the 'natural body', which underpins notions of regulatory practices. The natural body itself was posited as the 'bearer of forces' in that, for example, it would find the natural position for sitting or

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[2] For the purpose of this thesis the instrumental coding of body 'objects' also relates to hearing aids, prosthetics and wheelchairs.
[3] Prosthetics can also lead to the disabled body being read as 'cyborg', see Haraway (1991).

standing rather than having one imposed on it (Foucault 1977/1975). This body appears to have become more agentive, but this supposition is false, in Foucault's terms, because all actions are a result of externally imposed or learned disciplinary structures. Rather, discipline is an art of 'composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine' (Foucault 1977/1975; 164). Foucault (1977/1975) draws on the thinking of Marx when positing that in terms of productive forces one body is articulated in relation to others, and indicates that in such cases the body operates 'not through an enslavement of others, but through an affirmation of self' (1981/1976: 123) (see Chapter 2). Affirmation of self was linked to the affirmation of the body in a number of ways. In order to illustrate this Foucault discusses the concept of blood lines (antiquity of ancestry) in the aristocracy:

> families wore and concealed a sort of reversed and sombre escutcheon whose defamatory quarters were the diseases or defects of the group of relatives – the grandfather's general paralysis, the mother's neurasthenia, the youngest child's phthisis, the hysterical or erotomanic aunts (1981/1976: 124-5).

Such 'defects' were apparently deemed the acceptable side effect of keeping aristocratic blood lines 'pure' in eighteenth-century society. For the bourgeoisie 'the affirmation of the body [involved converting] the blue blood of the nobles into a sound organism and a healthy sexuality' (Foucault 1981/1976: 126). This indicates, to some extent, the power invested in and emanating from the body. One can see that the notion of the health of the sovereign standing for the health of the nation in medieval society re-appeared in the body of the aristocracy in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, Foucault's position is somewhat contradictory: he maintains that power is dispersed and fluid but does not say it is equalised; therefore, the elevation of one sector of society (the aristocracy) indicates that regulatory practices tended to involve unbalanced power relations, i.e. some 'enslavement of others' (the proletariat). Furthermore, although Foucault accounted for people whose power was (and still is) denied by societal 'norms', because he tended to view the body as a site of power relations he was less interested in investigating their 'voice' even though he must have been aware that they must work doubly hard to enter the discourse (see Thornborrow

2002).[4] Nevertheless, given time, self-surveillance at the site of the body was to prove more effective at maintaining society as a whole.
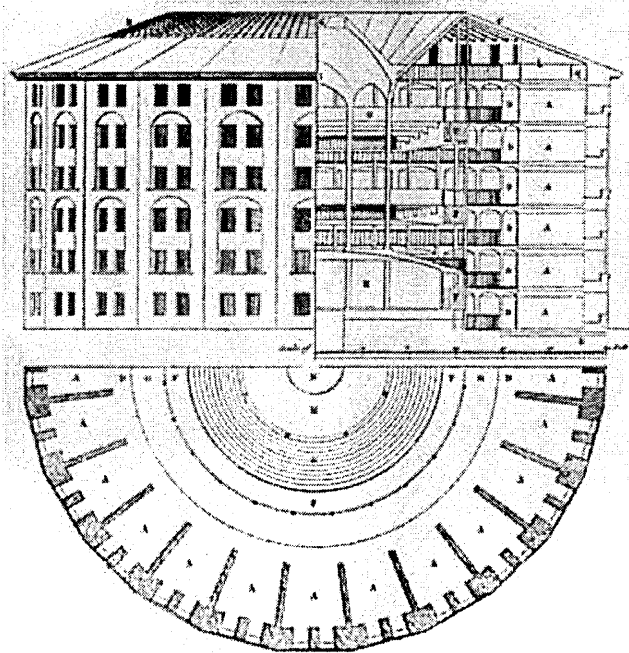
Figure 3.1: Institutional surveillance, based on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon design, later permeated self-surveillance. Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Foucault

The grounding example of the development of self-surveillance is Jeremy Bentham's penitentiary panopticon (Foucault 1977/1975). As Figure 3.1 indicates, Bentham's design incorporates a central observation tower with windows overlooking each prisoner's cell – which form a circle around the tower; the lighting is such that at any one time no prisoner knows whether they are being watched and thus is impelled to behave as though they are (Foucault 1977/1975). In effect, there is 'an inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he [sic] is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself' (Foucault 1977/1975:

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[4] Foucault was less interested in practices than utterances because he realised that practices are the materiality out of which power relations are produced (Mallett, personal communication).

155). This adjustment of behaviour requires constant self-awareness, self-surveillance and (through these) self-regulation, which came to be used to good effect at the individual level. Thus, disciplinary procedures enacted on the body become normalised practice, which as Mills has pointed out, 'within Western cultures are not necessarily experienced as originating from institutions, so thoroughly have they been internalised by individuals' (2003b: 43-4). What is of interest here, is how the kind of self-surveillance that ensued from the ideas underpinning Bentham's panopticon resulted in increasingly different 'rules' being applied to the surveillance and self-surveillance of female and male bodies, as the next section indicates and is related to the novels explored in Chapter 4.

3.3 Gazing on gendered bodies

The increasing intensity of self-surveillance engendered a separation, categorisation and then governing of different typologies of bodies on different bases, including sex. According to Lacqueur, before 1800 the 'one-sex' model prevailed; this viewed women's bodies to be 'inferior versions of the male body' on both abstract and material levels (cited in Shildrick 1997: 27; see also Sheldon 2002). Eventually however, a 'two-sex' model – in which the sexes came to be seen as opposites rather than being commensurate with each other – was developed (Shildrick 1997). Returning to Foucault; during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the focus on sex was endemic:

> many other centres ... came to produce discourses on sex. First, there was medicine, via the 'nervous disorders'; next psychiatry, when it set out to discover the etiology of mental illnesses, focusing its gaze first on 'excess' ... and lastly, all those social controls, cropping up at the end of the last century, which screened the sexuality of couples, parents and children, dangerous and endangered adolescents – undertaking to protect, separate, and forewarn (1981/1976: 30-1).

This surveillance and self-surveillance on the grounds of sex difference is captured in Berger (1972), who observes that men are seen to embody power, whereas:

> a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself. [It] is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions ... A woman must constantly watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself ... From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she considers the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman (1972: 46).

According to Berger (1972), women, more than men, are both gazed upon and self-survey constantly and concomitantly. Similarly, Young has observed that 'for feminine existence the body frequently is both subject and object for itself at the same time' (2003: 169). Although dealing with 'visual pleasure and the narrative cinema', Mulvey echoes this viewpoint when she suggests that 'pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female', and goes further in positing that: 'The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly' (1998/1975: 589).[5] If one follows these arguments through, it becomes apparent that social and historical imperatives have given rise to a situation where women, more than men, have a heightened awareness of their own embodiment and are constantly adjusting themselves as both subject and object in other people's eyes.[6] I would argue that this behaviour is reflected in literary representations, as is apparent in my exploration of *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) and *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) in Chapter 4.

Berger posits that this duality has its roots 'in the art-form of the European nude [where] the painters and spectator-owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women' (1972: 63). Moreover, the idea of women as passive and men as active beings reappears in cinematic portrayals of women, underpinned by 'the ideology of the patriarchal order' (Mulvey 1998/1975: 594). According to Berger, this 'unequal relationship is so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women' (1972: 63). Women survey, enact and re-enact their own femininity.

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[5] See also discussion of disability in Chapter 2 and Figure 2.2.
[6] There have been, however, instances of male self-grooming throughout the ages; in the latter part of the twentieth century it has entered the mass media through advertising and celebrity endorsements (for example, the French footballer David Ginola advertising l'Oreal hair products).

Figure 3.2 goes some way to illustrating the nature of the woman as surveyor, purveyor and surveyed in art. The reclining woman gazes at the artist, while the head of a man looking at her through the window is incorporated to the right of the canvas, and the artist must (of necessity) also gaze upon her: therefore the woman is doubly conscious of herself.

Figure 3.2: Reclining Bacchante by Felix Trutat (1824-48). Source:
www.people.virginia.edu/~tpf2e/seeing.html

What Berger does not mention is that this surveillance was underpinned by centuries of a medical management focused (amongst other things) on 'the *hystericization* of women which involved a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex' (Foucault 1981/1976: 146-7). Ehrenreich and English have claimed that the very theories 'which guided doctors' practice from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century' were not based on empirical observation, instead it was accepted as a physiological fact 'that woman's *normal* state was to be sick' (1979: 99; see also Showalter 1985). This has wider implications: the woman's body and its functioning were, in effect, problematised – *not just for herself* but 'in organic communication with the social body … the family space' (Foucault 1981/1976: 104). Individual women were impelled to remain constantly vigilant about the ways in which their very biological embodiment might affect the workings of society as a whole. Thus, although the action of women was taken at an individual level, it included a 'consideration

of disease as a political and economic problem for social collectivities' (Rabinow 1984: 273).[7]

Feminists, like researchers in disability representations (section 2.7), have argued that the functioning of women's bodies tended to be couched in the negative, and claim that this attitude has endured. Shildrick describes how even today:

> Losing control of oneself is to a large degree synonymous with losing control of, or having no control over one's body. In scientific and medical discourse in particular, it is quintessentially a feminine rather than a masculine trait, predictable and tolerated in women ... Normative constructions of [female 'disorders' such as pre-menstrual tension and menopausal irritability] suggest someone who is in need of control by others (1997: 26-7).

Historically, this is evidenced in the results of analyses carried out in the name of medicine, which led to the appearance of, 'new personages ... the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother, the hysterical or neurasthenic girl' (Foucault 1981/1976: 110). Moreover, to fit in with concepts of discipline and order, once evaluated each typology could be placed into a hierarchy of behaviour, which then enabled a 'medico-administrative' power/knowledge to operate (Rabinow 1984: 283). Sometimes the medico-administrative advice involved remaining within the private or domestic sphere and undertaking limited activities. Thus, through such self-surveillance, even the 'idle' woman and the woman 'afflicted with "vapours"' was to feel that she had a value to society – even where this was related negatively, through the (mis)functioning of her body (Foucault 1981/1976: 121). As Ehrenreich and English observe 'If you have to be idle, you might as well be sick , and sickness, in turn, legitimises idleness' (1979: 98). Foucault describes how such self-medication required 'a reflective mode of relation to oneself, to one's body ... a voluntary and rational structure of conduct' and thus had the effect of normalising specific behaviour in women in relation to their biological sex (1988/1984: 100). This reflective mode included communicating the functioning of one's body and/or mind in great detail.

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[7] The formation of charitable organisations in the nineteenth century gave further impetus to the surveillance over illness and disease – especially among the lower classes, who were themselves viewed as a menace to the health of the social body (Rabinow 1984: 274). However, the issue of the influence of charitable organisations (both in their activities and their marketing) is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Following the model of the church confessional, both women and men were required to confess their 'private thoughts and practices' to doctors and psychiatrists (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 171).[8] This requires the kind of intimate self-surveillance discussed above. Yet, with such surveillance, for women 'the absence of formal institutional structures ... creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural' when it is not (Bartky 1988: 75); similarly Bordo argues that the 'normative feminine practices of our culture ... train the female body into docility and obedience [but are] experienced in terms of power and control' (1993a: 27).[9] In this involuntary and unnatural activity many women accept the production of idealised femininity as the 'norm', and in so doing continually collude in patriarchal culture. Nevertheless, according to Bordo, 'dominant forms and institutions are continually being penetrated and reconstructed by values, styles and knowledge that have been developed and gather strength, energy and distinctiveness "at the margins"' (1993a: 27). This relates to Foucault's idea of power in the form of discipline that rather than being held by one person or group (e.g. royalty or the aristocracy), power is dispersed and acted upon freely by people whatever their position within society.

As the above discussion indicates, a gender imbalance becomes apparent: the materiality of individual women's bodies came to underpin societal perceptions of femininity and female sexuality in a quite different way to those of men's bodies, masculinity and male sexuality. The 'science of medicine' ensured that *bio-power* resulted in the feminine being presented as requiring 'treatment' different from that of the masculine. As such it echoes 'juridisco-discursive power' in that it is based on domination and repression (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Bartky notes that Foucault 'treats the body ... as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life' (1988: 63). Although Foucault does discuss: 'distributing the living in the domain of value and utility' and points out that by qualifying, measuring, appraising and hierarchising it 'effects distribution around the

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[8] In the early twentieth century, psychoanalytic practice included 'confession' of one's private thoughts. For women this had huge implications. The work of Freud, for example, led to the hypothesis that female behaviour was linked to their perception of lack (of phallus or penis) (Rivkin and Ryan 1998: 127).
[9] The 'production' of femininity through unbound practices (for example, the wearing of make up) and its implications for women in terms of disability is discussed further below and in relation to novels in Chapters 4 and 5.

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norm' (1981/1976: 144), he also all-but overlooks the fact that impaired bodies have historically had a very different relationship with 'the characteristic institutions of life', and in so doing reproduces western ablism. Foucault's discussion on the 'norm' centres around what came to be seen as sexual deviancy, but any dominant ideology on the body can only be constructed *after and in relation to* the delineation of those who do not adhere to a specific corporeality has been established. Moreover, as Davis argues, 'the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society' (1997a: 9). Society and societal practices, then, tend to establish such abstract concepts as 'a norm'; in this instance how scientific-medicine came to delineate the feminine body as 'impaired' relative to the masculine body. I will focus upon Foucault's discussion of normalising procedures in the next section and relate them to those on disability and the binary construction normate/non-normate (section 2.3).

3.4 Foucault on normalising procedures

According to Foucault the rise of the examination 'combines the techniques of observing hierarchy' which, he argues, has arisen through the disciplinary procedures of earlier centuries 'and those of a normalizing judgement' (1977/1975: 184). Underpinning much of Foucault's (1977/1975) discussion is the concept of 'normalising' procedures. Foucault argues that such normalising procedures involved 'a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them' (1977/1975: 184). Implicit in this work is the notion that wherever a disciplinary practice evolved in relation to perceived bodily difference, it was subsumed into societal practices to ensure that dominant ideologies on embodiment would continue to prevail. Moreover, notions of bodily difference, in terms of embodiment and functioning, form the basis of medical, economic, scientific and political practices and institutions – all forms of *bio-power*. Foucault describes how one consequence of the development of such *bio-power* was 'the growing importance assumed by the action of the norm ... Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise and hierarchize ... it effects distributions around the norm' (1981/1976: 144).

Foucault (1977/1975) continues by illustrating how one way of separating the 'normal' from the 'abnormal' arose to combat the spread of the plague. This entailed quarantine and constant surveillance of the inhabitants of each dwelling, and Foucault suggests that this system had its roots in: 'the constant division between the normal and the abnormal' (1977/1975: 199). Behind all the 'mechanisms of discipline' is 'normalizing power' and the:

> universal reign of the normative ... and each individual ... subjects to it in his [sic]
> body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral
> network, in its compact or disseminated forms ... has been ... the normalizing
> power (Foucault 1977/1975: 304).

Foucault demonstrates how the disciplinary practices (in the form of techniques for isolation) triumphed in the sense that they had evolved to the extent that 'the fear of the plague [could be] successfully transformed into the fear of the abnormal', a fear that could be used to justify isolation on the grounds of illness or impairment and its possible threat to society (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 191). As Foucault suggests, 'by operating at every level of the social body and by mingling ceaselessly the art of rectifying ... the universality of the carceral lowers the level from which it becomes natural and acceptable to be punished' (1977/1975: 304). Here, 'punishment' is being excluded. With this right to punish comes the idea of normalising influence, punishment being meted out on those who deviate from a norm. Thus, 'normalisation' procedures are simultaneously created and perpetuated through the imposition of *bio-power* as well as being continually re-enacted throughout the social body and upon the individual (as will be seen in the novels discussed in Chapter 4).

3.5 Normative and non-normative

The above discussion indicates that standards of normativity are discursively constructed (Davis 1997a). Yet a normalisation procedure is being enacted even with bodies that '"fail" to conform' to the notion of 'normative' (Shildrick with Price 1999a: 11). Such is the power of the normative on the body that eventually society comes to associate certain attitudes

and behaviours with bodies that are perceived as excessive or lacking (such as conjoined twins, people of small stature, those with superabundant hair) (see also Porter 1997); these 'abnormal' bodies or practices become subsumed into the normative hierarchy. As Butler (1990, 1999) has observed, repeatedly performing or reiterating femininity, for example, normalises concepts of the feminine and effectively embeds it into everyday perceptions of women's bodies. Thus, societal expectations are built up as to what constitutes normative female behaviour and appearance, which is represented in, for instance, contemporary advertisements. According to Bordo 'normalisation [remains] the *dominant* order of the day, even in a postmodern context' (1999: 246), and it is a small step to extrapolate these kinds of normalisation procedures to representations of physically impaired bodies in novels.[10] I contend that focusing on the physically impaired female body in literature can help elucidate our understanding of the effects of 'normalisation procedures' in relation to impaired bodies and femininity (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Foucault's (1973/1963; 1977/1975; 1988/1961) approach to tracing the history of medical and scientific discourses on the body has also had a 'normalising' effect on our understanding of the materiality of the body. Although useful in conceptualising the body in specific ways, his work has given rise to yet more discussion of the body as an abstract entity at both the macro (or societal) level and the micro (individual) level. Some researchers have drawn attention to the fact that Foucault 'never fully accounted for why certain bodies were considered deviant, never fully explained the ontology of deviance' (Davis 2002: 105 note).[11] Others have pointed out that, because Foucault posits the body as invested with 'historically specific forms of power', the concept of 'the body *simpliciter*, as a substratum prior to power ... drops out of the picture altogether' (Fraser 1989: 61); he also appears uninterested in the individual agency and materiality of the body itself, which are as important to our understandings of representations of the body in all its guises. Finally, for this part of my discussion, Foucault (1981/1976) limits his account of the effect of interactions between the macro (societal and temporal) level and the micro (individual)

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[10] Davis has claimed that the depiction of 'the average character in the novel, a genre that is devoted to the depiction of daily life, [results in] the novel [being] a form centrally concerned with the norm' (2002: 103). For Davis, normalising procedures appear to infiltrate literary texts, as well as the characters represented therein.
[11] In his discussion, Davis (2002) argues that deviance comes under pressure both from those (e.g. medical scientists) who attempt to normalise physical differences and from concepts of the norm.

level to homosexuality, rather than expanding it to include representations of the homosexual body in cultural products. Thus, he overlooks the normalising paradigms associated with experiences of or encounters with non-normate (i.e. feminine and impaired) bodies in specific settings during specific periods and the way these are represented in products that circulate more freely in culture and society.[12] While Bourdieu's (1991) proposal of *habitus* may not reveal 'truths' about our notions of bodies it is useful in elucidating social-historical influences and bodily agency within texts.

3.6 Bourdieu: bodily *habitus* and *hexis*

According to Butler, *habitus* consists of 'those embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own "obviousness"' (1999: 113). *Habitus* is then a disposition to behave or react to in certain ways to specific situation. Bourdieu argues that we all have dispositions that, 'incline us to act/react in specific ways', and that this *habitus* is *inculcated* in us from early childhood; *structured* to reflect social conditions; *durable* in that behaviours and attitudes become ingrained in our bodies and endure for life (i.e. 'operate preconsciously'); and are *generative and transposable* in that they can be generated in one setting and transferred to another (Bourdieu 1991: 12). In addition, Bourdieu claims that although the notion of *habitus* rules our daily behaviour, it neither follows rules nor is it consciously co-ordinated (1991). It can be understood as acting somewhat as an individual 'normalising' procedure, but one that we constantly work and re-work as new situations arise that challenge our previously held values, attitudes and behaviours. Related to this is the concept of a practical sense – a state of body rather than mind, or corporeal *hexis*, which is:

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[12] As Young notes '[t]he situation of women within a sociohistorical set of circumstances ... has a unity that can be described and made intelligible. It should be emphasized, however, that this unity is specific to a particular social formation during a particular epoch' (2003: 164). Only in retrospect can a specific historical periods and specific behavioural and linguistic tendencies be constructed and discussed as occurring during those periods. Here we can only speculate, but such speculation on bodies and the discourses surrounding them is often accepted as a 'truth' inherent in bodies *at that time*, whereas, as Shildrick points out 'truth itself is constructed not discovered' (1997: 22). This is especially applicable to disability – as discussed in Chapter 2, the impaired body as a concept is a recent phenomena, whereas, as this chapter demonstrates, notions of idealised femininity are much older.

> a certain durable organization of one's body and its deployment in the world [it] is a political mythology realised, *embodied,* turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking (Bourdieu 1991: 13).

Durable here is taken in the sense of both enduring and malleable in different situations. Butler has observed that, for Bourdieu, the body itself is 'a form of engagement with the world', which, rather than acting in accordance with ritualised practises as espoused by Foucault, does so as an act of 'incorporated memory' (Butler 1999: 115). It is the materiality of the body that 'is recast as a practical activity [and *habitus*] is generated by the tacit normativity that governs the social game in which the embodied subject acts' (Butler 1999: 115). In addition to the genealogy of the body developed in Foucault's writing, Bourdieu's approach works to imply that the materiality of the body is itself an active (political) agent in expression equal (as it were) to that of the mind.[13] Thus, Bourdieu's notions of bodily *habitus* and *hexis* can be used as modifiers to Foucault's notions of the ways in which power is acted upon and within the materiality of the body.

According to Mills, a discourse is created centring on the body and it becomes 'the "place" where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted' (2003b: 35). Like disability researchers, feminists have come to view the body as a site of political struggle through 'materiality as a direct grip culture has on our bodies, practices and habits of daily life' (Bordo 1993a: 16). And Butler (1999) suggests that it is through the constant 'performing' of, for example femininity, that notions of the feminine body become embedded with power associated with society and culture (see also Young 2003). According to Shildrick with Price, this helps explain 'how the deployment of the body through activities and gestures ... are productive of a discursive identity that is both open and constrained' (1999a: 8). This would indicate that in order to understand the agency and materiality implicit in bodies more fully then we should also take account of the way individual embodiment appears in both social practices and is represented in cultural products, and how these work to reiterate each other.

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[13] This is illustrative only the body and mind are one and the same entity acting in accordance with each other (see also discussion of the phenomena of cellular memory in Caroll n.d.).

What is also useful for my investigation of representations of physically disabled women is Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic power because it deals with 'aspects of most forms of power as they are routinely deployed in social life' (1991: 23). For Bourdieu, as for Foucault, power here is not a physical force – instead it circulates in that it, often constructed from below, 'always rests upon a foundation of shared belief ... those who benefit least, participate, to some extent, in [the symbolic exchange and thus] their own subjection ... Dominated individuals are not passive bodies' (1991: 23). As I will indicate in Chapters 4 and 5, individuals who write about disabled bodies take part in the symbolic exchange of power in that their texts are overtly, or covertly, as political statements – i.e. each one is part of the struggle over identity beyond and within the paradigm of disability and femininity discourses. According to Bourdieu:

> Struggles over identity [are] struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe ... to impose the legitimate definition of divisions of the social world and, thereby, to *make and unmake groups* (1991: 221).

Drawing on Bourdieu's ideas, one could say that physically disabled people share 'a unique vision' of their identity and perhaps 'an identical vision of its unity' (Bourdieu 1991: 224).[14] Aligned to this is the notion of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991) whereby some social practices have a higher status and are therefore deemed more valuable than others. In relation to the body this may involve resistant practice of a particular type of identity eventually becoming accepted into society.[15] These initially resistant practices come into being through a recognition of powerlessness and often relate to specific identity-based labels (Thornborrow 2002). Within this 'shared' identity disabled women themselves make and unmake a group identity that is associated with physical impairment by, for example,

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[14] Though this view is not shared by all disabled people – see section 2.8 and Asch and Fine, who have pointed out 'the category ... "disabled women and girls", exists wholly as a social construct. Why should a limb-deficient girl, a teenager with mental retardation, or a blind girl have anything in common with each other?' (1988: 6).

[15] Here I am thinking of members of the Deaf community preferring to self-identify as minority language users (Haualand 2005).

appropriating previously denigrating labels.[16] On the one hand, their engagement with the social world in the form of auto/biography takes account of the notion of the symbolic power invested in their body; and, on the other, material power also comes into play – the materiality of physical impairment is immediately apparent and read in specific ways (Mitchell and Snyder 2001).

Returning to the discussion of stigma in Chapter 2, Bourdieu (1991) has observed that it is the relations between material power and symbolic power that enables agents to classify other agents (one person to separate his/her identity from that of (an)other). I would argue that authors can and do utilise strategies that 'seek to put these classifications at the service of their material or symbolic interests' (Bourdieu 1991: 225) in order to explore representations of disabled characters (see Chapters 4 and 5). Although this is often intended in such a way as to challenge notions of physically disabled people as a homogenous group, it is from 'within' this group that symbolic power can be and is drawn. However, although both Foucault and Bourdieu discussed texts on occasions, neither overtly drew attention to disability *per se* in texts – instead, I look to the work of feminist and disability researchers for elucidation on the female body and femininity and the disabled body and disability in texts.

3.7 Discourses on the body

Thus far I have mentioned how some feminist and disability researchers have made use of Foucault's writing on the body. In order to 'avoid the impasses of traditional theorizing about the body' (Grosz 1994: 189), I explore those discourses on the body that have contributed to discourses on representations of the physically disabled female body. Although there are many strands to bodily discourses, the research investigated here is that by feminists and disability researchers.

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[16] Lisicki (1990) and Marks (1999) provide examples of disabled women who re-appropriate previously denigrating terms, often ironically.

Gatens (1999) has observed that discourses, as posited by Foucault (see section 2.9.1), are part of power relations, and that within these relations a 'multiplicity of discursive elements ... can come into play in various strategies' (Foucault 1981/1976: 100). I demonstrate that these discursive elements can and do appear within feminist and disability research into representations of the body in a number of different ways, and that these are often predicated upon power relations in terms of gender. I then look at the intersections in these approaches and, in the following Chapters, demonstrate how these intersections can be used to explore representations of physically disabled women in novels. In a departure from earlier sections, I link the theory directly to the novels explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.8 Embodiment

The way we describe embodiment is not as obvious as we would expect because, according to Bordo, 'we are no longer given verbal descriptions ... of what femininity [and disability] consists. Rather we learn the rules directly through bodily discourses' (1993a: 170). Thus, this section looks at the discourses that have been established around female embodiment in relation to mind/body binarisms, gender and bodily boundaries. Here, I will demonstrate that the intersections of these discourses enable one to explore the ways in which disabled women's bodies are represented in novels throughout Chapters 4 and 5, but first I would like to discuss gender and mind/body binarisms.

3.8.1 Gender and mind/body binarisms

This section deals with the concept of the mind/body binarism and the way it has been constructed and referred to in relation to gender. Historically, the female body has often been equated with passive materiality (instinct), whereas the male spirit has been seen as the guiding force (reason): being of the mind and 'standing clear of the flesh' (Bordo 1993a: 5).[17] According to Bordo, this mind/body binarism 'is no mere philosophical position ... it

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[17] See also Spelman 1999, and the discussion of western notions of men, women and the gaze in section 3.3.

is a *practical* metaphysics that has been deployed and socially embedded in medicine, law, literary and artistic representations, the psychic construction of self [and] popular culture and adverts' (1993a: 13). This practical metaphysics can be traced to Greek philosophy: Plato described the body as 'untrustworthy' and the fourth/fifth century philosopher and theologian Augustine, termed it 'animal' (Bordo 1993a: 3). This view of the body endured: in the seventeenth century science and philosophy conceived of the body as animal in the sense that it was biologically programmed but possible to control. Bordo (1993a) states that underpinning these descriptions is a tension between the mind and the body where the latter constantly seeks to undermine the former, and that in women this is much more likely to be the case.

Foucault (1977/1975) was also concerned with the notion of the body as an abstract concept separate from the mind and especially one that is acted upon in relation to the dominant ideology. Relating it to gender, Foucault (1981/1976) describes how, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the biological functioning of the female body was systematically used to undermine the analytical powers of women, thus rendering them unfit to engage with, for example, politics or science.[18] This 'practical metaphysical' position became embedded within society at a number of levels. In the deployment of this position in eighteenth-century medicine, for example, a link was made between femininity, sexuality and sickness:

> the feminine body was analysed ... as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality ...
> it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices [and] placed in organic
> communication with the social body [and] the life of children ... the Mother, with
> her negative image of 'nervous woman', constituted the most visible form of ...
> hystericization (Foucault 1981/1976: 104).

The outcome of this bodily analysis effectively grounded women within the domestic sphere: the Mother (note the capital M) was expected to be useful only in the sense of the production and nurturing of children. However, Foucault continues, that in the process of the hystericization of women: "'sex" was defined ... as that which belongs, *par excellence*, to

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[18] One could argue that this is, perhaps, why women in Great Britain were not permitted to vote in national elections until the early twentieth century.

men, and hence is lacking in women; but at the same time as that which by itself constitutes woman's body' (1981/1976: 153). Thus, Foucault (1981/1976) posits that women became perceived as being reduced to the functioning of their body and, more importantly, the workings of women's mind (or intellectual capacity) were also intrinsically linked to their bodily functioning. However, this itself was deemed unstable (an issue I explore in relation to acquired and cured disability in Chapter 5), which introduces the notion that women were more aware of the functioning of their bodies than men. This gendered approach to embodiment is reflected in the work of feminist researchers.

3.8.2 Embodiment and the gender split

Feminists have explored female embodiment from a number of perspectives, some of which closely relate women's awareness of their bodies to their behaviour and understanding of the world. To take just two examples: first, Grosz claims that 'in opposition to male misogynist notions, feminists have conceptualised the female body as a unique means of access to knowledge and ways of living' (1994: 15). Second, others refer to the psychological sense in which women's embodiment 'becomes noteworthy [for example] when particularities in one's form of embodiment – such as race, gender or physical abnormality – acts as a disability in the context of particular social settings' (Sheldon 2002: 15). Sheldon's statement focuses on female embodiment being other to the male whatever the context, and disabling within particular social settings; whereas Grosz (contra to Foucault's use of lack discussed above) introduces the notion of women's embodiment endowing them with qualities that men lack. Thus, women's embodiment renders them as other and gives them a different perspective on life compared to men.

The concept of female as other to male has its roots in ancient Greek thinking – Aristotle asserted 'The first beginning of [the] deviation [i.e. something straying from the generic type] is when a female is formed instead of a male' (quoted in Garland Thomson 1997a: 270). Bodily deviance from the norm (or generic type) has tended to lead to a 'fateful link between social deviance and the morally correct' (Brandt cited in Epstein and Straub 1991: 15). This issue is apparent in my exploration of other characters' attitudes towards Mattie

in *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911). Thus, as well as the mind/body split outlined above, female embodiment became linked inextricably to immorality of mind and such a state was perceived as a threat to bodily boundaries; the containment of which becomes imperative.

3.8.3 Bodily boundaries

The integrity of bodily boundaries is often predicated upon a sense of self. According to Begum 'for many women self-image is synonymous with body image' (1992: 75), and Klein defines 'self' as 'everything constituting an integral part of a given individual' (1982: 5). Here, I read self-image to indicate both a physical boundary between oneself and the world and a metaphorical indication of those we recognise as 'same'. To retain order, Epstein and Straub claim that gender systems first delimit then contain 'the threatening absence of boundaries between human bodies and bodily acts that would otherwise explode the organisational and institutional structures of social ideologies' (1991: 2). As argued earlier, some bodies and bodily boundaries are perceived as irruptable. As my exploration of representations of physically disabled women in novels in Chapters 4 and 5 indicates, often the perception of the irruptability of bodily boundaries is related to our understandings of femininity and the female body – or gender systems.

While gender systems are 'always unstable sociocultural constructions', it is their very instability that explains their cultural importance – especially in retaining order in terms of bodies and bodily boundaries (Epstein and Straub 1991: 2). They must be constantly enacted and re-enacted in order to persist. Unfortunately – and perhaps inevitably given the foregoing discussion – the female body has been viewed as having 'the propensity to leak, to overflow the proper distinctions between self and other' (Shildrick with Price 1999a: 3). In effect, women's lack of bodily integrity has resulted in them becoming objects of repulsion and fear (Shildrick with Price 1999a). It is perhaps not surprising to discover that this fear appears in representations of female embodiment – consider Grosz's statement in this context: 'it is women and what men consider to be their inherent capacity for contagion ... that have figured so strongly in cultural representations' (1994: 197). Contagion can be metaphorical – for example, it is implied in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) that

Edith's impairment brings with it a propensity to overflow to the extent that it affects other parts of her body as well as other characters – as is discussed in Chapter 5. This kind of representation indicates that impaired female embodiment is not perceived as stable. And, although 'the scope and limit of the body's pliability is not yet adequately understood' (Grosz 1994: 190), I would argue that investigations of representations of disabled characters, such as Edith could help us to develop our understanding of the body's pliability. Shildrick explains that these conceptions of the body are based on the notion that 'the body is a fabrication, organised … as an always insecure and inconsistent artefact, which merely mimics material fixity' (1997: 13). We can locate the body as a fabrication in the ways that other feminist researchers have conceptualised it. This includes thinking of the body as cyborg (i.e. an amalgam of natural and artificial components, Haraway 1991; Robillard 1999), as a site of oppression (Shildrick with Price 1999a), and of politicisation (Epstein and Straub 1991), or in symbolic or metaphoric terms (Sontag 1991). In each of these conceptions feminists have 'imagined the human body itself as a politically inscribed entity … shaped by histories and practices' (Bordo 1993a: 21). From the above discussion, one could conclude that fabrications of female embodiment are shaped by histories and practices, which are often predicated upon power over and knowledge of the body.

3.8.4 Control and female embodiment

As well as generating different conceptions of the body, feminists have been concerned with notions of power and knowledge in relation to female embodiment (Sawicki 1991 and section 3.2). Some claim that women's bodies have been contained and controlled in a number of ways: 'female bodies have historically been significantly more vulnerable than male bodies to extremes in both forms of cultural manipulation of the body [and in the] history of medicine' (Bordo 1993a: 143).[19] Sometimes this cultural manipulation is based on institutional practices, but at others it is bounded more by social conventions. For example, in relation to conventions of femininity, as Bartky demonstrates when discussing the ways

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[19] Efforts to attain a feminine 'ideal' can include such practices as Japanese women's removal of all hair from their body, to the more sinister selling of the 'need' to resort to cosmetic surgery to attain the 'ideal' breast size or nose shape in western society – both of which are now 'sold' as normalising feminine procedures.

in which women have participated in and been subjected to disciplinary practices, that 'are part of the process by which the ideal body of femininity – and hence the feminine body-subject – is constructed' (1988: 71). Such unbounded practices tend to arise because 'the ideology of beauty is the last one remaining of the old feminine ideology that still has the power to control ... women' (Wolf 1991: 10). For disabled women, this sense of control is enhanced: according to Wendell (1996, 1997) disabled women must contend with the 'ideal body of femininity' portrayed in cultural products to a greater extent than non-disabled women, because society's notions of disabled women as other puts them at a further remove from the ideal (see sections 2.8-2.10). Nevertheless, even the 'idealised' female body has a propensity to leak and there is a perception (through reproduction, for example) that it ruptures the more persistent view of bodily boundaries (Shildrick 1997; Douglas 2002/1966). Therefore, discourses on femininity and the female body are viewed as a threat to concepts of bodily boundaries – a view that is reflected in representations of disabled women.

3.9 Intersecting discourses and representations

This section explores how the discourses on female embodiment have contributed to the representation of women in texts and how these have, in turn, overlapped with similar discourses on the disabled body as discussed in Chapter 2.

3.9.1 On female embodiment

According to Betterton, Western society has a 'long history [in imagery which] links feminine qualities and characteristics with what was supposed to be the frailty and capriciousness of women's bodies' (1987: 7). This history is apparent in the representations of the female body discussed in section 3.3 in art, advertising, the media and photography. But Betterton claims that in advertising rather than simply creating images of capricious female bodies, constructs the 'differences *between* men and women' and then addresses 'the viewer as though these *were* real' (Betterton 1987: 23). Yet other investigations have focused

on 'the meanings signified by woman in images' (Pollock 1987: 41)[20] and the status of women's bodies within culture and language from a variety of theoretical positions (Williamson 1987).

In being concerned with the status of women's bodies within culture, these feminist investigations often echo Foucault's assertion that politics, technology and theory intersect to produce new knowledge and understandings (discourses) on the integrity of the body. Underpinning the idea of the integrity of the female body is the signified – an idealised femininity – which finds its output in representations (signifiers). However, such bodily representations are not produced in a vacuum, they are influenced by 'codes and conventions' and 'historical conditions' (Betterton 1987: 68). In Pollock's (1987) example the bodily process or 'natural' signifier is the normative, somewhat idealised, female nude and the signified would be its association with a particular product (in hre example, it is information about test tube babies). Although such portrayals serve to both *re*-present and *reinforce* the concept of idealised female embodiment that circulate, as Coward (1987) has indicated sometimes the representation is not quite so clear cut. Some texts (and I include those explored in Chapters 4 and 5) can be placed 'precisely in the area of competing definitions [of] the female body and sexuality' (Coward 1987: 55-6). In my discussion of the character Edith (French 1997/1980) in Chapter 5, I show that literary representations can help question concepts of both idealised femininity and disability. *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) provides one example of how a disabled female character can signify both the idealised female (young in appearance) and yet her impairment acts as a signifier that renders her as sexually undesirable (see section 5.5). Some representations of physically disabled women can be generative and, in Chapters 4 and 5, I demonstrate how the overlaps between the discourses on femininity and disability can enable an unearthing of new codes and conventions.[21]

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[20] For a comprehensive review of representation of disability in film, see Norden 1994.
[21] Today, this may be achieved when marginalised groups, in this case disabled women, seize the opportunity to write about and represent the female body and sexuality from their own (often previously unheard) perspective. See Boazman 1999; Browne *et al.* 1985: Campling 1981; French 1999; Hunt 1998; Keith 1994; Keller 1903; Kosovsky Sedgwick 1999; Lonsdale 1990; Mairs 2002; Miner 1997; Morris 1989; Saxton and Howe 1987; Slack 1999; Trahan 1997; Wade 1997; Wick 1994.

3.9.2 On physically disabled women

Like the fear of women's bodies, the relationship between 'negative public attitudes'
towards disability and 'cultural perceptions of impairment are [also] shaped by deep-rooted
psychological fears of the abnormal and the unknown', and as such are linked to
embodiments that are perceived as other (Barton and Oliver 1997: 4; and see Chapter 2).
Taken together the two set up the notion of an unhealthy, unruly, uncontrollable
embodiment and result in an enhanced fear of the mutability of both women's and disabled
people's bodies. For example, it became the 'norm' to dissuade disabled women from
bearing children, mainly due to 'fears that disabled women would produce children with
similar conditions [which] have mingled with convictions that they would harm, deprive, or
burden children they attempted to rear' (Asch and Fine 1997: 248). This fear also acts as a
'protective regulation to control bodies, reproductive capacities and the social opportunities
of women with disabilities' (Ferri and Gregg 1998: 432). Sadly, stereotypical representations
of physically impaired women often reflect this fear and regulation. What is more, the fear
is often focalised through the eyes of other characters – as is the case with Edith (French
1997/1980) and Mattie (Wharton 1911) who are both portrayed as becoming burdens to
their respective relatives (see Chapter 5). Moreover, this advice can be related to the
hystericisation of women generally (Foucault 1981/1976) – both Edith and Mattie are
portrayed as demonstrating hysterical behaviour, which results in the accidents that cause
their impairment.

Whether it be related to reproduction or not, what is important here is that the definition of
embodiment is imposed – by the other characters – 'from outside the boundaries of [the
disabled person's] existence' (Kriegel 1987: 34). Usually, these definitions are based on
notions of normative/non-normative bodies, and most literary representations of physically
impaired women reflect this view of bodily boundaries (see Chapters 4 and 5). In addition,
parallels have been drawn between concepts of the integrity of women's bodies (which has
a long history) and those of disabled people in western culture. The 'notion of woman as
"lack", as "deformity" or deficiency' has appeared in the work of Greek philosophers (e.g.
Aristotle) and twentieth-century theorists (e.g. Lacan) (Gatens 1996: vii). Underpinning

this, Shakespeare has claimed, is the fact that a non-disabled identity is predicated on a denial of physicality; whereas those with physical differences tend to 'be defined entirely by their physicality' (cited in Ferri and Gregg 1998: 434). Women and disabled people have both tended to be denied social and political power because they are defined by their embodiment and their bodies are perceived as inherently physically disordered.

Drawing on Foucault's excursions into discourses on the body (see sections 3.2-3.5), I contend that characters in novels do indicate that disabled women, more than non-disabled women and disabled men, are primarily perceived through their embodiment. Some characters reflect the claim that 'disabled women may be more negatively viewed by both women and men than the similarly disabled man' (Asch and Fine 1997: 243). Yet other characters can be read as contesting this assertion. This is certainly the case with the characters explored in Chapters 4 and 5 – whether a female character is born with or acquires her impairment – all of the novels appear to indicate that such characters are defined by their physicality. But, what is of interest here is the manner in which an author chooses to present this. Those characters with congenital impairments – Trudi (Hegi 1994), Olympia (Dunn 1989) and Adah (Kingsolver 1998) – accept their (female, impaired) embodiment, even celebrate the freedom it offers them; whereas those characters with acquired impairment – Mattie (Wharton 1911) and Edith (French 1997/1980) – are portrayed as becoming entirely dependent and passive.

According to Shildrick and Price, 'the category of disability is constructed [e.g. through detailed self-surveillance] as a condition that is engendered as feminine in terms of its implied dependency and passivity' (1999b: 435).[22] This detailed self-surveillance has its antecedents in Bentham's panopticon (see Figure 3.1). Additionally, one way that this dependency and passivity can be perceived is by 'infantilising' the disabled female body – effectively de-sexing it (Lonsdale 1990). This is predicated on perceptions of the disabled female body and, inevitably, entails negative consequences.

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[22] Shildrick and Price also claim that anyone in the UK wishing to apply for the Disability Living Allowance may find the sheer volume of the report overwhelming: 'four pages of initial notes are followed by 28 pages of report' – obliging the claimant to 'take personal responsibility in turning a critical gaze upon their own bodies' (1999b: 435) and posit that such disciplinary practices are intrinsically gendered.

3.9.3 The de-sexed body

Returning to Foucault's discussion surrounding the body and sexuality above; he claims that 'eventually the entire social body was provided with a "sexual body"' (1981/1976: 127). However, even today there are those whose gender is 'defined' as ambiguous, or are denied sexuality because of misperceptions about their bodies (Lonsdale 1990). In terms of sexual practice, for many years disabled women were 'deprived of the chance for long-term intimacy' and/or 'considered as unfit as sexual partners' (Asch and Fine 1997: 248). In focusing on the character Edith (French 1997/1980), I will show how some representations of physically disabled women reflect Weinberg's claim that such women become 'locked in perpetual adolescence' because of the strong societal taboos attached to their sexuality (quoted in Asch and Fine 1997: 274). Essentially, physically disabled women are seen as 'neither the object nor the subject of desire' (Ferri and Gregg 1998: 431). My explorations in Chapters 4 and 5 indicate that disabled female characters do have their sexuality as well as the opportunity to perform their femininity denied (Swain *et al.* 2003; Butler 1999).

In contrast to the notion that femininity and physical disability bring with them restrictions, Attwood (1998) states that disabled women could operate beyond idealised gender assigned boundaries.[23] Similarly, according to Ferri and Gregg, disabled women are often less 'sex-role stereotyped as a form of resistance to oppressive societal imposed dual dependency' (1998: 431). Nevertheless, Harris and Wideman (1988) (amongst others) claim that disabled women, although subject to the laws of patriarchy, are excluded from its representations and symbolic order because they are denied access to it rather than being freed from it. As Chapters 4 and 5 indicate, in some novels physically disabled female characters are represented as being excluded in the sense they are redundant because of their gender (i.e. they are portrayed as being entirely dependent and non-reproductive) (Fine and Asch 1988: 23). These representations, which are explored through the characters Edith (French 1997/1980) and Mattie (Wharton 1911) in Chapter 5, work to normalise (reinforce) negative perceptions of the physically disabled female body – as the next section

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[23] This is apparent in the characters Trudi and Olympia discussed in Chapter 4.

demonstrates. In other novels active, unrestricted, independent, nurturing characters –
Trudi (Hegi 1994) and Adah (Kingsolver 1998) – are emerging, as the examples in Chapters
4 and 5 show.

3.10 Changing discourses/normalising representations

In the above sections I have discussed the ways in which discourses around female
embodiment were established and how they, together with impairment discourses, have
influenced discourses on representations. Here, I take a step back in order to demonstrate
how this situation came about; how it has had a normalising effect on the linguistic
conventions used to write about representations of the physically disabled female body and
how discourses around disability representations continue to develop. I also refer to the
ways they overlap with discourses on the female body.

Foucault has highlighted how most discourses on the body are constructed around the
binarism of perfect/imperfect bodies (1981/1976). In his example, Foucault (1981/1976)
describes how homosexuality came to be constructed negatively by an often medically-
based discourse. It was negative in the sense that homosexuality was discussed in terms of
being (like the female body and the impaired body) a deviation from the norm.[24] As
demonstrated above, feminists have developed further the discourses on the female body
and femininity in specific ways, and at times (e.g. during the Women's Liberation
Movement of the mid-late twentieth century) have deliberately chosen to depart 'from the
discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality' (Martin 1988: 12). During this
time, other discourses on the body began to emerge. Amongst these, disability studies
explored the constructions of 'impairment' and 'norms' and became an arena of
investigation in the late twentieth century (Barton and Oliver 1997; Albrecht *et al.* 2001b).[25]
It was initiated in the mid-twentieth century and gathered momentum in the latter part of
the century when the international recognition of an individual's rights included specific

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[24] Prior to the appearance of the term 'homosexuality', the term in general circulation was 'inversion'.
[25] See also Garland Thomson (1999); Meekosha (2004); Snyder *et al.* (2002) on disability studies research.

mention of disability and impairment (see Campbell 1997; and section 2.2). Such is the pace of change, disability researchers such as Corker now argue that impairment discourses (like discourses on homosexuality and femininity) have become 'naturalised' or are 'employed as if they were common-sense, apolitical statements' (2000: 118). These commonsense, apolitical statements are also apparent in normalising procedures relating to femininity and female bodies; Bordo describes how: 'the body of the sufferer [of hysteria, agrophobia, anorexia is] deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity emblematic of the period in question ... always homogenizing and normalizing' (1993a: 168-9). Through constant reiteration (in novels, for example) these kinds of discourses tend to become linguistic conventions that objectify the disabled (or feminised) body, which in turn tends to drive what can be described as a hegemonic 'belief' system about disability (or femininity) amongst society in general (Corker 2000; see also Coleman and DePaulo 1991).[26] This process of objectification goes some way to indicate the power of cultural products such as news media or literary texts, and is reflected in my explorations of novels in Chapters 4 and 5. However, discourses on representations of the impaired body (like those on the female body) are in constant flux, with theoretical standpoints constantly being questioned and discourses shifting their focus.

As discussed in Chapter 2, within disability discourses (as with other academic arenas) different theoretical standpoints have been established. In the UK at least, research that relates directly to conceptions of the impairment and disability tend to focus on the 'medical model' and 'social model', both of which have been critiqued. Thomas, for example, has stated that one of the difficulties with the social model is that 'it downplays the ways in which cultural representations ... construct negative meanings about people with impairment' (2002: 68), and developed by others – see Swain and French (2000) on the 'affirmation model' (see section 2.9.1 and footnote 14 therein). What is of interest for this thesis is that disability researchers have demonstrated how negative representations in television, film and advertising have tended to be based on medical models of disability,

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[26] See also the UK Department of Work and Pensions' (DWP) recently revamped (2006) Images of Disability website, which encourages organisations and advertising agencies to include representations of disabled people and disabled actors in their advertising. Here, such an approach is couched as being 'a creative opportunity'.

which have constructed impairment as representative of an individual or social flaw (see Chapter 2 this thesis; Casling 1994; Kent 1988; Kriegel 1987; Shakespeare 1999).[27]

To a greater or lesser extent 'impairment-as-social-flaw' is apparent in all of the characters explored in Chapters 4 and 5 and bears out Hevey's (1992) assertion that it has become the 'naturalised' representation of disability in most media. As such naturalised representations form part of the 'discourses of disability', in Chapter 4 I briefly discuss how they could be said to have their roots in conceptions of the body in general, and how these may or may not have influenced the emergence of twentieth-century texts which include physically impaired female characters.

Discourses on disability representations have shifted considerably over time. Hevey critiqued those representations that frame disability as 'tragedy' (i.e. 'traditional representations [as] *impairment representation* [with] impairment meaning flaw' (1993: 117)). Another approach viewed images of disabled women's bodies 'as merely a reflection' and compared 'bad' and 'good' ones (see Kent 1988).[28] More recent investigations have framed disability representations as 'different' (Mitchell and Snyder 1997b; Davis 2002) and 'extraordinary' (Garland Thomson 1996a), as well as describing how disability is included within the enfreakment (or labelling different bodies as freakish) of bodies within novels (Adams 1996; Cassuto 1991; Peterson 1996). Collected works, readers or handbooks of disability now include at least one chapter on disability representation – see Gartner and Joe (1987), Fine and Asch (1988), Garland Thomson (1996b), Barton and Oliver (1997), Davis (1997a,b), Mitchell and Snyder (1997b), Corker and French (1999), Albrecht *et al.* (2001a), Snyder *et al.* (2002). Journals have also devoted entire issues to the subject area (see, for example, *Disability and Society*, volume 9, number 3, 1994).[29]

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[27] This runs counter to Foucault's (1981/1976) assertion that the recurring impairment in aristocracy was an acceptable part of maintaining their blue-bloodedness.

[28] In Kent's exploration of novels she describes a positive representation as one in which the author depicts disabled female characters as 'independent, vital women who are not defined in terms of disability alone – women who value themselves and are esteemed by the people around them' (1988: 194).

[29] What is not obvious from this list is that the majority of research into cultural representations of the disabled body has been undertaken in North America. However, in recent years a focus on cultural representations has emerged in British disability studies. A Cultural Disability Studies Research Network has recently been established by researchers from Liverpool John Moores University, Edge Hill University and Sheffield Hallam University; the CDSRN's inaugural conference entitled 'Emerging Fields: Developing a

Inevitably perhaps, within discourses on representations of disability, many authors have concerned themselves with the materiality of the bodies of particular characters. Investigations have focused on the ways in which power is enacted over disabled characters by other characters simply because of the former's corporeality. For example, in discussing the film *The Elephant Man,* Darke points to the ways that 'the abnormal are created by a specific medical group so as to reinforce the powers taken to enforce normalcy' (1994: 338). Echoed in the discussion of normative/non-normative in Chapter 2 and above, what Darke (1994) also draws attention to is the constant comparison and thus, inter-relatedness of those deemed 'normal' and those 'abnormal'. He also points out that in *The Elephant Man* 'there is a repeated combination of the words "normal" and "person" ... which logically then means that an abnormal doesn't constitute a person' (Darke 1994: 339; see section 2.8). This kind of association leads to claims that the disabled character is always a non-character within literature and that they simply become a function of the plot, but as Chapters 4 and 5 indicate, exploring representations of the physically disabled woman at the intersection of feminism and disability allows for a deeper interpretation.

Other strategies for the interpretation of disability representations have been traced by Mitchell and Snyder (2001). 'Negative imagery', I have already touched upon and will revisit in Chapter 5. 'Social realism' 'called for the solution of more realistic representations' (Mitchell and Snyder 2001: 199) and is perhaps reflected in the proliferation of reality shows (e.g. *Big Brother*) and autobiographical materials (e.g. Picardie 1998) that highlight and *re*-present disability. A 'new historicist' approach takes an anthropological view towards unearthing 'images that could help to reconstruct a period's point of view on human variations' (Mitchell and Snyder 2001: 200; and see sections 1.2 and 5.1.1). Researchers have also used 'biographical criticism' to unearth 'disabled and chronically ill authors' Mitchell and Snyder (2001: 205) cite John Milton, Alexander Pope, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, to name but a few. The researchers' aim is to discern a 'disability logic' in their work. Finally, Mitchell and Snyder highlight 'transgressive

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British Cultural Disability Studies' took place 26-27 May 2007. In addition, a British-based *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* went online in June 2007.

resignifications' whereby 'scholars have begun to attend to the subversive potential of the hyperbolic meaning invested in disabled figures' (2001: 208). These are valuable approaches, but I would argue that to more fully understand the specific ways in which the representations of the physically disabled female body operate, we should also pay heed to the overlap between disability and femininity and gender representations – which is the approach taken in Chapters 4 and 5.[30] But to do so, we must understand the way discourses on representations of physically disabled women have developed.

3.11 Discourses on representations of physically disabled women

On the frequency of representation, Mitchell (2002) claims that disabled characters abound in literature, and Longmore (1987) has said much the same about television and film. Yet both Morris (1991) and Kent (1988) have stated that representations of disabled female characters are not so easily located. Morris and Kent also argued that many such representations were shallow, and criticised feminists for not taking account of disability in their research on the body and femininity.

The discourse on representations of disabled women emerged in the late 1980s – alongside the increasingly (at that time) vociferous disability rights movement – as yet another example of disability's invisibility or the prevalence of negative portrayals of disability. As part of this investigation, and as mentioned in section 3.7, feminist researchers were criticised for not taking account of disability in their discussions of gender issues or when writing on the body and femininity (Morris 1991).[31] In addition, novelists who produced 'stereotypical' representations (i.e. those most commonly reflecting and expressing a fairly shallow range of social and cultural attitudes (Longmore 1987: 66)) of passive disabled women were the recipients of criticisms[32] – an issue I revisit in Chapter 5 when I discuss

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[30] See Mallett (2007a) for a full discussion of these five critical approaches to disability representations.
[31] Similarly, as Price and Shildrick have pointed out, although disability activists set the terms of disability discourses, their work 'is frequently insensitive to other differences such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity' (1998: 226).
[32] Mallett (2007b), however, has demonstrated, in the context of the television series *South Park*, disability stereotypes can be subversive especially when they are presented ironically.

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both Edith (French 1997/1980) and Mattie (Wharton 1911). In the exploration in Chapter 5 it is apparent that it is the conjunction of the disabled female characters' impairments and femininity which provides the impetus for events – thus her embodiment acts as a 'narrative prosthesis' to the novel. (See section 1.4 for a discussion of narrative prosthesis.)

The role of the impaired female body then has come to have special significance in literature and research into literary representations (Keith 2001). At one end of the spectrum, the disabled female character has been pathologised and rendered as the separate almost invisible other, in the sense that until recently it had not been discussed within academia. Perhaps, as Morris (1991; see also Kent 1988) has asserted, this is because disabled women have most often been seen as inessential within feminist philosophy; a situation that has 'contributed to misunderstandings and mistrust between women with disabilities and non-disabled feminists' (Ferri and Gregg 1998: 431). However, at the other end of the spectrum, the disabled female body has been ultravisible, when challenging an often male-imposed norm or ideal. This is certainly the case with the characters Trudi (Hegi 1994) and Olympia (Dunn 1989) in my discussion on the non-normate body and surveillance in Chapter 4.

Where disabled female characters do appear in literature, they indicate attitudes that accord with emerging notions, including 'narrative prosthesis' (see section 1.4). As Chapters 4 and 5 indicate, their bodies also demonstrate 'the materiality of metaphor' or where 'physical and cognitive anomalies promise to lend a tangible body to textual abstractions' (Mitchell 2002: 16).[33] In questioning the dominant ideologies and rejecting hegemonic systems on the body in the way that some disabled female characters do (especially those of Olympia (Dunn 1989) in Chapter 4 and Adah (Kingsolver 1998) in Chapter 5), such representations offer a 'framework of reference of revolution and social change' (Whittington-Walsh 2002: 706).

I would argue that it is only by thinking of such texts as part of an emerging discourse – i.e. part of a symbiotic development of notions of femininity, the female body and disability

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[33] See also section 4.2 on narratives of and on the body and section 5.3 on disability, gender and femininity.

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theoretical standpoints or employing a 'multiplicity of discursive elements' (Foucault 1981/1976: 100), that we will reveal the part impairment plays in discourses on power in relation to all bodies. However, I accept that in some ways using a symbiotic approach to investigate representations in literary texts is too multi-faceted, and as Chapters 4 and 5 indicate, we have yet to reach a point when the language strategies we employ to discuss disability representations are considered adequate. We have yet to reach a point when we are not, for example, constantly referring to instances when the notion of 'enforcing normalcy' (Davis 1995) is the over-riding imperative, in a manner that affirms that corporeal difference matters, be it visual or literary.

3.12 Critiquing Foucault and feminists

Here, I would like to briefly examine the approaches and shortcomings of some of the researchers' work on this subject which I have drawn upon. As indicated earlier in this chapter, many researchers on the body have been influenced by the work of Foucault. They either critique his approaches (Bartky 1988) or draw upon his ideas on discourse, power and the body (Bordo 1999; Martin 1988; Sawicki 1991; see also sections 3.2-3.5). Some discuss women's bodies in 'political' terms of sexuality, race and class, but until recently, few mentioned disabled women specifically. Others have utilised Bourdieu's notions of bodily *habitus* and *hexis* (Butler 1999 and section 3.6) in discussing behaviour and attitudes towards sexuality. Of those that do discuss disability as an issue, some use euphemisms, for example, 'bodily deviance' and 'anatomical anomalies' (Epstein and Straub 1991: 15).

Few of the researchers cited take account of the disabled female body.[34] During my research I have found that most feminist researchers concerned themselves almost exclusively with writing about non-disabled females. Bartky (1988), for example, overlooks the need to take account of bodies that, through the actions of *bio-power*, are rendered yet

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[34] Even today disability is overlooked, for example, none of the speakers at a conference entitled 'Gender, the body and objectification', held at the University of Sheffield 21-22 May 2005, dealt with or mentioned the disabled female body.

more docile than non-disabled women's. Moreover, despite the attention Foucault gave to the way women's embodiment played a part in the concepts of power relations, Bartky herself criticises Foucault for being 'blind to those [disciplinary practices] that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine … that is more docile than the bodies of men' (1988: 64).

Finally, although I have avoided discussing the legitimacy of Foucault's (1981/1976) claims about accepted and excluded discourse – they are somewhat lacking in address to the discourses operating within a patriarchal society. As Shildrick has observed, '[although] Foucault himself fails to remark it, in patriarchal society the dominant discourses are those which consolidate and extend the male social order' (1997: 43). This goes some way to indicate the shortcomings of the focus of Foucault's work, as well as how, in critiquing Foucault some researchers tend not to realise the omissions from their own work. The issue of docility is explored through the characters in Chapter 5.

3.13 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated how an approach underpinned by the Foucaultian notion of myriad discourses circulating in society,[35] here feminist and disability discourses on the body, can be drawn together to interpret and explain literary texts that include representations of disabled women.

The main theorist I will draw upon in succeeding chapters, Foucault, tended not to discuss bodies consistently in terms of gender and so does not address the way women's bodies have been constructed. Furthermore, the only sense in which he discusses disabled bodies is in his writing on the incarceration of those classed as insane (see *Madness and Civilisation*, 1988/1961). His genealogical approach has, however, helped demonstrate how self-surveillance and self correction to 'norms' (modern power) have come to impact upon ideas

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[35] This approach is sometimes termed 'new historicist' and forms part of a Foucaultian approach (see Chapter 2 this thesis; Veeser 1989).

of the body and to permeate our behaviour in relation to power over the body. Bourdieu's (1991) notions of bodily *hexis* and *habitus* have helped elucidate the body as agentive in ways that Foucault's work does not. As I have shown, feminists have utilised aspects of both Foucault and Bourdieu's work to take account of the historical imperatives that have shaped conceptions of women's bodies (Bordo 1999; Ehrenreich and English 1976, 1979).

I have indicated the ways in which some feminists have drawn attention to the drawbacks or oversights on Foucault's part. Moreover, I have demonstrated how, although feminist researchers have discussed women's bodies and femininity in relation to race, class and sexuality, they have often tended to overlook bodily 'difference' in terms of disability. Similarly, I have shown how disability researchers working from a variety of standpoints have employed a Foucaultian approach when discussing the impaired body; occasionally in relation to disability representations (Abberley 1993), but until recently, few have engaged specifically with representations of the disabled female body in texts (Garland Thomson 1996a; Kent 1988).

Thinking of these approaches as a Venn diagram it is the central area of overlap between the myriad discourses about the 'ideal' western female body, disability, corporeality and feminist standpoints that will be brought to bear upon a discussion of representations of disabled women in cultural products – in this case texts that are contemporary to the discourses. I have chosen to focus on five novels: *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) and *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) in Chapter 4 in relation to bodily power and short stature; and *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911), *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) and *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) in Chapter 5 in relation to gender, fluctuating femininity and the impaired female body. I believe that, although each aspect of a character's identity has much to contribute at an individual (micro) level, together they can help elucidate the contemporary discourses on representations of disability at the macro level.

Furthermore, the examples of characters I focus on in Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate particular theoretical standpoints in this chapter, and can be read as negative stereotypes or destabilising the dominant discourses on disability and femininity. I have chosen to focus

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on the intersections of femininity and disability because I believe these are important in indicating how, for example, authors draw on ideals of femininity discussed in this chapter to contrast the disabled and non-disabled female body. Hence my discussions of Edith (French 1997/1980) and Mattie's (Wharton 1911) feminine appearance before and after the accidents which result in impaired bodies is related to the ideologies circulating at the time of each novel's production (see introduction to Chapter 5). Similarly, where a female body is seen as lacking in comparison to the male body (as outlined above), then representations of disabled women's bodies indicate it is seen as lacking femininity compared to the non-disabled female body. Nevertheless, there are representations that play upon this notion and effectively challenge it – as is apparent in my explorations of *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) and *Geek Love* (1989) in Chapter 4 and *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: The power of being different

4.1 Introduction

As the extent and scope of the theories that have influenced disability discourses outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 indicate, the impaired body takes many forms. In order to illustrate specific types of representations of the disabled female, this chapter analyses two novels that have what can be termed 'non-normate' characters at the centre of the plot (see sections 2.3 and 3.5). In both novels, *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) and *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989), the central characters are persons of restricted growth. The issues that will be explored in this chapter relate to the interstices and interconnections in the theoretical approaches discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 — drawing on the work of theorists such as Foucault (1973/1963, 1977/1975, 1988/1961), Bourdieu (1991), Butler (1999), Kent (1987, 1988) and Garland Thomson (2002) in relation to feminist and disability research.

I chose to explore *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) and *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) for a number of reasons. First, because they provide examples of novels with plots that are predicated upon surveillance of the female body and whereby the body is both subject and object of the surveillance (see Berger 1972 and section 3.3). As I demonstrate in this chapter, different types of surveillance — including self-surveillance and fear of surveillance (see Foucault 1977/97 and section 3.2) — run throughout both novels at both the micro and macro levels and that much of it is focused upon the female non-normate body (see section 2.3). What I term ultravisibility (see section 4.8) helps in my explorations of the ways in which, through their non-normate embodiment (as both disabled and female), Trudi in *Stones from the River* and Olympia in *Geek Love* share a heightened 'form of engagement with the world' (Butler 1999: 115). Although their reasoning is different, both Trudi and Olympia provide examples of characters who reject the labels imposed on them by others;

instead, their self identity is based on a strong belief in the power of their embodiment (see sections 4.8 and 4.9). Thus, both novels echo the discourse on the concept of non-normate in relation to the body in general (see Bordo 1999 and section 3.5) and disability in particular (see Davis 1997a and section 2.3). Third, through this ultravisibility and their active bodies, Trudi and Olympia indicate how the disabled female body can be seen as agentive of and in its own right – reflecting bodily *habitus* and *hexis* (see Bourdieu 1991 and section 3.6). Fourth, each novel also enables some discussion of the gendered aspects of representations of disability (see section 4.10) – in *Geek Love,* for instance, Olympia's situation allows me to discuss issues surrounding female reproduction and male replication (see section 3.10). Essentially, I explore both novels in order to reveal further the discourses surrounding the body in relation to surveillance, gender and disability theories covered in Chapters 2 and 3. I contend that the two novels explored here (and others that have been published more recently) enable discourses on notions of disability and femininity to move on from the traditional and stereotypical (representations of which are explored in Chapter 5).

Before launching into a discussion of these two novels, however, I first offer an outline of narratives of and on the body illustrated in this and the following chapter. The exploration of the two novels, *Stones from the River* and *Geek Love* is then carried out thematically. This approach illustrates how in literary representations, theories of surveillance and stigma can be seen to operate to produce both invisibility and ultravisbility in characters with non-normate bodies as well as passivity in such characters. It also serves to show that these bodies can be viewed as active, powerful bodies and that this is often related to the gender of the character.

4.2 Narratives of/on the body

Discussing representations of disabled (and non-disabled) characters in fiction is problematic; as outlined in Chapter 2, traditionally there has been a tendency to see them as stereotypically negative. Shakespeare has described how mainstream representations of

disability in film are either 'the tragic but brave invalid ... the sinister cripple [or] the "supercrip"' (1999: 164). Longmore asserts that disabled villainous characters tend to reinforce 'three common prejudices ... disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their "fate" [and] disabled people resent the nondisabled' (1987: 67). He continues: 'These ... reflect what Goffman describes as the fundamental nature of stigma: the stigmatised person is regarded as "somehow less than human"' (Longmore 1987: 68) (see section 4.5 below). Kent (1987, 1988) points out that, until the late twentieth century, there were fewer representations of disabled girls or women in literature. Where they do exist disability stereotypes tend to 'medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people' (Barnes 1994). Although there is no doubt that this is the case, more recently disability scholars have turned their attention to specific aspects of representation. Mitchell (2002) has focused on the prevalence of using disability as a 'narrative prosthesis' in novels. I contend that although the notion of disability as a narrative prosthesis is useful, literary representations of disability are also underpinned by cultural concepts of the body and power, and as such can be related to other 'narrative prostheses', such as gender and femininity (see Chapter 3). In her discussions of what she terms 'the extraordinary body', Garland Thomson has linked disability with race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class to 'complicate the body's cultural construction' in American culture and literature (1996a: 135). Such iterations and reiterations of disabled bodies thus form part of an interconnected (and constantly interacting) web of concepts that continue to inform our developing understanding of the materiality of the corporeal body.

As discussed in section 2.7, often our understandings are based on types and stereotypes of the body (Dyer 2002). However, in developing my understanding of representations I have drawn upon Garland Thomson (2002), who has posited that there are four primary visual rhetorics of disability: wondrous, sentimental, exotic and realistic. Although these are discussed in relation to photographs, they also come into play in literary representations of disabled characters and can be said to form part of the 'culturally fabricated narrative of the body' (Garland Thomson 2002: 74).[1] I would argue that these four rhetorics are not

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[1] As the discussion of Mary Duffy's work in section 2.10 demonstrates, different modes of representation come into play and disability can be visually exotic to a greater extent than it can be exoticised in literature.

mutually exclusive; it is possible to have a realistic representation of a character within a sentimental setting, for instance. It is also my contention that the culturally-fabricated realist narrative of the body has been built upon the interconnections between the theoretical viewpoints on disability, gender and femininity described in Chapter 3. And, as that chapter has demonstrated, some disability, gender and feminist research has itself been informed by Foucault's (1970/1966) genealogy of bodies and Bourdieu's (1991) concept of bodily *hexis* and *habitus*. The investigations in this and the next two chapters are also informed by such notions of bodies, but in very specific ways. Here, I look at how women of short stature, in this case operating in very specific societal situations, are portrayed as powerful bodies in two twentieth-century novels: Olympia in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) and Trudi in *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994). I will show how notions of power and bodily integrity come into play in relation to the body and short stature in these novels.

4.3 Bodily power and small stature

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, physical disability takes many forms and one group of individuals that are often perceived and represented as disabled are people of short stature (sometimes referred to as people of restricted growth). As Gerber has observed:

> dwarfism is ... not necessarily a disabling [condition], in spite of the health problems dwarfs often do experience ... the lives of dwarfs could be completely normalized ... But this has hardly been their history. In the western world ... short stature is one of the oldest sources of the perception of human difference and ... stigmatisation. [It] has signalled immaturity and powerlessness (1996: 49).

Throughout history, people of short stature have been portrayed various 'texts'. In paintings, for example, in Figure 4.1 the figure second from the right is a person of short stature; she acted as companion to the Spanish *infanta* (shown in the centre foreground). In addition, people of short stature were (and still are) exhibited in freak shows (Figure 4.2; see also Gerber 1996; Garland Thomson 1996b), appear in film (e.g. Todd Browning's *Freaks* – Figure 4.3; Hawkins 1996) and in literature.

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Figure 4.1: Detail from **Las Meninas,** *Diego Velazquez, 1656, Prado Museum, Madrid. See also Foucault 1970/1966.*

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R tm R O

Figure 4.2: Image dated 27 August 2006 and captioned 'The freak show, long banished from polite state fair midways, seems to be making a comeback'. Source: Nancynail.com.

^BROWNING'S

Macraef ON

FOßD   ^
HYAMS
BACIANOVA
ATES

Figure 4.3: DVD cover for Todd Browning's **Freaks.** *Source: michaeldvd.com.au*

In line with other representations of central characters of short stature (e.g. Benedict Lambert in *Mendel's Dwarf* – Mawer 1997), Hegi (1994) and Dunn (1989) choose to represent Trudi and Olympia as 'different' – hence my discussion of normate/non-normate in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter is concerned with 'the power of being different' (Hegi 1994: 9). Nevertheless, there are many features of both novels that could be said to be formulaic and others that make them stand out. The novels recount Trudi's and Olympia's lives from their earliest memories to maturity (and in Olympia's case, death). *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) is narrated in the third person, but mostly focalised through Trudi's eyes; whereas *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) is narrated in the first person, ostensibly as the Binewski family's history written by Olympia for her daughter, Miranda.[2]

4.4 Surveillance and the body

First, to return to Foucault's (1977/1975, 1981/1976, 1988/1961) ideas of self-surveillance and to Goffman's (1963) notion of stigma (see also sections 3.3 and 2.3). Foucault demonstrates how in periods of heightened surveillance 'watching' the self and others is something that everyone becomes involved in, and underpinning this is power/knowledge of and over the body. Shildrick has observed that where formats of surveillance have the involvement of the groups they are directed at this 'merely reinforces the sense in which power/knowledge relies on self-surveillance' (1997: 51). Implicit in much of this surveillance, and what contributes to its construction, is the 'stigmatised' body – Foucault discusses lepers and the plague as two instances, but another example, and what Foucault has described as 'the most cunning and naïve' (1988/1961: 149), was the domination of mainland Europe by the Nazis in the twentieth century. *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) is set before, during and after the Second World War and thus in a society and at a time when a very specific dominant cultural ideology held sway. At that time power was overseen by the state but acted upon at the individual level in the sense that the Nazis had inculcated a

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[2] Another recent novel to use the impetus of a mother narrating her life story for her daughter is *The Girls* (Lansens 2006).

set of what Bourdieu (1991) calls 'everyday rituals' in order to 'sustain belief' in the Third Reich, and this novel demonstrates how it also circulated at every level of German society.

The discourses constructed around those deemed 'undesirables' (predominantly Jewish people, disabled people and homosexuals) focused individual's attention upon those who were 'other' to the Ayrian race.[3] Goffman points out that the non-normate is stigmatised and that stigma 'constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity' (1963: 12-13). On the basis of stigmatising everyone who was not perceived as belonging to the Ayrian race, the Nazis instigated a programme of annihilation. This was predicated on the bodies of the others who they perceived would pose a threat to the healthy functioning of the Ayrian people and to the conceptual body of the German state itself. It is against this background that the life of the character Trudi is played out (Hegi 1994). Two extracts will illustrate this. The first indicates how Nazi sympathisers accepted that disabled people should be institutionalised or disappear completely from society:

> Rumors were coming through that the weak and deformed and retarded were at risk ... Anton Immers ... thought it only fitting that some were taken out of institutions and relocated to undisclosed places, while others were removed from their communities (Hegi 1994: 312).

The second extract shows how the mores that govern acceptable social and cultural behaviour had been all-but eradicated in the service of the level of surveillance operating in Nazi Germany – such that it literally penetrates the bodies of those deemed other (Foucault 1988/1961). Here an SS soldier tells Trudi:

> 'You become an experiment ... a medical experiment for the almighty profession,' he said, and told her of operations performed ... on people afflicted with otherness. 'Because the rules that used to temper curiosity no longer exist ... Some people might even tell you that a *Zwerg*[4] has no right to live' (Hegi 1994: 381-2).

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[3] Two speakers at a Disability Studies Association Conference – Hansen (2006) and Hollins (2006) – indicated that the number of disabled people annihilated by the Nazis was approximately 250,000.
[4] Throughout the novel, Hegi (1994) uses occasional German words and phrases: hence the German for female dwarf, *Zwerg*, and for male dwarf, *Zwerge*, appear in the quotes in this chapter.

Here the surveillance is operating at the level of the body. Stigma is assigned to people who display 'otherness', and with 'afflicted' indicating negativity. Furthermore, their eradication is justified on the grounds that, at its extreme, curiosity breaks down the barriers to acceptable behaviour within the communities referred to in the first extract. Surveillance then is predicated upon the body of the individual, and behaviour, 'medical experiments', and attitudes toward that individual are justified on the grounds of the functioning of the body of the state or 'the almighty profession'.

As Foucault has demonstrated (1977/1975, 1981/1976, 1988/1961) surveillance comes in many guises, and *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) is set in 'Binewski's Carnival Fabulon' – travelling shows that were common in the USA from the late nineteenth century, and, judging by Figure 4.2 above, continue to be popular today (Garland Thomson 1996b). The narrator, Olympia Binewski, is a 'bald albino hunchback [with] dwarfism' (Dunn 1989: 9). Along with her surviving[5] siblings – Arturo (whose 'hands and feet were in the form of flippers'), Electra and Iphigenia ('Siamese twins with perfect upper bodies joined at the waist and sharing one set of hips and legs') and Fortunato (can 'move things with his mind [he's] telekinetic') – Olympia forms the exhibits of the family's travelling show (Dunn 1989: 8, 9, 81).[6] As it is set in a travelling 'freak' show, the novel operates in a setting of heightened surveillance – it is the Binewski family who are constantly watched.[7] However, as performers, they also watch (and manipulate) their audience, and – in relation to Foucault's writings (1977/1975, see also section 3.2) on surveillance being explicitly focused on the body – each other. The novel indicates that, contrary to the dominant ideology operating in North America at that time, the characters Olympia and her siblings are valued and gain self-esteem in themselves as other and constantly refer to the people who come to

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[5] There are a number of other siblings who were either still-born or died in infancy, kept in jars of formaldehyde, and whom can be viewed by Carnival patrons for a fee (Dunn 1989: 60-2).
[6] The Binewski children are the result of their parent's experimentation 'with illicit and prescription drugs, insecticides, and eventually radioisotopes'; at one point Olympia reflects on the fact that, 'My mother had been liberally dosed with cocaine, amphetamines, and arsenic during her ovulation and pregnancy with me' (Dunn 1989: 8, 9). Their parents' justification for doing so is: 'What greater gift could you offer your children than an inherent ability to earn a living just by being themselves?' (Dunn 1989: 8).
[7] According to Russo, freak is 'codified in a world of spectacle' (1994: 79), which produces something of a conundrum – a freak is only productive when being 'consumed as part of the show'.

Binewski's Fabulon as 'norms' (Dunn 1989: 58, 85, 128, 175, 213, 228 – see also discussion below).

On the issue of ultravisibility, the configuration and lighting in a carnival tent is such that it operates in the reverse of Bentham's panopticon as detailed by Foucault (1977/1975) (see also Figure 3.1, section 3.2). Rather than the prisoners' cells being lit so that the warder can view any prisoner at anytime, each prisoner effectively unaware of when or if they are being watched; in a carnival tent the central area is lit, ensuring that the audience's attention is focused upon the show. Nevertheless, like the prisoners' self-surveillance the audience in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) does not remain passive, they must participate in the show. Arty has the seating (or 'bleachers') wired to his microphone such that his voice physically affects them, 'and the feeling of "darling" rose up ... through every buttock on the bleachers. The crowd sighed ... "sweetheart" thrummed the crowd, and they all gasped' (Dunn 1989: 199). Furthermore, Dunn has the central characters in *Geek Love* turn the gaze back upon the audience such that they wish to reduce the difference between themselves and the non-normate Arty, Elly and Iphy. This, in effect, works to reduce the distance between the sign (non-normate body) and the signified (impairment) (see section 3.7). However, the Binewskis are careful to play upon the special character of the family – for instance, of the siblings, only Olympia is permitted to roam the midway – as she does not constitute an 'exhibit'. Nevertheless, she remains the target of stares:

> 'Fuckin' kee-rist! What happened to you?' asked a knock-kneed drunk ... Arty and the twins couldn't come out in a crowd like this. Once the gates opened and the norms trickled through, my more gifted siblings hid. The crowd won't pay for what they can see for free (Dunn 1989: 95).

As discussed below, the stare comes from someone with few or no inhibitions, therefore the unrestrained reaction of the drunk to Olympia's appearance is negative. Olympia again couches this description in terms of her brothers and sisters being 'more gifted' – implying her own comparative ordinariness (which is countered by the drunk's reaction).

Olympia's narration of life in Binewski's Fabulon, is interspersed with her life afterwards. Briefly, the Fabulon is destroyed by the telekinetic powers of the youngest son, Fortunato (or Chick), in response to the death by their own hands of the conjoined sisters Elly and Iphy. The father, Al, and brothers Arty and Chick also perish in the flames. However, Olympia sets up herself, her mother (Lil) and Olympia's daughter (Miranda) in a lodging house together, with Lil acting as manager. Within this triumvirate, Olympia is able to keep an eye on (and maintain some power over) both her mother and her daughter, both of whom are unaware of their familial connections: 'This is my selfish pleasure, to watch unseen [on the grounds that.] It wouldn't give them pleasure to know me for who I am' (Dunn 1989: 14). Olympia hasn't seen her daughter for 16 years because Arty forced her to put Miranda into a convent school because, apart from an 'extended spur of [her] spine' which forms a 'curling tail' (Dunn 1989: 29, 20), Arty believed that Miranda did not have a sufficiently distinctive body to entertain and thus raise income in the Fabulon, so he did not wish to have her around. Olympia observes Miranda, 'the day that she arrived [at the house] I stayed close to my spyhole [in the door] all morning ... my eye was fixed to the hole' (Dunn 1989: 31). Repeatedly, there are references to what the character Olympia perceives as some kind of recognition by Miranda and Lil, thus she continues to operate in a situation of surveillance by others – and must constantly be on her guard against being found out. For example, she states, 'I don't trust Lil's blindness or her deafness to disguise me completely ... She might harbor some recognition of my rhythms' (Dunn 1989: 13). And, of Miranda sketching, Olympia thinks 'The bite of fear – "she [Miranda] knows" – grabs my chest and then relaxes. No. I've been sitting here bald and naked for an hour. Too late for that' (Dunn 1989: 35). Her exposure to her daughter is complete physically, but mentally and emotionally she works to remain a secret from both Miranda and Lil while constantly observing them.

In a further twist to the plot, and one that compounds the notion of ultra-surveillance (watching and being watched constantly, with such watchfulness operating on a number of levels), is the appearance of the character Mary Lick. Olympia befriends Miss Lick, after she discovers Miss Lick (who herself watches Miranda perform in a night club) is willing to fund the removal of Miranda's tail. As Miranda puts it: '[Miss Lick] isn't after my ass, she's

after my tail' and her take on the proposed operation is: 'Why not? It would be silly not to' (Dunn 1989: 37, 45). Olympia wishes for Miranda to retain her distinctiveness, but in order to be successful, Olympia must also disguise her intentions from Miss Lick. These convolutions of plot all add up to a highly secretive watchful central character, who nevertheless is constantly 'on show' herself, because of her non-normate embodiment.

In essence, people of restricted growth are among the very groups a Foucaultian analysis (1981/1976, 1988/1984) would focus upon, i.e. those that occupy a 'marginal' state within society. The setting of both novels also follows Foucault's (1970/1966) notion that power circulates from the bottom up: in *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) individuals were to survey each other every day and to report on any 'undesirables' or 'undesirable behaviour'. Similarly, in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989), it is the Binewski family that holds the power over the gaze of their audience within the confines of the Fabulon, and Olympia in the survivor's life afterwards. These representational strategies are predicated upon the non-normate body, but with constant references to the normate and the idealised body. As the next sections demonstrate, stigma is associated with the impaired body, invisibility and the passive body and ultravisibility and the active body – but what becomes apparent is that none of these are mutually exclusive concepts.

4.5 The stigmatised body

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 the stigmatised person – in this case the disabled character – is both perceived and represented by other characters as 'somehow less than human' (Longmore 1987: 68). I would argue that the link between stigma and the negative ways that physically impaired characters are perceived by other characters is a manifestation of what Goffman terms 'interaction-uneasiness' (1963: 30). In terms of non-normate bodies, this is related to the visibility of the 'dis'ability to other characters and the effects this has upon them in terms of taboo and association (Douglas 2002/1966). In both novels there are indications of perceptions of the effects of the stigmatised body. For instance, Trudi

constantly recognises that any association with her will affect the character whom she has
befriended – in this instance Eva:

> Though it stung Trudi to be ignored by Eva in school, she tried to understand. If
> Eva let on that she was her friend the other children would exclude Eva too, as
> certainly as if her body had shrunk overnight ... she sensed that in the eyes of the
> town, it would be the opposite: Eva would be treated like an outcast (Hegi 1994:
> 100).

Here it is Trudi's embodiment that would affect Eva's – 'shrunk overnight' – and because
of this, Eva would become the outcast to society that Trudi feels herself to be. Moreover,
Trudi's body is perceived by the townspeople as having the power to affect those around
her and, indeed, she knows they evoke her as a threat to discipline their own children (Hegi
1994: 159, 173). Here there is the implication that her 'disability' is a negative characteristic
– rather than the friendship with Eva enhancing Trudi's standing amongst the other
children, the opposite would occur. In later life Trudi challenges people with this thinking.
On holding the baby of one of the townswomen (who has somewhat reluctantly allowed
her to do so), Trudi says 'You think I'm going to drop her? And that she'll turn out to be a
Zwerg too?' (Hegi 1994: 417).

Similarly, in interactions with other characters, the stigmatised body comes to the fore in
Geek Love (Dunn 1989). For instance, the conjoined twins Elly and Iphy, having recently
'sold' their virginity to a 'normate' man, reflect on the experience; and Elly points out:

> 'Iphy, listen. He wouldn't have hugged us anyway. They are never going to want
> to hug us or cuddle up afterward. They are *always* going to get right out of bed and
> zip up still wet and go away' (Dunn 1989: 230).

The more pragmatic Elly is aware of their body's value as a novelty sexual experience – but
also that for the 'normate' man, she and her twin encounter, it will be 'never' more than
fleeting. Although any deeper or lasting association – 'hug' or 'cuddle' would neither be
appropriate nor wanted. Here the stigmatised female body is both part of the attraction
(for the sex) and repellent (for the rapid departure). Whereas for Trudi in *Stones from the*

River, Eva is willing to become friends in secret, any revelation of her association with Trudi's stigmatised self will result in a cessation of their friendship (Hegi 1994).[8]

Stigma then is related to the ultravisibility of these characters' bodies. These instances demonstrate that the stigma attached to Trudi and Olympia's (and Elly and Iphy's) corporeality affects all of their interactions with other characters. In choosing to employ central characters who live with the stigma of non-normate embodiment, both Dunn and Hegi thus acknowledge stigma as 'something worth writing about' (Goffman 1963: 40). Nevertheless, the materiality of these characters' bodies also engenders a sense of their being different from other people – such that other characters treat them differently – often ignoring their presence and rendering them invisible, a factor that both Trudi and Olympia turn to their advantage – as is revealed in the next section.

4.6 Invisibility and the passive body

Examples of the association between disability, invisibility and the passive body can be found throughout *Stones from the River* and *Geek Love.* These play upon Bourdieu's (1991) notion of bodily *habitus* – 'a disposition to behave or react in certain ways to specific situations' – as discussed in Chapter 3. What Butler describes as 'the embodied rituals of everydayness' (1999: 113) is neatly encapsulated in an extract from *Stones from the River.*

> Most grown ups didn't look right at Trudi: they acted as if she were invisible and said things they would never say around other children ... If she didn't remind people that she was there, she got to listen to all kind of secrets (Hegi 1994: 72).

It is as though the ritual behaviour of the normate characters in the fictional town of Bergdorf is to render non-normate characters invisible. As this extract also indicates, Trudi turns this to her advantage – she does not 'remind people' that she is there, so she gets to listen to information that would not be accessible to other children. However, in assuming

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[8] The friendship endures, and much later in the novel, Trudi and her father (Leo) offer refuge to Jews – one of whom is Eva (Hegi 1994).

the passivity expected of her by other characters, she becomes an active participant in their

gossip – and stores 'all kinds of secrets' for later, such that the townspeople come to fear

her ability to extract and appropriate their 'secrets' to retell their stories:

> Even if you were determined not to talk to Trudi Montag at all, you couldn't
> always guard your secret from her. You'd weaken: something in her generous eyes
> would make you want to tell her, and though you didn't want to give in, you
> already sensed that it was too late, that your secret was becoming hers, and that
> from then on you could only watch it grow as Trudi paraded it around town (Hegi
> 1994: 247).

This extract, written in the second person,[9] almost portrays Trudi as a malignant force

around town – acquiring stories through stealth. This notion is only tempered by the

inclusion of such attributes as 'generous eyes'. Returning to the third person, it continues:

> whatever the people gave Trudi was not enough … If she couldn't have their
> acceptance, at least she'd have their stories … Because of her difference. Because
> they could not accept her – they owed her something … her own secrets she held
> on to, accumulating power by keeping separate what was hers and what belonged
> to others (Hegi 1994: 247-8).

It becomes Trudi's disposition, her 'embodied rituals of everydayness' to extract secrets and

weave them into stories about the people around her and for them to try to resist. There is

a recognition of the power of the narrative in the storytelling, the townspeople are aware

that once a secret is retold by Trudi that it cannot nor will not become undone or be

untold. The last phrase in this extract indicates, however, that Trudi recognises herself as

both observer and narrator and as such doesn't see herself as belonging to others, she

perceives herself as always being separate, being different. Here then, the notion of the

passive disabled body is turned upon its head: Trudi has become the purveyor of knowledge

– usually predicated upon people's bodies, but also in their everyday behaviour, values and

attitudes; while maintaining power over her own secrets and stories.

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[9] There is insufficient space here to discuss second-person narrative strategies, but Greenwood (2003)
observes that such narratives tend to 'celebrate … compromised subjectivity' (2003: 36).

Similarly, in *Geek Love*, Olympia's love for her brother Arturo and for her daughter Miranda renders her 'an invisible presence' to them. To her brother and others, she becomes a passive recipient of orders in the Fabulon; and in later life, to Miranda – sketching Olympia – merely the subject for her medical illustration class project:

> Watching her work is comfortable. I feel invisible again ... She is not interested in my identity. She doesn't notice it ... I am merely a utensil, a temporary topic for the eternal discussion between her long eye and her deliberate hand (Dunn 1989: 34).

Olympia observes that Miranda is 'not interested in my identity', as though to imply that she does not possess one. However, as discussed in section 4.5, Olympia lives in constant fear of Miranda realising her true identity. The character Olympia also apparently feels comfortable as a utensil – a situation she has been no stranger to when ministering to her brother Arturo's needs in the past. In an extract that has echoes of those from *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) above, Olympia observes:

> People talk easily to me. They think a bald albino hunchback dwarf can't hide anything. My worst is all out in the open. It makes it necessary for people to tell you about themselves ... Just being visible is my biggest confession ... They go too far because I am one listener who is in no position to judge or find fault (Dunn 1989: 197).

Echoing the discussion of Trudi above, Olympia's stigmatised body provides the impetus for other characters' revealing 'necessary' all. In both of these situations, as disabled characters operating under heightened surveillance Trudi and Olympia are simultaneously *ultravisible* (as an 'undesirable' or 'freak') and *invisible* (as 'disabled' females). Furthermore, these two instances illustrate Sheldon's argument that 'particularities of one's form of embodiment [can act] as a disability in the context of particular social settings' (2002: 15): at the very moment when these characters are invisible their passivity is mistaken by other characters for an inability to act independently. In essence, other characters can be said to subconsciously react to both Trudi and Olympia's perceived disability by discounting their bodily power because of it. However, as the following sections indicate this is a misconception.

4.7 Mutable bodies

A related issue is the notion of the mutable, disembodied body or the ability to transcend the body (Wendell 1999). This can be illustrated by instances in which Olympia and Trudi 'assume' other identities. Here, for example, Olympia works at a radio station and as a voice, she claims that she is able to assume any form:

> I can never be inconspicuous in person. A hunchback is not agile enough for efficient skulking. But my voice can take me anywhere. I can be a manicured silk receptionist, a bureaucrat of impenetrable authority, or an old college chum ... a pollster doing a survey ... a reporter for the daily paper (Dunn 1989: 186).

First, Olympia acknowledges that the materiality of her body can be seen as limiting, but more importantly, she asserts that in some cases it is redundant. She implies that beyond the confines of other characters' stares, she is liberated: 'my voice can take me anywhere'.

Trudi, chooses a different way of assuming another identity. She combs the marriage advertisements in a newspaper and writes under an assumed identity: 'this woman whose description – tall and slender with a mane of auburn hair ... warm hearted and, loved to cook and dance ... adored opera as well as children' (Hegi 1994: 296-7). The values, attitudes and behaviour are all Trudi's own, but the appearance of her assumed identity is not – she has taken it 'from one of the colourful book jackets in the pay-library' where she works (Hegi 1994: 296). Trudi goes to the café in which she has arranged the date and watches the man, enraged by his 'never even glanc[ing] at her', Trudi writes another note under her assumed identity 'I have seen you and I find you too pitiful to consider' and hands it to the man (Hegi 1994: 298). (Trudi and the man, Max, eventually become lovers.) In both of these instances Trudi takes part of her own identity (her love of opera), and the attitudes towards herself and her body ('pitiful'), projects them onto other characters.

In this sense, both characters Olympia and Trudi are able to transcend their own bodies and operate as others – or at least feel less or more conscious of their impairment according to the social context. Through voice Olympia is able to assume identities she doesn't possess

– thus holding the power invested in a body imagined by the other characters: 'an old college chum' or 'a manicured silk receptionist'; whereas Trudi uses the written word to assume imagined and somewhat idealised characteristics. However, as discussed elsewhere, Trudi also uses the secrets she has accumulated about other characters and her ability to tell stories, to hold other characters in thrall and make them temporarily forget the materiality of her embodiment, thus holding power over them. Nevertheless, it is often in instances when the non-normate body is most visible that it also embodies power – as the next section demonstrates.

4.8 Ultravisibility and the active body

> 'Always remember,' my father used to say, 'how much leverage you've got on the norms just by your physical presence' (Dunn 1989: 69).

As the above quotation indicates, ultravisibility is the converse of invisibility and the passive body. With ultravisibility, power is invested in the body; and here the non-normate body is active. However, one could argue that any body whether idealised, normate or non-normate always is enacting, active and therefore never passive (Young 2003). This is not to say that in being invisible the non-normate character is not active, as demonstrated above. Furthermore, to illustrate the notion of ultravisibility and the active body, I need also to draw on Bourdieu's bodily *habitus* because, in *Stones from the River*, Trudi's body and other characters' perceptions of it appears to act as 'a [heightened] form of engagement with the world' (Butler 1999: 115). It also relates to Foucault's (1977/1975) notion of self-surveillance (discussed in section 3.2). For example, at the start of the book we are introduced to Trudi through her feelings of bodily inadequacy in the sight of others.[10] Although the narrative of *Stones from the River* is in the third person, most of the novel is focalised through Trudi's eyes and she sees herself as being different. Like many of us, she rejects the label 'disabled' and its connotations, and when Trudi is described as being

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[10] Though, as the character Trudi matures, her feelings of bodily inadequacy diminish: 'At least by now she was used to her body, even if she might never get used to the word *Zwerg*' (Hegi 1994: 495).

disabled, it is often focalised through another character's eyes. In one instance the local doctor tells Trudi she is a dwarf, but Trudi rejects this explanation thus:

> She laughed and shook her head. Dwarfs belonged in fairy tales ... She knew she didn't look like *Schneewittchen's* [Snow White's] dwarfs. *Zwerge* were men, squat, little men with big bellies and funny, peaked hats ... 'There is no girl *Zwerg* in *Schneewittchen und die sieben Zwerge,*' she reminded Frau Doktor Rosen (Hegi 1994: 53).

This exchange helps to indicate how perceptions of people of short stature endure from myth, of which traditional fairytales are just one literary convention. Notwithstanding the fact that she is no less of an invention than the seven dwarfs, the character Trudi's life is communicated through a realist novel rather than a fairytale. And, as Watt has pointed out, 'the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it' (reprinted in Walder 1995: 215). This exchange is presented as the experiential being invoked to counter the medical prognosis.

Conversely, *Geek Love* borders on the genre of fantasy novel. Like Trudi, the character of Olympia sees herself as being different, but views this as a cause for celebration rather than consternation. Olympia introduces herself thus:

> It was a disappointment when I emerged with such commonplace deformities. My albinism is the regular pink-eyed variety and my hump, though pronounced, is not remarkable in size or shape as humps go ... The dwarfism, which was very apparent by my third birthday, came as a pleasant surprise to the patient pair [her parents] and increased my value (Dunn 1989: 9).

Rather, Olympia's repeated allusion to her own bodily inadequacy stems from believing herself to be inferior within the setting of the family's business: 'My situation was far too humdrum to be marketable on the same scale as my brother's and sisters' (Dunn 1989: 9). Instead she is to work as a 'talker for the business', her parents' observe: 'A bald albino hunchback seemed the right enticement toward the esoteric talents of the rest of the family' (Dunn 1989: 9). However, as the novel is in the first person, the reader is given to empathise with the character Olympia. As a 'talker for the business' and in her later life as a

storyteller on radio she is portrayed as being able to report events within the plot of the novel as an 'expert', almost omniscient voice.[11]

Because the Binewskis' life is based around being stared at, I would argue the novel indicates that the family deliberately choose to separate themselves as other, engender new cultures and create their bodies as discursive constructions (see section 2.8). Indeed, Olympia's elder brother, Arty, describes the Binewski siblings thus, 'We are the things that come to norms in nightmares' (Dunn 1989: 52). Olympia asserts that the greater part of the audience attend the show to assure themselves of their normalcy – extending Garland Thomson's four rhetorics somewhat (see section 4.2). Nevertheless, some of the so-called norms are attracted to the very things that Arturo says are their 'nightmares', and he works to persuade his audience to turn from being 'ugly' to 'beautiful', or 'all right' in order to 'be happy' (Dunn 1989: 199-200). By this, he means to assume a non-normate ultravisible embodiment. Whereas Olympia's ultravisibility occurs in the midway, hence the reaction of the drunk in an extract cited in section 4.4, and on the street when people see her. But as observed below – Olympia is not ashamed of her body; she is portrayed as revelling in the stares of others and returning their stares.

4.9 Powerful bodies and self-identity

Implicit in many of the descriptions of Trudi and Olympia's bodies is the concept of power – and this is directly related to their maturation and growing acceptance of their self-identity. These characters' bodies appear to act as a site where power is enacted as well as one in which power is implied. For example, in a photo of Trudi and a childhood friend she 'stands on a boulder with her chin held up ... Her torso was much wider than [George's]' (Hegi 1994: 86). The concatenation of the solidity of her young body with that of a boulder and in comparison to George's is significant. For me it implies that Trudi's

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[11] This authorial approach tends to be replicated in auto/biographical material.

bodily *hexis* (or state of body; Bourdieu 1991) was powerful and that she has sufficient self-esteem to hold her chin up proudly even at an age when she has most self-doubt.

However, it is their growing self-awareness that drives both Trudi and Olympia's power in relation to their bodies. The only time Trudi encounters another person of short stature is Pia – an animal tamer at a carnival. As she watches Pia's performance Trudi realises, 'people … were awed by [Pia's] skill and courage [at placing] her head inside the lion's wide open mouth' (Hegi 1994: 130). Trudi volunteers herself as an assistant during Pia's performance and together she and Pia weave a story about an island of little people 'so glorious that everyone in the audience would have followed them there without questions' (Hegi 1994: 132). The image of the small woman against a large powerful animal and Pia's fearlessness in placing her head inside the animal's mouth is strong for both the audience and the reader (and for the character Trudi too). That Trudi is able, by association, to assume some of Pia's fearlessness: first in showing herself to the audience, and second in holding them in thrall by storytelling is a strong one. This is a pivotal point in Trudi's maturation; after meeting Pia she becomes more accepting of her difference than previously.

Encounters with other dwarfs are also represented in *Geek Love*. Olympia muses 'You'd think dwarfs and midgets would have drifted through the Fabulon all my life. It was actually, though accidentally, very rare for me to see anyone like me' (Dunn 1989: 311). However, Olympia's body is constantly portrayed as a powerful body both within the Fabulon and in her later life. At one point Olympia finds herself at the club where her daughter Miranda performs a striptease. Olympia is pushed onto stage and made to perform:

> The twisting of my hump feels good against the warm air … and [I] open my near-blind eyes wide so they can see that there is true pink there – the raw albino eye in the lashless sockets – and it is good. How proud I am, dancing in the air full of eyes rubbing at me uncovered … Those poor hoptoads behind me are silent. I've conquered them. They thought to use and shame me but I win out by nature (Dunn 1989: 23).

The phrases 'true pink', 'raw albino', 'eyes rubbing at me' and 'win out by nature' in this extract indicate Olympia feeling her body at its most open, honest and therefore powerful. Indeed throughout *Geek Love* Dunn (1989) turns the idea of the powerful body on its head, and positions the central characters as celebrating their non-normate bodies. Constantly, she brings the reader's attention to the non-normate body as a powerful body and the normate body as inferior, thus essentialising the notion of *being* rather than *becoming* a 'true freak'.[12] A conversation between Miranda and Olympia helps to further illustrate this point:

> [Miranda says] '... You must have wished a million times to be normal.'
> [Olympia replies] 'No.'
> 'No?'
> 'I've wished I had two heads. Or that I was invisible. I've wished for a fish's tail instead of legs. I've wished to be more special.'
> 'Not normal?'
> 'Never' (Dunn 1989: 41).

This conversation, once again, touches upon the notion of normal, but in relation to distinctiveness of embodiment. Olympia views the non-normate body as special, and appears to introduce the idea of a continuum of 'specialness'. She conveys that having 'two heads' (referring to Iphigenia and Electra), invisibility (referring to Fortunato) or a 'fish's tail' (referring to Arturo) would make her 'more special'.

4.10 Gender and the disabled body

As gender is a recurrent theme throughout my thesis, here I discuss a number of issues in representations of gender and disabilities in *Stones from the River* and *Geek Love*.

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[12] Like the extension of the use of the term disability to include cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV in the DDA (2005), researchers have extended the usage of the term 'freak' to include investigations of texts on tattooing and race (Cassuto 1996); on conjoined twins (Clark and Myser 1996; Pingree 1996); on exhibitions (Cook 1996; Fretz 1996; Gerber 1996; Vaughan 1996); on film (Hawkins 1996); on laughing gas demonstrations (Hickey Grayson 1996); and on fantasy novels (Peterson 1996).

4.10.1 'Gendered' impairment

First, to deal with perceptions of reasons for impairment based on gender. Disability researchers have pointed out how perceptions of the impairment of men and women differ. Asch and Fine, citing research undertaken by Hanna and Rogovsky, describe how 'non-disabled college students attributed male disability to external situations such as war, work injury or accident. [Whereas] they attributed female disability to internal causes such as disease' (1988: 15).[13] This kind of gendered representation of reasons for impairment is borne out in *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994). For example, Trudi's father, Leo, limps because of an injury sustained during the First World War; similarly, the local butcher walks 'slightly bent to the left' after breaking his back when slaughtering a cow (Hegi 1994: 28). Similarly, as Keith (2001) points out, female characters' disability or disfigurements are often either congenital, for example, Frau Doktor Rosen has a 'white, raised ... trace of [a] cleft palate' (Hegi 1994: 23), or the female character's disability is viewed as being due to her inherently unstable mental state, for example, Trudi's mother, Gertrude, spends much of her adult life locked in the attic or in an asylum because of her 'craziness' (Hegi 1994: 13).[14] In addition, women's impairments – perceived to have been acquired through internal causes – tend to engender more negative attitudes because of 'fears of contagion or of the person's inherent moral badness' (Asch and Fine 1988: 15) (see section 3.9).

4.10.2 Gender, identity and the non-normate body

Gender appears in different guises in the novel *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989). As Adams, paraphrasing Haraway, has pointed out: 'gender is a discourse mapped onto the body' (1996: 277). However, as earlier sections of this chapter indicate the character Olympia 'emphasises essential bodily difference as a determining factor in her social identity' (Adams

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[13] This may be related to notions of women's bodies having leaky boundaries that are more susceptible to disease (Shildrick 1997); whereas men's bodies need to be violated by force to become impaired (Mallett personal communication).
[14] One novel that deals with myth and disability and which has an impaired female character at its centre is *Precious Bane* (Webb 1924). In this novel, a repeated refrain is the myth that a mother would produce a child with a cleft palette if a hare crosses her path when she is pregnant. See also Darke's (1994) discussion of the myth behind Joseph Merrick's head shape.

1996: 277). I would argue that it is both her gender identity *and* her non-normate body (see section 3.7) that Olympia claims create her as a person and influences the way she relates to other characters. The manner in which Olympia perceives her brother Arturo's body contrasts with her own. Each description of his body is couched in the positive, whereas her perception of her own embodiment is generally negative. For example, when preparing his body for a show, Olympia constantly admires Arty's physique:[15]

> His back muscles rolled into cut slabs, every knob of his incredible spine visible as he bunched to help me ... The flippers on Arty's hips were graceful. Nearly flat, twisting at their short joints like swans' necks, smooth and powerful and extending with asymmetrical purpose (Dunn 1989: 355).

Her use of words such as 'incredible', 'graceful', 'powerful' and 'purpose' engender a sense of solidity and positivity inherent to Arty's body. In using such language, Olympia projects her admiration onto the audience that Arturo will shortly perform for. Contrast these with Oly's descriptions of her own body in the eyes of others. While she enjoys showing her body off for its shock value as indicated above, Olympia tends to degrade her own embodiment to one of ordinariness. For example, when she is in the swimming pool being stared at by a group of young children:

> I have never claimed that my hump is extraordinary in size or conformation, but it is a classic of its kind, rising in a clean arc and pulling my shoulders up, pinching my chest out in a narrow wedge. The top of my hump, if I bend at a certain angle, is as high as the back of my head. [The children] are impressed at the size of my hands on the ends of my short, thin arms. I smile and open my eyes so they can tell ... that my eyes are a deep rose pink rather than red (Dunn 1989: 366).

In both of these extracts, the descriptions work in different ways because of the characters' gender. Olympia conveys a sense of power emanating from Arturo's body, whereas, although her body is powerful, because it holds the interest of others, one gets the impression that she revels in it for a different reason. I would argue that in the former it is a gaze (implying somewhat subjective admiration) and in the latter a stare (implying more objective curiosity, perhaps revulsion). By having a group of children stare at Olympia,

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[15] This is just one example: there are others throughout the novel.

Dunn would be aware that a child's stare is less bound by social niceties, indeed the phrase 'The children's eyes are crawling on me' (1989: 365) conveys a sense of Olympia being invaded by insects. She counters this invasion by deliberately displaying the non-normate parts of herself to them: 'my hump', 'my hands' and 'my short, thin arms', and thus underscores her otherness. However, at the same time Olympia is recording their misconceptions of her embodiment: her hump is not extraordinary, but a 'classic of its kind' and aspects of herself that could be deemed feminine – her eyes being 'a deep rose pink, rather than red' compared to Arty's slabs of muscle.

The characters Olympia and Trudi are portrayed as operating in a heightened awareness of themselves as surveyor of self, as surveyed women (Berger 1972), and as disabled. Both characters realise most other characters' reaction to their embodiment is a mixture of fear and curiosity – reflecting perhaps the discussion of the fear of femininity in Chapter 3. As Olympia muses: 'That was the time when I realized that the peculiar look on people's faces when they saw me ... could be translated into one simple question: "What the hell happened to you?" They need to know so they could prevent it from happening to them' (Dunn 1989: 360). However, I would argue that it is their embodiment and gender combined that combines to engender a fear of the non-normate body which drives normate characters to stare so openly at both Trudi and Olympia.

4.10.3 Patriarchal and matriarchal authority

Gender and power raises its head in the form of patriarchal authority in both novels. Both are set within the dominant ideology of the nuclear family – with the father, mother and child(ren). In *Stones from the River*, Trudi's mother (Gertrude) dies when she is young, but Gertrude remains part of the family: Leo never remarries and keeps photographs of his wife's dead body dressed in her bridal outfit in his room. There is also the implication that Gertrude continues to influence decisions that Trudi makes, and as a child Trudi believes that, if she can grow, her mother will return to life: 'It was all connected to the size of her own body. Once that stretched itself, her mother would be well again. She was only staying away until then' (Hegi 1994: 52). In *Geek Love*, Olympia's family is the 'classic' nuclear

family with mother, daughters, father and sons. Indeed the opening chapter is entitled 'The Nuclear Family: his talk, her teeth' (Dunn 1989: 3-11), and throughout the novel first the father, Aloysius, then the eldest son, Arturo, and finally the youngest son, Fortunato assume control of the individual family member's everyday behaviour and destinies. This foregrounding of patriarchal authority is, however, undercut by the fact that both of the central female characters survive beyond the death of their fathers and brothers and come to accept and value their own non-normate identities.

4.10.4 Reproduction, replication and gender

Reproduction, replication and disability are interesting gender-related issues in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989). Such are Arty's powers of persuasion during his act that one member of the audience is encouraged to respond: 'I want to be like you are' (Dunn 1989: 201). This idea snowballs until a number of audience members elect to have their limbs amputated, join the Fabulon as hangers-on and eventually become part of an 'Arturian Cult' (Dunn 1989: 207). Arty's embodiment attracts their attention, and, in allowing themselves to be persuaded to have their limbs amputated, this section of the audience identifies with and enhances their attachment to his stigmatised body (Goffman 1963). In effect, Arty has encouraged them to replicate in his image. Olympia reports on a similar, though less invasive, response to Elly and Iphy's conjoined body:

> The norms loved them. In towns we passed through regularly pairs of young girls would come to the show dressed in a single long skirt in imitation of the twins' and 'a Twins Fan Club came to the door ... they dyed each other's California hair ... blue-black (Dunn 1989: 58, 344).

There are two issues here, first, the twin's fan club members receive no encouragement from Elly and Iphy in their wish to appear conjoined. Second, in electing to appear conjoined and to dye their blonde 'California hair' blue-black, these young girls reject what represents a particular American type of values and appearance for its feminine antithesis. In this way the novel *Geek Love* counterplays upon traditional notions of the body: by re-writing the codes and conventions of the idealised female body (Betterton 1987; see also

Chapter 3 this thesis). In essence, the behaviour of the twin's fan club members also plays upon the notion of idealised femininity – an issue I return to in more detail in Chapter 5 in relation to other novels; while the amputees' could be said to have been persuaded to emulate Arty's non-normate masculine body.

The foregoing chapters in the novel indicate that the male characters do tend to exploit the females (for example, Al convincing Lil to produce 'special' children through the use of various drugs during pregnancy); and there are instances of Arturo exploiting everyone around him. In discussing *Geek Love,* Adams argues that 'Arty's authentic freakishness calls for a replication of an idealised model ... Whereas the female body, with its ability to create originals through reproduction, poses a threat to Arty's absolute power' (1996: 283-4). This reflects my own reading of the conflict between the sexes that arises in terms of Olympia, Electra and Iphigenia's ability to reproduce. In giving birth, Oly to a daughter, Miranda, and Elly and Iphy to a son, Mumpo (Dunn 1989: 348, 334), can be seen as a threat to Arturio's ability to encourage others to replicate in his image. In being able naturally to reproduce non-normate children, the Binewski girls differ sufficiently from their parents' methods; and as such have an inherent power that Arty cannot hope to emulate. In essence, his Arturian Cult is an enactment and re-enactment of the primacy of (as he perceives it) his ideal masculine embodiment and the power implied within it, which is reflected in Oly's adoration.

Furthermore, the disabled female is often perceived neither as being be able to bear and raise children nor expected to get married (Asch and Fine 1997; Ferri and Gregg 1998; Lonsdale 1997). Reflections of this perception appear in fiction, for example, in *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994), where Trudi muses upon the links between social conventions and herself as a non-normate female:

> 'No-one in Burgdorf would scorn her for not getting married ... it would be what was expected of her in this town ... In a strange way, she had more freedom than other women, the freedom to make her own decisions, to provide for herself ... to listen to her own counsel' (Hegi 1994: 216-17).

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What is interesting here is that Hegi's character reflects disabled women's own experiences of the liberation that this freedom from expectations can bring, as one young woman states:

> 'I go to parties and come home late … If my sister wanted to do that it would be out of the question. They think I won't ever get married … So I have more freedom than she has' (cited in Lonsdale 1990: 71).

It also echoes the discussion of the de-sexed boy in section 3.10.1, in that it frees the individual character from having to enact her femininity. Therefore, novels such as *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) could be said to go some way towards closing the disjuncture between the signifier (the literary representations) and the signified (the lived experience).

Gender and disability, then, can be read as interacting in a number of ways in terms of expectations of physically disabled or non-normate characters in fiction. As I have indicated here, it finds its outlets through gendering of the underlying causes of impairment in female and male characters. There are instances of the perception of the disabled male body as being more powerful in its corporeality than the disabled female body. In relation to power, gender arises in relation to patriarchal authority over the disabled female body. One example, issues of reproduction (by non-normate females) and replication (by non-normate males) of the so-called disabled body are inherently related to gender in these novels.

4.11 Conclusions

As this chapter has demonstrated, in *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) the character Trudi's observations about herself and the lives of people in the fictitious town of Burgdorf, and in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) the character Olympia's observations about herself and those around her, operate both at micro and macro levels. Therefore, their stigmatised and impaired or non-normate bodies can be read as signifying a number of issues. For example, Trudi's embodiment acting as a metaphor (Mitchell 2002) for the heightened surveillance that operated throughout Nazi Germany and much of Europe at that time; and Olympia's

for the way in which the unbounded stare at non-normate bodies operated in and beyond 'freak' shows.

It is my contention that the centrality of Trudi and Olympia and the ways in which they behave and react to the characters around them, and *vice versa*, in both *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) and *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) as described in this chapter is important for our understanding of the ways in which the non-normate body is perceived as both powerful and powerless when observing and being observed. Although written more than 50 years after the end of the Second World War and long after traditional freak shows have ceased to operate[16] respectively, these female characters would both encourage the reader to reconsider traditional concepts of power and so-called 'disabled' bodies.

Both Trudi and Olympia, as characters of short stature, indicate how congenital impairments or what are perceived (often focalised through other characters) as life-long disabilities can be critically evaluated as powerful bodies in novels. Both characters' bodies (to paraphrase Grosz 1994) receive, bear and transmit meaning, messages and signs – rather 'like the system of writing'. They demonstrate how the physically impaired or non-normate body can be represented as mutable or transcended in literature (Wendell 1999). In so doing, their bodies appear to align more to Bourdieu's (1991) notion of the active body, rather than to Foucault's (1970/1966) of the passive body (i.e. the site and sign of raw data) at both the conceptual and the practical level.

I have discussed notions of femininity and sexuality throughout this chapter in relation to these characters. In the next chapter I will examine acquired impairment in relation to femininity and the ways in which the confluence of disability and gender is often portrayed as disempowering for the protagonists in some novels, but how it is portrayed as empowering in others. I will also analyse the ways in which an impairment that has been

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[16] The enfreakment of the non-normate body continues, I would argue, in today's mass media, but now operates within different parameters in relation to surveillance. With the increase in focus on the 'idealised' body, it is now more acceptable to stare at the non-normate body, for example, the winner of a recent *Big Brother* series had Tourette's syndrome. Furthermore, there are television series that focus upon disfigurement such as *Body Shock* which remain extremely popular. Both series have been screened on Channel 4 during 2006-07 – see also Yuan 1996 on the phenomenon of the celebrity freak.

cured is often portrayed as empowering for a character, and the implications all of these different portrayals have for readers' perceptions of disability.

Chapter 5: Disability, femininity and gender

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will demonstrate how literary characterisations are infused with specific meanings which both reproduce and reinforce societal notions of disability in relation to gender and femininity. In essence, this is an exploration of the narrative purpose that physically disabled female characters serve within novels. Examples in this chapter are taken from novels that include characters who acquire an impairment (i.e. they become impaired) and characters whose impairment disappears (i.e. their impairment is cured) during the course of the plot.

Generally, these types of representations of physically disabled women tend to emphasise differences between disabled and non-disabled bodies and reinforce stereotypical notions of 'disability [as] a system that produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies' (Garland Thomson 2002: 74) (see also discussion of marked bodies in sections 2.3 and 4.5). This is especially the case where a central[1] character becomes disabled in order to propel events forward, but also closely relates to the way that that character's femininity is presented before and after her impairment is acquired and its wider effects on the other characters and the setting of each of the novels. Here, I focus on characters who become impaired through accidents: Edith Morrissey in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) and Mattie Silver in *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911). By way of contrast, I analyse a character who is cured of her impairment: Adah Price in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998).

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[1] Kent (1988) describes one of the characters I have chosen to focus on, Edith (French 1997/1980), as 'minor' and 'offstage', but I consider her a central character in that it is her impairment that drives the plot from the point when the reasons behind it is revealed.

As with the previous chapter, I chose these three novels in order to illustrate the theoretical viewpoints that serve to underpin discourses on disability and femininity outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. First, two of the novels include characters that reinforce negative associations with disability – Mattie in *Ethan Frome* and Edith in *The Bleeding Heart* and thus demonstrate a shift in the disability discourse to what Mitchell (2002) terms 'narrative prosthesis' and 'the materiality of metaphor' (see Chapter 1 and sections 2.9 and 5.2 respectively). Second, the introduction of a third character, Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible*, enables me to look at the ways authors can contest such associations – one who (like Trudi and Olympia in the previous chapter) reflects much of the discussion on the active body and powerful bodies and self-identity in sections 4.8 and 4.9.[2] Third, as I demonstrate, throughout this chapter, fictional representations of female characters who become impaired often appear to serve both stereotypical and idealised notions of femininity discussed in sections 2.7 and 2.10 too. To explore this issue, I describe the disparate ways such characters are perceived pre- and post-impairment – Edith in *The Bleeding Heart* is presented as having her femininity enhanced in a mask-like way to compensate for her impairments, and the way Mattie's femininity is diminished in *Ethan Frome* (see section 5.5; and section 5.7 in relation to associations between different disabilities). Fourth, I illustrate how the onset or cure of impairment is linked to traditional associations with gender-related behaviour discussed in section 3.8. For example, the onset of both Edith and Mattie's and the curing of Adah's impairment is linked directly to their relationships with men – but Edith and Mattie's acquisition of impairments are attributed in part to their female bodies' intrinsic unruliness – see section 3.10. In the same section, I explore how, conversely, the character Adah (*The Poisonwood Bible*) must heed the advice of a man in order to leave her impaired 'self' behind and develop as a reasoned woman (see also Keith 2001; and section 5.4). Fifth, I demonstrate how disability can be read as affecting the other characters, the plot and the setting – for example, the character Dolores' musings on the compromising of her own feminist beliefs by any bodily dependence on Victor (see section 5.8). Taken together these explorations reflect feminist and disability discourses on the integrity of the female and impaired body respectively (see sections 3.7 and 2.9 as well as 3.10). Sixth, my

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[2] The characters explored in the previous chapter, Olympia in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) and Trudi in *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) also work to contest negativity associated with disability.

investigation demonstrates the different ways that the introduction of impairment or its disappearance in a character can drive the plot of a novel and how such representational strategies have become 'normalised' (see section3.11). In essence, this chapter is an exploration of how stereotypical representational strategies employed by Wharton (1911) and French (1997/1980) work to position the reader's viewpoint and thus reflect (and confirm) traditional notions of disability and femininity – thus adding little to the discourse. It also shows how this kind of approach has endured in novels from the early through to the late twentieth century. However, Kingsolver's (1998) approach demonstrates how characterisations of physically disabled females in more recent novels have enabled such discourses to be rewritten and to develop further. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on the character Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) in order to explore the deeper implications of her embodiment in relation to the rhetorics of disability as well as feminist theories on the body and femininity.

Thus, the two apparently 'opposing' issues of acquiring or being cured of physical impairment are investigated in relation to a number of thematic strands. By drawing upon the terminology in Chapter 2 and theories discussed in Chapter 3, I will demonstrate how they can further our understanding of representations of gender, femininity and the disabled female body, starting with the application of narrative prostheses and the materiality of metaphor. But first a brief excursion into the implications of investigating the novel *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911), which, unlike the other novels discussed in this thesis, is not contemporary.[3]

5.1.1 *Ethan Frome,* new historicism and changing discourses

In earlier chapters I introduced the issue of examining the novels with a new historicist approach (sections 1.2 and 3.11); through this I intended to indicate that there are broad changes in the discourses surrounding representations of disability and femininity (as this and the preceding chapter shows). Despite their similarities in plot construction – women

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[3] The other novels explored in this thesis were published as follows: Dunn 1989, French 1997/1980, Hegi 1994 and Kingsolver 1998.

characters involved with men characters reach a critical point in their relationship, an accident ensues and impairment is the outcome – *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911) was published more or less 70 years before *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980). Furthermore, *Ethan Frome* was produced at a time when the first wave of feminism (nineteenth to early twentieth century) was taking place and when disability studies did not exist. Therefore, the discourses circulating at the time of publication of *Ethan Frome* were primarily concerned with the emancipation of women – which included, to some extent, the medical treatment of women.[4] The next novel to be published (and the one with which my discussion of *Ethan Frome* is most closely linked), *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980), was originally produced by an author, French, who was recognised as a feminist (see Kent 1988). The feminist discourses circulating at the time of the publication of *The Bleeding Heart* were, from the 1960s to the 1980s (or the second wave of feminism), were concerned with legal and cultural inequalities; as were those of activists in the disability rights movement. Disability studies also became an established area of academic research around this period (see Chapter 2). Thus, these and the other novels discussed in this and the previous chapter were produced when very different discourses surrounding femininity and disability were operating. One would imagine that this would affect the representation of physically disabled characters – i.e. that very different representations would be the result of the changing discourses. Instead, as I intend to illustrate throughout this chapter, this allows authors to choose from a myriad of characterisations.

5.2 Narrative prosthesis and the materiality of metaphor

Mitchell (2002) indicates how disability can act as a narrative prosthesis in novels (see section 3.11), but I would argue that gender and femininity can also function in this way too. Each supports the development of the plot and drives events to a greater or lesser degree at different times. Sometimes a character 'becomes' her disability, femininity or

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[4] There are similarities between Perkins Gilman's criticism of the medical treatment of women in *The Yellow Wall Paper* (1996/1892) and those implied by Wharton in *Ethan Frome* (1911) – novels which could be said to be contemporary with each other.

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gender, or such attributes serve to construct a specific aspect of her behaviour or embodiment. For example, the female character who becomes impaired acts as a narrative prosthesis (driving the plot in a particular direction), but also in doing so apparer.tly loses those aspects of herself that are seen as feminine or signalling femininity (additional narrative prosthesis). Here, Young has observed – the body is 'both subject and object for itself at the same time' (2003: 169), which for me is compounded by the fact that the character is disabled *and* female. In other words, in acquiring an impairment a character may also be perceived as being no longer able to enact her femininity (Young 2003) and is thus often perceived as asexual – as is the case with Mattie in *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911).[5] Alternatively, with the onset of impairment, her femininity may be presented as becoming false – as is the case with the character Edith in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980).[6] I will examine the ways in which these issues are communicated to the reader.

All three areas (disability, gender and femininity) can be seen to overlap in terms of bodies that demonstrate 'the materiality of metaphor' (Mitchell 2002). In the novels investigated here, there is some indication of 'disability [serving] primarily as a metaphor for things gone awry with bodily and social orders [and] there is a cumulative material impact on cultural attitudes towards disabled people' (Mitchell 2002: 24), and I am convinced that this is related to the gender and femininity of the characters as presented. For example, the central female characters in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) contrast wildly: Victor's lover Dolores is portrayed as a strong independent feminist whereas his wife Edith has functioned as the ideal wife, but the implication is that neither of these female characters can be both. This triangulation is based on issues related to gender and idealised femininity. In one instance Victor reflects, 'Edith in the hospital with her fragile body smashed to smithereens, ruined, ruined, all us [the whole family] ruined' (French 1997/1980: 272). In *Ethan Frome* the metaphor of disability extends to the setting of the novel: the visitor observes that the Frome house looks 'unusually forlorn and stunted' because it is missing its adjunct L (store-rooms, toolhouse, woodshed and cowbarn) and 'it is certain that the "L"

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[5] Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow* (1961/1941), has informed some of the themes explored in this chapter. In a series of essays on American novels, Wilson explores the factors that may influence different authors' writing, including Wharton's *Ethan Frome*.
[6] Further general discussion of representations of the disabled female in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) can be found in Kent (1988).

rather than the house itself seems to be the centre, the actual hearth-stone of the New England farm' (Wharton 1911: 21). Similarly, in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998), the character Adah Price is presented as disabled or non-normate while living in the Congo, but is cured of her impairment on her return to America – raising issues of connections between coloniality, femininity and disability.[7] Thus, the reader is encouraged to perceive the whole of the Fromes' and the Prices' lives being affected by the materiality of Mattie and Adah's impaired bodies. I will return to these issues later in this chapter. Next, however, I will discuss how femininity can be seen to fluctuate in relation to disability in the novels investigated here in a number of ways

5.3 Gender-related behaviour, disability and fluctuating femininity

In terms of negativity, for me the stereotypical portrayal of a disabled woman as a 'tragic but brave invalid', a 'sinister cripple' or a 'supercrip' (Shakespeare 1999; see also Chapter 4 this thesis) often relates to bodily power in terms of that character's gender and/or femininity. Examples of this kind of thinking can be seen in the characters Adah, Edith and Mattie as I will indicate later in this chapter. As stereotypes (Dyer 2002; see also section 2.7), such portrayals can be related to societal perceptions of bodily integrity, but tend also to reaffirm misconceptions about disability, gender and femininity. It is for these reasons that disability researchers, including Morris (1993) and Keith (2001), have deplored many representations of disabled women in literature. The author French (1997/1980), for example, was criticised for reproducing a stereotypical 'tragic' disabled character in Edith that would adversely affect readers' perceptions of disabled women, such that Kent was driven to write: 'when I consider French's otherwise elevated consciousness, I feel that I and all disabled women have been betrayed' (1988: 99). What these researchers point to is the fact that it is as physically disabled females that the characters' fates are shaped, not just by their impairment, but also because it brings into play theoretical standpoints on

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[7] The author, Kingsolver (n.d.), claims that 'The four sisters and Orleanna [the mother] represent five separate philosophical positions'. However, constraints on space do not permit an investigation of disability representations and colonial/post-colonial themes that arise in this novel and others (see e.g. Barker in press; Lorde 1982; Morrison 1997; Rhys 1966).

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femininity and gender. It is the intersections between these concepts that are discussed in
sections 3.7–3.8 and illustrated here.

First, a note on *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980): Dolores meets Victor during a work
placement in England and they fall passionately in love; although Dolores is aware that
Victor is married. After some months Victor reveals that his wife, Edith, is paralysed 'from
the waist down [with] stumps that had been legs' (French 1997/1980: 217). This revelation
is made more than half way through the novel, but is prefaced by Victor explaining the
reason for Edith's impairment. For 20 years Victor goes out to work and Edith remains at
home 'to bring up the children in a peaceful orderly and loving home' (French 1997/1980:
219). Throughout much of their marriage Victor is entirely self-absorbed and has a series
of affairs; he only gradually becomes aware Edith is unhappy. After she leaves him briefly
and returns, he notices that 'her face began to change. She developed little pursed lines
around her mouth … and her voice began to have a disapproving intonation' (French
1997/1980: 201). Here French appears to be setting up a gradual decline in Edith's
femininity both in terms of her behaviour and her embodiment. As Shildrick has observed:
'Losing control of oneself is to a large degree synonymous with losing control of … one's
body [and] is quintessentially a feminine rather than a masculine trait' (1997: 26) (see
Chapter 3 for further discussion). Losing control of oneself here could also be related to
losing one's former attractive appearance. This is borne out by the phrases chosen: the
implications of 'pursed lines' and 'a disapproving intonation' indicate that Edith's
disapproval is negatively affecting her appearance and her attractiveness to Victor. I will
return to the issue of feminine appearance in relation to disability in more depth below.

After Edith has discovered Victor's latest infidelity they argue, she storms out and drives
her car into a wall. The result is that Edith would, 'never be able to walk again, never be
able to use artificial legs but [it] felt as if her soul had atrophied' (French 1997/1980: 216).
This kind of approach by an author is generally recognised as clichéd: linking bodily
impairment and other attributes has been well documented. Here links are made between
the supposed negative effects of an impaired body on deeper psychological beliefs (i.e. in
Edith's soul); moreover, there are similar examples throughout this part of the novel *viz*: 'as

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if the accident had caused bone loss throughout her body' and 'Her voice seemed to change with her face' (French 1997/1980: 217-18). In the following sections, I will explore the negative associations between the stigma attached to disability and/or femininity and stereotypical representations and the ways that disability is purported to have wider gender-related effects. This exploration will indicate how the mutability of disabled women is represented through the acquisition or cure of impairment and will go some way towards indicating how this is underpinned by the historico-social notions of femininity and disability outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.

5.4 Gender and unruly bodies

It is my contention that socio-historical beliefs, rooted in nineteenth-century notions of the links between the female body and unruly behaviour (Ehrenreich and English 1979; Gilbert and Gubar 1979), can be seen to operate and become reinforced in the characterisations of Edith (French 1997/1980) and Mattie (Wharton 1911). As Foucault has pointed out: 'the *hystericization* of women ... involved a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex' (1981/1976: 146-7). The implication in both *The Bleeding Heart* and *Ethan Frome* is that the female characters' unreasonable behaviour results in them 'inviting' their disablement (Ehrenreich and English 1976). For example, as a female Edith is inherently unable to win the argument over Victor's infidelity; thus she was beyond reason when she left the house and so reacted in what would be termed a 'hysterical' manner. It is certainly couched in those terms by Victor:

> She shrieked [and kept shrieking] ... She was beside herself ... Suddenly she turned around and began to pull my books off the shelf and hurl them, anywhere, everywhere ... she threw it [a precious first edition] across the room ... I went for the book and she went for the door ... I wasn't so sane myself at that moment (French 1997/1980: 207-8).

At this point in the narrative, we understand Edith's behaviour – 'shrieking', 'beside herself' and 'hurl them' – is characterised by snap decisions, which she is making while anxious and

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angry. Put simply she wants to hurt Victor as much as she is feeling hurt (having seen him in a restaurant holding hands with another woman). But it is the last phrase 'I wasn't so sane myself' that is most telling; Victor is implying that Edith is insane and it is during this period of insanity that she attempts suicide. Whereas he is mostly reasonable and rationale as she throws the books: 'I didn't try to stop her. I thought that was a good way to get her anger out as any … Here she had all this passion locked up in her, all blocked. It fascinated me' (French 1997/1980: 208). Victor appears to be emulating the behaviour of a nineteenth-century physician observing a woman's 'hysterical behaviour' (Gilbert and Gubar 1979).[8] Furthermore, returning to Berger (1972) and Mulvey's (1998/1975) assertion that the female state is to be both subject and object of the male's gaze (see also section 3.3), Victor's observation that Edith's passion is 'locked up' and 'blocked' also serves to indicate that the 'physiological fact' of women's state is to be sick (Ehrenreich and English 1979).

Similarly, it is implied that the disablement of the character Mattie in *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911) is the result of her losing control, to the point where she suggests that, rather than separating permanently, she and Ethan should commit suicide together:

> … she snatched her hands from his, threw her arms about his neck and pressed a sudden drenched cheek against his face. 'Ethan! Ethan! I want you to take me down again!'
> 'Down where!'
> 'The coast [an improvised sledging track]. Right off,' she panted. 'So 't we'll never come up any more.'
> 'Matt! What on earth do you mean?'
> … 'Right into the big elm. You said you could. So 't we'd never have to leave each other any more.'
> 'Why what are you talking of? You're crazy!'
> 'I'm not crazy; but I will be if I leave you.'
> She tightened her fierce hold (Wharton 1911: 165-6).

Like Edith, Mattie's actions are jerky and uncontrolled: she 'snatched her hands', 'threw her arms', 'her fierce hold' and is referred to as panting like a dog. Like Victor, Ethan initially

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[8] Another example of this approach is that of the behaviour of the physician husband, John, in the novel *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Perkins Gillman 1892).

appears to observe her behaviour, going so far as to exclaim "You're crazy!" However, unlike Victor, Ethan then goes along with Mattie's plan (he too does not wish for them to part). Consequently, they both sustain injuries which result in more or less complete paralysis on Mattie's part; and a loss of mobility to Ethan to the extent that he is no longer able to undertake the necessary physical work needed to run his farm profitably. Thus, it is implied that Edith and Mattie's unruly behaviour relates to their gender and results in their becoming disabled. The attitude of other characters, through whose eyes the action is focalised, leads the reader to believe that the female body is inherently unstable.

Both of these women characters are disabled by functional limitations (Altman 2001),[9] which I would argue can be related directly to traditional notions of gendered bodies – the 'passive' female is at the mercy of the 'active' male. Stereotypically, when the hysterical female takes action 'tragedy' in the form of disability is the result (Hevey 1993). As readers, we are given to understand in both novels that both women intend for death to be the result of their actions. Victor states that Edith 'had driven her car directly into the wall of an underpass ... Her eyes caught me. They spoke. *So I lived after all... Wonderful*' (French 1997/1980: 211, emphasis in original). Mattie says, 'I want you to take me down again! ... So 't we'll never come up any more' (Wharton 1911: 165). As discussed above, we are also given to believe that both of these characters are acting as though temporarily insane, but it has to be said that in both instances their behaviour is in direct response to that of the male characters.

In *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998), Adah provides an example of the kind of representations that can also relate her impairment directly to her gender. The Price family embark on a Mission (in the religious sense) to what is now the Republic of Congo in Africa during the mid-twentieth century. By giving each character the opportunity to speak, Kingsolver utilises the candour of child's eye and manner of communicating to introduce Adah's disability. As a child, the character Adah observes:

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[9] Nagi describes functional limitations as 'the restrictions that impairments set on the individual's ability to perform the tasks and obligations of his or her usual roles and normal daily activities' (1965, cited in Altman 2001: 106).

> Officially my condition is called hemiplegia. *Hemi* is half, hemisphere, hemmed in, hemlock, hem and haw. *Plegia* is the cessation of motion ... physicians in Atlanta pronounced many diagnoses on my asymmetrical brain, including Wenicke's and Broca's aphasia, and sent my parents home [with] the prediction that I might possibly someday learn to read but would never speak a word (Kingsolver 1998: 39-40).

Here Kingsolver appears to be denigrating the medical profession's ability to 'pronounce' and label Adah's condition and to situate it within medical knowledge (reflecting somewhat the disability discourse on the medical model – section 2.9.1): it could be 'Wenicke's [or] Broca's aphasia'. Adah, with her knowledge of Latin, breaks 'hemiplegia' into its constituent parts, situating it firmly within the body – 'hemmed in' and 'cessation of motion' respectively – and relating it to less specific aspects of language: 'hem and haw' for instance. Her extensive knowledge of language contradicts the doctor's prognosis about her limited mental capacity. Nevertheless, the reader is induced to believe that Adah 'acts out' the prognosis of the medical profession – preferring to communicate by writing notes and walking with a pronounced limp throughout her childhood. In essence, Bourdieu's description of bodily *hexis* might be considered useful here for he describes it as 'a certain durable organization of one's body and its deployment in the world [a] way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking' (1991: 13). Adah appears to be enacting her disability – because that is what is expected of her – and it in turn affects the way she feels and thinks, but she becomes accustomed to her embodiment. Adah has come to appreciate the intrinsic value of her so-called disability to her selfhood when she muses 'Will I lose myself entirely if I lose my limp?' (Kingsolver 1998: 497). Certainly, as with the characters discussed in Chapter 4, Adah's behaviour appears to bear out Butler's assertion that the body itself acts as an act of 'incorporated memory' (Butler 1999: 115). But, as argued in Chapter 3, the impaired female body is also malleable: when Adah returns to the USA, she is 'cured' of her slant (her functional limitation or impairment (Altman 2001)) by an 'upstart neurologist [who is] persuasive, intimidatingly handsome and the recipient of a fabulously coveted research grant' (Kingsolver 1998: 496). The character Adah describes how:

> He insists ... my dragging right side is merely holding on to a habit it learned in infancy ... Mostly to prove him wrong, I submitted my body to an experimental program of his design. For six months he had me stop walking entirely, in order to clear my nervous pathways of so-called bad habits ... One day I felt the snap like a rubber band that drew my right leg up under me as my left arm moved forward (Kingsolver 1998: 496-7).

Thus, the 'upstart neurologist' is proved right to some extent. However, Adah's mother, Orleanna, insists that Adah's bodily behaviour was not 'learned in infancy [because] she never practiced anything' (Kingsolver 1998: 497).

These extracts help to indicate that throughout the novel Adah is the epitome of reason: in engaging with the 'program' the neurologist devises, perhaps part of the attraction for her is his obvious academic abilities and kudos, but the physical attraction is also undeniable. This development in the plot could be read in a number of ways. First, Adah's embodied 'bad habits' could be read as a metaphor for the differences between the 'uncivilised', 'unruly' body of Africa and the perceived 'civilised', 'contained' body of America or the differences between femininity and masculinity. Second, for a girl who has operated as 'disabled' to become a successful woman in the post-colonial world she must be seen to be 'cured' or once escaped from patriarchy of her father's control chooses her own path. And, third, in terms of gender issues – it takes a man within the medical profession to 'cure' the unruly woman of her impairment. In contrast is the onset of impairment that has 'cured' the characters of Edith (French 1997/1980) and Mattie (Wharton 1911) of their unruly femininity – they both become much more acquiescent to the dominant ideology of their culture as disabled rather than as non-disabled women.

Another observation I would make here is that for all the play on the disappearance of her impairment, the character Adah is no less objectified as a non-disabled woman than she was as a disabled one, but it is for different aspects of her embodiment and ability that she is the focus of her sister and other characters' attention. Whereas, as subsequent sections of this chapter indicate, both of Edith (French 1997/1980) and Mattie (Wharton 1911) appear to become objectified more as disabled women and for very different reasons than they were

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as non-disabled women. First I deal with links between disability, femininity and appearance.

5.5 Disability, femininity and appearance

According to Wolf (1991), during the twentieth century, cosmetic surgery arose to replace the medical control of women. It has established an ideology of femininity predicated upon youth and beauty. As Shakespeare has observed, 'the prevailing focus on beauty and normality … are deeply divisive for all women, but particularly oppress those whose bodies do not fit the stereotype' (1997: 219). Moreover, often our notions of femininity can either be confirmed or challenged by the texts we read as we mature (Betterton 1987; Coward 1987; Pollock 1987). In *The Bleeding Heart* Victor reveals that 'the doctors had given [Edith] a present when they repaired her scarred face – they'd lifted it. She looked fifteen years younger than she was … I guess they wanted to console her for the rest' (French 1997/1980: 216-17). In this novel there also is an interaction between traditional conceptualisations of bodily paralysis (disability studies, see Morris 1989; Keith 2001) and those of femininity (feminist studies, see Betterton 1987; Curti 1998; Moi 2002; Pollock 1988; Smith 1990); here feminine beauty is seen as 'compensating' for the 'tragedy' of impairment. Edith's face is portrayed as frozen temporally in appearance as her body is spatially – while the one remains youthful, the other is aged. This description introduces the notion that cosmetic surgery in the form of a face lift, which 'restores' Edith's youth, would act as 'consolation for the rest', it compounds the notion that bodily impairment – even the very use of the non-specific term 'the rest' is suspect here – is a negative thing which must be compensated for.[10] Furthermore, introducing the notion that the medical profession is able to make decisions about, or make a 'present of', what is an acceptable feminine appearance for a woman – i.e. one that is '15 years younger' – and without consultation with the woman herself, is questionable, but reflects historico-medical attitudes

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[10] Originally, cosmetic surgery was intended to 'restore' a persons appearance: for example reconstructive breast surgery after masectomy (see Kosofsky Sedgwick 1999), whereas nowadays such cosmetic surgery is often sold in popular magazines as an 'enhancing' the body (see Cronin 2000; McCarthy 1998).

(Wolf 1991). In effect, we get the impression that the doctors have ensured Edith's appearance is frozen into some kind of grotesque feminine mask. I would argue that Edith's false youthful feminine appearance is effectively conveyed as drawing the onlooker's attention and thus masking her impairment – but that the two work together to confirm what is seen as her feminine passivity. In essence, for me, the two are connected to become one metaphor: Edith's face effectively represents her passive femininity (Young 2003) and her wheelchair represents her passive disability (see Slack 1999).

Conversely, with the character of Mattie in *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911), it is her body that could be seen as being frozen temporally (see extract below) and her face that has aged. However, as with Edith, these two aspects of Mattie's embodiment also act to confirm her feminine passivity in the eyes of others, but in slightly different ways. The visitor encounters the Frome family more than two decades after the sledging accident.

> The other woman [Mattie] was much smaller and slighter. She sat huddled in an arm-chair near the stove, and when I came in she turned her head quickly toward me, without the least corresponding movement of her body … Under her shapeless dress her body kept its limp immobility (Wharton 1911: 173-4).

First of all, this description contrasts starkly with the descriptions of Mattie as a young woman who attracted the attention of Ethan. 'As she passed down the line [of dancers], her light figure swinging … Frome, at each turn, caught sight of her laughing panting lips, the cloud of dark hair about her forehead, and the dark eyes' (Wharton 1911: 30). Whereas the visitor describes Mattie's face as being 'bloodless and shrivelled [with] shadows sharpening her nose and hollowing the temples' and 'her dark eyes [have a] bright witch-like stare that disease of the spine sometimes gives' (Wharton 1911: 174). As discussed in section 5.7 below, links have been made between impairments and the functioning of other parts of the body, but I would argue that this can be seen to echo aspects of femininity and other bodily attributes.[11] However, this in itself has a normalising effect on the materiality of the body (Bordo 1999; see section 3.5).

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[11] For example, archetypal 'dumb blonde' jokes link hair colour to cognitive ability.

Focalised through Ethan, the former description gives the impression of vitality in the 'laughing panting lips', which acts as a direct counterpoint to the 'bloodless and shrivelled' appearance of Mattie to the visitor. Additionally, there is a false connection between Mattie's impairment and her femininity: she is reduced from a young woman 'with a cloud of dark hair … dark eyes' to one with 'grey hair' whose 'dark eyes' have become 'bright [and] witch-like', i.e. the archetypal opposite of youthful femininity. These contrasts engender the impression that Mattie's impairment has aged her beyond her years to the extent that her face is hag-like. After the accident Mattie Silver's appearance is described as more haggard, with its associations with decrepitude; whereas her body draws the visitor's attention because of its complete immobility. Mattie has always appeared child-like in the 'slightness' of her body – for example, when Ethan first encounters her he reflects: 'She don't look much on housework' (Wharton 1911: 33) – but with her paralysis she has become completely dependent on the Fromes in much the way an infant is on its parents. Indeed, it is insinuated that Mattie enjoys the only comfort in the Frome household in the fact that her chair is 'a soiled relic of luxury bought at a country auction' and is also described as a 'cushioned niche' (Wharton 1911: 174). Again, as with the character Edith in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980), here, there is an underlying notion that the disability must be compensated for, even if it is to a lesser extent.

These instances of changes to disabled female characters' appearance indicate that the ways in which their femininity and impairment are conveyed in texts often overlap to compound negative notions of women who acquire impairments specifically and disabled women generally. It appears that Edith's femininity has been compromised by her disability and that Mattie's lack of femininity is represented by her disability. However, a recurring theme with characterisations is their reiteration of stereotypes; and one of the ways in which physically disabled female characteristics are re-presented is their association with passivity. In the next section I examine the way disability and femininity are concatenated as narrative prosthesis (Mitchell 2002) to enforce normalcy through the notion of passivity; I also discuss the ways in which some portrayals of disabled female characters work to disrupt this notion.

5.6 Passivity and dependence/activity and independence

As discussed in Chapter 3, the concept of *bio-power* enables the body to be analysed and manipulated and thus rendered docile (Foucault 1977/1975). This docility is useful in the sense of production, and I would argue that further along the continuum of bodily concepts and behaviour is that of passivity, which has traditionally been associated with femininity and disability (see Morris 1991). Examples of such passivity can readily be found in novels that include physically impaired female characters. In this section, I will show how in both *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) and *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911) the two characters who become disabled in the course of the plot, Edith and Mattie, also become almost entirely passive – which is communicated as a total dependency on other characters. By way of contrast, the character Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) appears to be active and independent throughout the novel – both as a disabled child and as a 'non-disabled' woman. Nevertheless, it is the ways in which aspects of each character's embodiment, both in terms of femininity and disability, drives the plot that is of interest here.

These novels appear to demonstrate that female characters in 'traditional' roles (Edith as wife and mother (French 1997/1980)) in past times (*Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911) was written in the early twentieth century) and indicate deference to men's activities and decision-making. Furthermore, in such settings as rural America (re. *Ethan Frome*) and within arenas like the traditional western middle-class marriage (re. *The Bleeding Heart*), women would be expected to take on what were deemed 'feminine' roles (work within the domestic or private sphere) whilst men took on masculine roles (work within the public sphere) (see section 3.8). Similar dependency-based roles and behaviour expectations have also been designated to disabled people (whether male or female) (Morris 1991). Therefore, characterisations that call upon the double-bind of gender and disability can reiterate an 'obviousness' within embodiment that feeds and sustains readers' beliefs (see section 2.12). They can, as such, lend that character's body negative materiality (Mitchell and Snyder

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1997a) in terms of passivity and dependency,[12] which in novels where impairment is acquired contrast sharply with their activity and independent behaviour pre-impairment.

Seemingly, with Edith's disability comes an enhanced way of relating to her body as a docile object for Victor. For example, although 'Nothing had happened to [her hands] they felt boneless ... as if the accident had caused bone loss throughout her body ... They were, like all of her now, pliable' (French 1997/1980: 217). To imply that the injuries Edith sustained have affected the solidity of her bones to such a degree that they have also diminished her character introduces the notion of the mutability and irruptability of both the feminine and the disabled body (as discussed in section 4.7). Similarly, as pointed out above, in *Ethan Frome*, Mattie's 'immobility' is complete. She is confined to the kitchen, except 'In the summertime, on pleasant days, they move Mattie into the parlour, or out in the door-yard' (Wharton 1911: 180). It is only the 'querulous drone' of her voice that is able to travel beyond the confines of the Frome kitchen, and her 'dark eyes' have a 'witch-like stare', implying that even those 'active' parts of her have negative connotations.

As the alpha-male (middle-class, white, intellectual with high-powered high-earning job), in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) Victor comments on women's economic dependency on men in traditional marriages, but this is extended further in relation to disability. Perhaps one of the most telling sentences is 'There is *no* power greater than the power of passive dependency' (French 1997/1980: 226). Similarly, in *Ethan Frome,* a neighbour observes 'And I say, if she'd [Mattie] ha' died, Ethan might ha' lived' (Wharton 1911: 181), implying that Mattie's dependency has resulted in Ethan being unable to live his life to the full. Effectively, femininity, dependency and disability are aligned in negativity. Both these novels adhere to traditional, stereotypical notions of paralysis in implying that once paralysed, women become passive and entirely dependent upon others, whereas the reality for many women with paralysis is that they are able to live active, independent lives (see Browne *et al.* 1985; Morris 1989; Robillard 1999; Saxton and Howe 1987).

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[12] In essence, the materiality of the character's body is negatively associated with these traits to the extent that their impaired body comes to represent passivity and dependence.

Nevertheless, underpinning all of the above discussion about the seemingly passive characters Edith and Mattie is the notion of the active body. While their bodies may be sites upon which power is enacted (Foucault 1977/1975), their bodies are also sites of power in themselves – in the ways in which they communicate particular messages to other characters – and are thus (like Olympia and Trudi's in Chapter 4 of this thesis) more akin to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (1991). In this chapter, the more overt example of an active body can be seen in the character Adah, but this does not detract from the idea that the feminine, disabled body is itself presenting and reiterating power. Apparently, experiencing a type of paralysis to part of her body, the character Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) continues to explore her African experience to the full, turning it to her advantage. To me, this character demonstrates the more active bodily *hexis* (Bourdieu 1991). As she observes: 'Living in the Congo shakes open the prison house of my disposition and lets out all the wicked hoodoo Adah runs forth' (Kingsolver 1998: 64). Adah, apparently remains unafraid of what the continent has to offer in terms of taboo and myth and the effect it has upon her embodiment (Douglas 2002/1966). Moreover, perhaps because, for the Congolese people she encounters, impairment is less of an issue (Mama Mwanza, a character within the novel has no legs) Adah is no more the focus of stares or unwanted attention than her sisters (for example, Rachel, for her blonde hair and pale skin, Leah, for her tomboyish behaviour). Thus Adah is able to fully explore the area of the Congo her family has settled in: 'my way was slowly and surely to walk. What I do not have is *kakakaka,* the Kilongo word for hurrying up … Already I had gone as far as the pools and log bridge to the north … I discover the sights of my own' (Kingsolver 1998: 155-6). It is presented in such a way as to indicate that her embodiment allows Adah to move slowly; thus she absorbs Africa in a way that her sisters appear unable to: she is able to revel in its sights and sounds in a way that her sisters miss. Again, we encounter the mistaken premise that Adah's impairment brings with it a passivity that echoes that of other characters' perceptions of her and the characters Olympia (in *Geek Love,* Dunn 1989) and Trudi (in *Stones from the River,* Hegi 1994) as discussed in Chapter 4. However, there is more to Adah than simply an ability to soak up the world of *The Poisonwood Bible:* she silently demonstrates a lexical ability beyond that of a child of her age and certainly beyond that attributed to character with an impairment.

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5.7 In/articulate female characters

As has been indicated above, false links have often been made between impairment of one part of the body affecting other bodily functions.[13] Here, I would first briefly like to say something about the ways in which both Edith and Mattie's post-disability voices, which in part represent their femininity, are communicated, and the way this compounds the reader's impression that impairment affects the whole body. I would also like to touch upon Adah's (Kingsolver 1998) wry observations about the importance of speaking, which acts as a way of undercutting the importance of verbal communications.

In *Ethan Frome*, Mattie is variously described as 'droning querulously', '[a] querulous drone', 'answered complainingly' and using 'a thin high voice' (Wharton 1911: 25, 173, 174). None of these phrases is positive, and they are used in conjunction with other descriptions of Mattie such that they serve to compound the notion that her femininity is so diminished by her disability that even her voice is negatively affected. Furthermore, because Mattie is unable to rouse Zenobia [Ethan's wife] to tend to the fire: 'I thought I'd be frozen stiff before I could wake her up and get her to 'tend to it' (Wharton 1911: 175), it is insinuated that her immobility affects her voice to the extent that she is unable to make herself heard. This runs counter to the fact that the visitor's first 'encounter' with Mattie is on hearing her 'querulous' voice before he has even entered the homestead.

Conversely, in line with her post-operative girlish appearance in *The Bleeding Heart*, Victor describes Edith's voice as sounding younger '"Yes." She sighed lightly. Her voice had seemed to change with her face, it was girlish, as it had been when she was young' (French 1997/1980: 218). Here femininity appears also to be aligned with youthfulness. However, with paralysis of part of her body Edith appears no longer able to articulate her preferences, 'the only way [the housekeeper] discovered [Edith] was tired of lamb chops was that she began to leave them on her plate' (French 1997/1980: 219-20). It is as though Edith's

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[13] An issue which recurs in novels and auto/biography - see Webb (1924) and Hunt (1998) on the links between disfigurement and cognitive ability; Itani (2003) on links between deafness and cognitive ability; and Stewart (1993) on links between being a wheelchair user and deafness.

reconstructed femininity in the form of her younger face and her impairment have affected her ability to communicate in a fully articulate manner as might be expected of a mature intelligent female character.

Articulateness, or the ability to communicate fully, is a recurring theme throughout *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998). As a child Adah could be read as having an exceptional ability with words: she reads books backwards and finds and creates palindromic sentences, for example, 'Sun o put o not upon us!' and 'Evil, all ... its sin ... is still ... alive' (Kingsolver 1998: 65, 84); Adah also learns to use more Kilongo (the local language) words than her sisters. However, on being cured of her 'slant' Adah feels the loss of the lexical agility that she previously enjoyed:

> Along with my split-body drag I lost my ability to read in the old way. When I open a book, the words sort themselves into narrow-minded single file on the page; the mirror-image poems erase themselves half-formed in my mind (Kingsolver 1998: 558).

Here Adah appears to miss the fuller sense of self she experienced with impairment: both in body and mind – note the use of phrases like 'narrow-minded' and 'half-formed'. In addition, her sisters' perceptions of Adah raise issues of autonomy and intelligence leading to independence of thought and ability, as opposed to dependence. For example, Leah states: 'I was jealous of Adah, who picked up languages easier than she could tie her own shoes. I wish I'd studied harder' (Kingsolver 1998: 208). Ruth May compares the twins: 'Leah runs everywhere and climbs trees, but Adah can't, she is bad on one whole side and doesn't talk because she is brain-damaged ... She read books upside down' (Kingsolver 1998: 18, 24). Although Adah appears to be discounted as a full person, throughout the novel, there is a continuous undercurrent of envy between the sisters. Again, there is a somewhat sophisticated use of the eyes of children here that compares with the discussion of Olympia's experiences in the swimming pool (see section 4.9). Employing the full and frank view of the very young Ruth May, enables Kingsolver to make simplistic observations about disability and impairment that would not be tolerated when focalised through the

eyes of other adult characters. Similarly, the young Adah states openly her choice to remain silent:

> When you do not speak, other people presume you to be deaf or feeble-minded and promptly make a show of their own limitations. Only occasionally do I find I have to break my peace: shout or be lost in the shuffle ... It is true I do not speak as well as I can think. But that is true of most people, as nearly as I can tell (Kingsolver 1998: 39-40).

This extract links societal perceptions of impairment back to 'others' – rather than it resting within the disabled character's body. Adah indicates that she is able to communicate orally when she chooses, but remains in control of her own body to the extent that, predominantly, she chooses not to speak. Also, she recognises her own and others' limitations ironically: 'true of most people' effectively questioning traditional notions of disabled/non-disabled somewhat.

In using words such as 'different' or 'extraordinary' and which represent terminology that could be deemed 'politically correct' (see Mills 2003a; and section 2.4), authors such as Kingsolver align this to somewhat idealised notions of ability: both Adah and Leah are recognised as 'exceptional children'. Indeed by association they are both '*gifted*: Leah on account of her nonchalant dazzling on reading-comprehension tests, and myself by association, as I am presumed to have the same brain insofar as the intact parts go' (Kingsolver 1998: 65). The 'discovery' of this intelligence 'by association' was, according to Adah, recognised by:

> Miss Leep ... A principal less observant would have placed Leah in Gifted and Adah in Special Ed with the mongoloids [and Adah becomes] dazzling slick-quick at mathematics ... My hobby is to ... excel when I choose. I can read and write French ... Speaking ... along with the rest of life's acrobatics – can be seen in a certain light as a distraction (Kingsolver 1998: 66).

This discovery reflects recurring themes throughout the novel. First, reference to 'wrongs' acted upon Adah to be 'righted' by other characters (*re* the discussion of Adah's 'cure' by the 'upstart neurologist' above). Second, that what is conveyed by Adah herself is her own

choice in the matter: it is she who decides her own fate: whether or not to 'excel' and (much later) to 'rearrange [her] small apartment to accommodate a grown up baby' to enable herself to crawl around on all fours (Kingsolver 1998: 496). Interestingly, when Adah chooses to communicate verbally 'to speak [as] a matter of self-defence' (Kingsolver 1998: 461) her other 'impairments' diminish or disappear.[14] (This occurs when she returns to America with her mother – Ruth May dies from a snakebite, and Rachel and Leah settle in Africa.) Eventually, Adah herself becomes an eminent researcher, as her sister Rachel observes:

> Adah evidently got famous for being a brain in college and going to medical school (Mother sent me newspaper clippings for Adah winning some prize practically every time she took a crap), and could have done very well for herself as a lady doctor. But what I gather ... is that she works ... in some dreary big-deal place ... where they study disease organisms (Kingsolver 1998: 526-7).

Such is the change in the 'colonial' and the 'post-colonial' Adah, that when she revisits Africa, her sister Rachel observes: 'Leah and Adah happened to be walking in front of me ... as I was shocked to see how alike they were ... and Adah really doesn't limp a bit anymore ... Plus, she *talks*' (Kingsolver 1998: 546-7; emphasis in original). Nevertheless, for Rachel metaphorically her sister remains unchanged, 'Even though she [Adah] talked now, it was like she was still handing over her little written announcements on notebook paper' (Kingsolver 1998: 551). This all points to the character Adah being more profoundly affected by her environment than her sisters. Conversely, in both *The Bleeding Heart* and *Ethan Frome*, the central characters' impairments appear to affect the place in which they live, as the next section indicates.

5.8 Disability and femininity's impact on the plot and the setting

As Foucault has observed, the woman's body and its functioning was, in effect, problematised – *not just for herself* but 'in organic communication with the social body'

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[14] A similar plot development occurs to the central character Adah, in *The Piano* (Campion and Pullinger 1994).

(1981/1976: 104). The same could be said of the way the disabled character's body and its functioning have been problematised, as is apparent in the novels investigated here. Both appear to affect the 'social body' in terms of the plot and setting of the novels – in effect acting as a 'metaphor for things gone awry' (Mitchell 2002: 24). In the passages describing Edith post-accident, French appears to indicate that the materiality of the disabled female character's body acts as a metaphor in that it negatively influences the whole of Edith's behaviour and that this has wider implications. For example, 'there was something frightened in her now, something ... corroded' (French 1997/1980: 216). Here, the ellipses (which appear in the novel) indicate a pause, but can also serve to emphasise a word in the text and establish its importance in the mind of the reader. The idea of corrosion of self-esteem when related to disability is projected onto the character of Victor, who continues, 'It undermined me completely' (French 1997/1980: 216). As a narrative prosthesis, Edith's passive femininity and disability can be said to drive the remainder of *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980). Dolores and Victor's relationship is affected by the notion that Victor is not 'free' to choose his partner in life because of Edith's dependency. After finding out about Edith, Dolores constantly thinks about herself as an emasculated individual and how this would be compromised if she continued to have an illicit relationship with Victor. Moreover, she comes to believe that Victor would like her to be dependent upon him in the same way that Edith is, so that they will not have to part: 'break your leg, become paralysed, so I can carry you everywhere and never lose you' (French 1997/1980: 240, 325). So Edith's disability is portrayed as not only affecting herself negatively, but it is also presented as having ramifications in that it 'undermines' both Victor's masculinity and Dolores' feminist beliefs.

In *Ethan Frome,* Mattie is similarly seen as negatively affecting Ethan's masculinity, as Wilson has observed, 'the typical masculine figure in Edith Wharton's fiction is a man set apart from his neighbours in education, intellect and feeling, but lacking the force or the courage either to impose himself or get away' (1961/1941: 184). One could argue that Mattie's impaired body comes to represent Ethan's inability to escape from his fate: that of being saddled with an unproductive farm. Indeed, as one of the other characters Mrs Hale observes, 'It's bad enough to see the two women sitting there – but *his* face, when he looks

round that bare place, just kills me' (Wharton 1911: 177). This implies that, as women, it is both Mattie and Zenobia's lot to suffer the hardships of deprivation, but that it is somehow harder for a man. It is as though both novelists indicate that the male character's lives and their masculinity are diminished to such an extent by the survival of the disabled female characters that it would be better if the latter had died from their injuries – a damning indictment indeed on the fate of female characters who acquire impairment.

5.9 Disability, sex and reproduction

Briefly, for women, sexuality is often intrinsically linked to notions of bodily functioning and bodily boundaries – i.e. in terms of reproduction and menstruation (Shildrick 1997; Shildrick and Price 1999b). In many traditional representations disabled women appear to lack a sexuality - they are either asexual or are portrayed as having no sexual feelings towards others or being unable to enjoy sexual activity and certainly not considered to be able to produce children (see Lonsdale 1990). Representations of disabled females often reflect the view that their 'sexuality [is always] mapped onto people [and there] is not agency [for these characters] to develop their own sexuality' (Stephen 2002: 34). In *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980) and *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911), as discussed in section 5.5 above – on acquiring their impairments both Edith and Mattie appear to lose their sexuality along with their femininity. Furthermore, Edith says to Victor that she does not wish to deprive him of sexual intimacy, but that her paralysis should not prevent them from it:

> 'I know … you need … sex. And I don't want you to … suffer. So, even though
> I feel nothing there now, well if I feel nothing, it can't hurt me, can it? I want you
> to have what you want,' she finished, blushing (French 1997/1980: 219).

However, Victor finds the whole idea abhorrent, the implication being that Edith's impaired femininity would be unable to provide him with pleasure. It is as though, having produced his children, Edith then has no other function than to provide him mechanically

with his sexual needs; this portrayal overlooks the notion that a female character who acquires an impairment may wish to remain sexually active.[15]

Of the characters investigated in this thesis, only Olympia (Dunn 1989) and Edith (French 1997/1980) reproduce. However, in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989), Olympia is denied the opportunity to nurture her daughter by her brother Arturo (see section 4.10.4); and post-accident, Edith in *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980), appears to abrogate all responsibility for nurturing the children she had previously dedicated her life to raising. 'Edith almost never spoke of them to me without complaining [they] get on her nerves' (French 1997/1980: 221). Certainly, in her case it appears that the function of Edith's impaired body and its effects on the plot become more important. The reader is led to believe that once she acquires her impairment, Edith becomes almost completely self-absorbed – a trait she had not previously exhibited. Conversely, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, post-'cure' Adah dedicates herself to a different kind of nurturing: 'My work is to discover the life histories of viruses … I think of them as my relations, I don't have cats or children, I have viruses. I visit them daily … and like any good mother I cajole' (Kingsolver 1998: 599). This reflects Asch and Fine's notion that disabled women can be '"freer" to be non-traditional' in their nurturing roles (1997: 241). Effectively, Kingsolver portrays Adah as able to value her social and cultural (or here medical) contribution; without necessarily producing children herself. On the 'several men' she has been involved with, Adah observes 'Now which [would they choose], the crooked walker, or the darling perfection? … Any man who admires my body now is a traitor to the previous Adah' (Kingsolver 1998: 601). Despite her apparent 'cure', the character Adah never loses sight of the contribution of her non-normate self has made to her full identity.

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[15] See Trahan (1997) and Golfus (1997) for examples of frank portrayals of sexually active physically disabled female characters.

5.10 Conclusions

In this chapter I have illustrated how disability, gender and femininity intersect to provide enhanced narrative prostheses in novels, using examples from *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980), *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911) and *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998). I have demonstrated how the disabled female character's body acts as a metaphor, for example, for a society or culture that has gone awry or for an individual's behaviour to have gone against the dominant ideology operating in that time and in that place. In essence, these portrayals demonstrate a fluctuating femininity in relation to disability – which I have connected to Foucault's (1977/1975) notion of the docile body ruled by *bio-power* and Bourdieu's (1991) notions of bodily *habitus* and *hexis*.

As I have shown, all kinds of materiality are assigned to a character's impairment. The impaired female body then affects the plot and setting as well as the behaviour, values and attitudes of other characters. For example, the voices of Mattie (in *Ethan Frome*, Wharton 1911) and Edith (in *The Bleeding Heart*, French 1997/1980) are portrayed as being adversely affected by the onset of their impairment, and in turn affects the attitudes of the other characters as well as the setting of the novel. Whereas, with the 'cure' of her impairment, the character Adah (in *The Poisonwood Bible*, Kingsolver 1998) finds her voice in that she becomes able to communicate orally and thus affects the outcome of the novel. Nevertheless, as an example of the contribution impairment can bring to a woman's sense of self, Adah is portrayed as regretting the loss of her lexical agility and the different view of the written and spoken word that comes with the 'cure' of her impairment.

The changing embodiment of these characters post-impairment is also related to the way their femininity is perceived by other characters. In effect, in the case of Mattie, her femininity is diminished with the onset of disability; whereas Edith's post-impairment body demonstrates a falsely enhanced femininity and thus her passivity is compounded. The inter-relation between fluctuating femininity and disability also appears in the character Adah. In comparison to her sisters Rachel and Leah, Adah does not attract the attention of a male until after she returns to America, and then it is only because the 'upstart

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neurologist' wishes to cure her of her impairment (although they do become lovers later). Nevertheless, throughout the novel Adah is portrayed as valuing the difference her impairment bring to her sense of self, over and above her femininity. While narrow (somewhat stereotypical) representations of disabled characters like Mattie and Edith prevent the reader from gaining any such insights, this chapter has demonstrated that it is the mutability of their bodies in terms of their femininity and disability that drives the plot of the novel and which affects our perceptions of such representations.

Whether it is intended or not, the reframing of 'norms' for physically impaired women in texts effectively allows the reader to develop an understanding and empathy with characters as women first, with their impairment as something to be acknowledged and assimilated into notions of bodily integrity. As this and the preceding chapter have demonstrated, aspects of the non-normate female character's disability can be critically evaluated in relation to their femininity and gender. In some novels, disabled female characters may be portrayed as asexual, often revealing and reinforcing erroneous notions of disability in relation to bodily boundaries, whereas other novels can be interpreted as dealing with disability and sexuality in ways that challenge traditional notions. The implications this has for our understandings of the gendered, feminine, disabled body are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Conclusions

Discourses on the body have built up over time – from medieval feudal society through the eighteenth and nineteenth medico-legal societal structures to today's high-surveillance society – and have contributed to our understandings of the body as a site and sign of power and knowledge. Both feminist and disability discourses are in a constant state of becoming, in that their structures are established and then contested. In Chapter 2 I demonstrated how disability terminology has been appropriated and re-appropriated in the debate on representations of the 'impaired', 'disabled', 'non-normate' body. For example, that there are interconnections between the contributions of so-called models of disability (medical and social) and representations of the impaired body. Therefore, an evaluation of discourses on bodies must take account of the fact that bodily representations are socially and culturally constructed. Moreover, as Foucault (1977/1975) has shown that constructions are not simply the result of one strand of discourse, but are the result of many.

In Chapter 3 I showed how Foucault's genealogical approach to tracing discourses helps to indicate how our conceptions of the body in general and the physically impaired body in particular, are informed by historico-social imperatives. However, Foucault's (1977/1975) notion of *bio-power* is predicated on the body as a site where power is enacted, therefore, Bourdieu's (1991) notions of bodily *habitus* and *hexis* are employed to indicate how the body can be seen as agentive in its own right. I have traced how some feminist researchers have used Foucault's (1977/1975) and Bourdieu's (1991) work to discuss ideas of gender, femininity and female embodiment; and how disability researchers have taken the same approach in order to debate the impaired body. I also demonstrated how feminist and disability researchers have explored representations of female and impaired bodies respectively. However, it is apparent that, until recently the two have tended to remain separate – despite the fact that both deal with the body as a deviation from the norm.

My intention has been to indicate how these theoretical viewpoints converge to enable investigations into texts that have, for example, bodily surveillance at their core, and show how this has been predicated on the non-normate body. In Chapter 4, I show how bodily surveillance operates at both the macro (societal) and micro (individual) scale and is contextual in that it depends upon the dominant ideologies operating in the novel. Throughout Chapter 4, I indicated that specific forms of surveillance (here the female and the male gaze) relate to the gender of the protagonist, her non-normate body and notions of bodily *hexis* and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991). I have drawn on the work of Berger (1972) to explore how characters with non-normate (impaired, female) bodies are both invisible and ultravisible – an issue foregrounded in situations where the body is the recipient of the stare – as is the case with Trudi (Hegi 1994) and Olympia (Dunn 1989). However, as I have shown, the authors use focalisation to enable these characters to reflect the gaze back to those who are watching them - a representational strategy that enhances the sense of surveillance acted upon and by the central character. The central characters investigated in Chapter 4 raised different issues. In *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1998) the disability discourses are linked to other bodily discourses, i.e. those on Jews and Aryan people, homosexuals and heterosexuals during the Nazi dominance in Germany; and aligned to this are notions of stigma (Goffman 1963) and dirt and taboo (Douglas 2002/1966). The character Olympia in *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) is predominantly set in a travelling 'freak' show and deals with the notion of liminal spaces created for and by the non-normate. Exploring representations of the non-normate body can help in questioning the norm (often assumed, white, middle-class male) and the idealised (fetishised and often unattainable feminised) body. For physically disabled women it can be liberating: to paraphrase Adam (1996), a character's partial identity as woman, as feminine and as disabled, forms part of her ability to remain beyond 'fixed' categories of definition. A recurring aspect of both novels is the way in which the authors have their central characters question the notion of the bodily 'norm'. For example, the extra-ordinary Olympia (Dunn 1989) sees herself as ordinary in relation to her brothers and sisters, yet revels in her non-normate self in relation to 'norms'. In contrast, the character Trudi (Hegi 1994) questions the enhanced and idealised embodiment espoused by Nazism. These authors focus on the non-normate body within the discursive

framework of literary conventions while exposing overlapping elements of disability and feminist discourses – reframing and expanding them for further discussion.

Again, using feminist and disability researchers' work, I investigated the interstices between femininity and the disabled body in characters that acquire or are cured of their impairment. I was interested in the effect that this had upon other characters, the plot and the setting. In Chapter 5 I elected to examine the differences between the characters' disabled and non-disabled embodiment in relation to their femininity. In discussing the novels *The Bleeding Heart* (French 1997/1980), *Ethan Frome* (Wharton 1911) and *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998), cultural constructions of disability and of femininity and gender were revealed as acting as narrative prostheses to the plot, which often has a cumulative effect on other characters and the novel's setting. In investigating the intersections between the effects of femininity and of disability prior to and post impairment in Mattie (Wharton 1911) and Edith (French 1997/1980), I also sought to demonstrate how superficial discussions of stereotypes are unhelpful to our understandings of representations of the physically disabled woman. As Shakespeare asserts, 'shallow readings and disability correctness have lead to misleading evaluations of [particular] films' (1999: 167), and the same could be said for readings of literary representations. Thus, rather than avoid stereotypical representations, I have explored them as narrative prosthesis because, 'texts are an ideal sources for the study of the fluidity of stereotypical concepts' (Gillman 1985: 26). And, for me, part of this fluidity relates to the other aspects of the character's identity.[1]

This thesis has shown how investigations of literary representations can help elucidate the nature of 'multiple and shifting identities' (Riddell and Watson 2003: 3). Disabled female characters can exemplify how disparate aspects of identity – femininity and disability – come into play in different measure depending upon the context. It is the ways in which characters such as Trudi in *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) and Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998) negotiate aspects of their selfhood both to feel part of their community and to value their difference depending upon which member of their community they are

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[1] Mallett (2007a,b) has demonstrated that stereotypes can be utilised in texts in a number of ways.

dealing with. Some characters essentialise bodily difference as a determining factor in their social identity – both as female and as non-normate. For instance, paraphrasing and inverting Simone de Beauvoir's famous dictum, the character Olympia states 'A true freak cannot be made. A true freak must be born' (Dunn 1989: 20).

I would argue that the ways we negotiate our identity comes not just from personal encounters and experience of our bodily differences but also from the representations of them we encounter in texts. Such representations may also affect the way we view our own and others' impairment. Morris (1991, 1996), Kent (1987, 1988) and others have indicated how important it was to them to encounter 'positive' portrayals of disabled female characters (i.e. representations that were not dehumanising or patronising), but that such encounters were few. My investigations imply that the situation is changing: the texts investigated in this thesis indicate that disabled female characters are becoming more central to women's fiction. The notion of 'positivity' of characterisation is subjective of course, but some of the representations discussed here are not dehumanising or patronising. Ferguson, for instance, has argued that the character Olympia (Dunn 1989) inverts 'previously stigmatised and devalued characteristics [and claims them] as the basis for a new and positive identity' (2003: 77). Such inversions can help to redraw the focus of representations of physically disabled women.

Increasingly, research into impaired bodies focuses on narrative. For example, in investigating the ways that 'identity is constantly formed, reformed and challenged' (Riddell and Watson 2003: 11), Watson draws on the stories which disabled adults told during the research process. As I have shown throughout this thesis, story telling, be it fictional or auto/biographical, emphasises the primacy of narrative and indicates the negotiated nature of our identities.[2] Critical readings should take account of the fact that disability intersects with gender, ethnicity, race and sexuality to complicate the body's cultural construction in texts (Garland Thomson 1996a). As Chapter 3 indicates, the gendered, impaired body's cultural construction is a continuous process within feminist and disability discourses. And,

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[2] This includes auto/biographical material on living with, e.g. cancer (Picardie 1998) and myalgic encephalopathy (Peterson 2001; Lee 2002), poetry on, e.g. multiple sclerosis (Wicks 1994) and on, e.g. porphyria and long-term coma (Allende 1994) and locked-in syndrome (Bauby 1997).

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as I have shown in Chapters 4 and 5, the spaces where these somatic markers overlap can be located in representations of physically disabled women.

Disability is implicitly and explicitly present in all literary works (Bolt 2007; Davis 1997); therefore, this thesis has implications for future evaluations of representations of disabled women. As self-narratives are increasingly the focus of disability criticism, researchers who take account of both literary criticism *and* feminist approaches would help to contest the privileging of the self-narrative voice over fictional works (Riddell and Watson 2003). I would argue that it is inevitable that disabled people's experiential writings will inform future fictional representations. Indeed, critical evaluations of representations of disability (be they auto/biographical or fictional) are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Research now encompasses disfigurement (Jeffereys 2002), obesity and disability (Gilman 2002), takes in different aspects of the body (see Biggs 2002 on ageing; Morgan 2002 on the body in pain; Price Herndl 2002 on cancer journals) and what Vaughan (1996) terms 'cultural otherness'. These myriad approaches, necessarily, bridge theoretical divides to better understand conceptions of the non-normate body in its own right; as opposed to one that is an adjunct to the norm or ideal (see also Barker in press). According to Hughes, 'the narrowing of norms about the ideal body creates an environment in which physical capital becomes a much more important indicator of cultural capital' (2002: 70). My exploration of the central characters in *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1998), *Stones from the River* (Hegi 1994) and *Geek Love* (Dunn 1989) helps to redefine what it means to be different, to deviate from the increasingly narrow normate or idealised body. It is the characters' essence, the way they inhabit the novels, influence other characters and drive the plot – their 'physical capital' as gendered and disabled that makes such characters worth investigating. Disability is just one signifier of difference (Ahmed 2000), but, as I have demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, so are gender and femininity. Therefore, to move towards understanding 'human variety and mutability in the most fluid, capacious, and adequate manner possible' (Berube 2002: 337), disabled researchers should pay more attention to critiquing the ways in which disabled women are represented in literature.

To turn to the implications for feminist theory, which is predicated on the notion of an able body (Morris 1991), while feminist theorists acknowledge that our identities are contradictory, partial and strategic – indeed, Shildrick (1997) has pointed out that as a discursive construction in fictional texts, the body is inherently unstable – the exclusion of disability from feminist theoretical discourses on the body is lamentable. Taking account of disability would help to ground feminist discourses on the body in the non-normate nature of identity construction and help to uncover some of the ways that impaired female bodies serve to consolidate the normative imperative of the masculine body. In problematising representations of women's bodies in terms of femininity, feminists could also consider how gender, female embodiment and disability intersect in fictional representations to produce specific issues. In Chapters 4 and 5, I have demonstrated just two: ultra-surveillance based on the gaze or stare and narrative prosthesis based on impaired female embodiment. A consideration of the intersection of the gendered character with her impairment could help to elucidate further feminist conceptions of the cultural construction of the body.

I have drawn upon a range of theoretical viewpoints on the body to indicate how they can be usefully employed in an examination of specific literary representations. A necessary part of this has been to problematise some of these viewpoints whilst indicating how they can help discourses on the body evolve. My aim has been to demonstrate how representations of the gendered, feminine, disabled body in fictional texts can help to both challenge traditional notions of the physically impaired female character and assert the place of disability representations in literary criticism.

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