

# Exploring Disability Narratives: The Interplay of Mythology, Realism, and Representation in Literature and Media

Dr. Smriti Singh

Associate Professor, Department of English, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi, Shobhan Singh, Department of History, Zakir Husain Delhi College (Evening), University of Delhi, India

Received: 15 Jan 2024; Received in revised form: 18 Feb 2024; Accepted: 23 Feb 2024

©2024 The Author(s). Published by TheShillonga. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

## Abstract

*Disability narratives serve as a bridge between myth and realism, offering a profound lens through which to examine human diversity and societal constructs. While mythological depictions often reduce disability to symbolic archetypes—representing moral flaws, divine punishment, or extraordinary wisdom—realist narratives ground disability in the lived experiences of individuals, highlighting systemic injustices and cultural biases. This evolution in representation dismantles stereotypes, portraying disabled individuals as complex, multifaceted members of society. Works like Dickens' Bleak House or Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird challenge reductive tropes, fostering empathy and broader understanding. Disability narratives thus underscore the importance of inclusivity, revealing how race, class, and gender intersect with disability. By engaging with these stories, literature not only critiques societal norms but also champions equity and dignity. In doing so, disability narratives inspire a reevaluation of cultural values, enriching both literary discourse and social consciousness.*

**Keywords—** Disability, realism, myth, inclusivity, stereotypes.

Disability narratives are a distinct field of study within literature. They cover stories which focus on the experiences of people with disabilities, and how society treats them. These narratives are both a mirror for society to see itself in and a set of binoculars through which to look at the complexity and beauty of human diversity. Disability narratives intersect representation with reality: the unresolved tension between cultural clichés about "the disabled" and the authentic voices of people who are living or have lived with disabilities (Mitchell and Snyder, 4). The ancient myths are the roots of many typified archetypes in Western literature. In myths, for example, there is a wise cripple character who appears quite frequently—this portrayal has continued into modern times and can be seen from both literature and television programs today. Yet in contrast, there are also other forms of fictional personalities that better reflect reality. Through these natural manifestations and transformations rooted in old symbols, myths about disabilities have become prevalent features of current literature. The article delves into the dynamic relationship between disability narratives. To this end, it

analyses how mythological and realistic elements intersect in shaping both societal perceptions of people with disabilities, as well as these stories themselves. The article also critiques prior scholarship, pointing out gaps and suggesting a framework for all-inclusive storytelling. At root, the article seeks to emphasize the significance of disability narratives. Not only are they important tools for cultural criticism but can also be used as different avenues hats to dig in order to unearth things that have been left out or overlooked. Ultimately, it urges a turn toward more balanced and nuanced representations. There are separate but not discrete narratives of disability across a temporal continuum, covering every aspect of the human experience. Unfortunately, the theoretical statement has not yet been made that unifies these separate areas under one umbrella to make them equally, but this era may offer such a statement. Because in each of these fields the voice at work is.

If we situate disability narratives in the broader context of literature and culture, it is possible to understand how they can either reinforce or challenge norms in society. According to Mitchell and Snyder, "disability narratives

may reflect and manage unconscious economies of fear and desire" (7). The stories thus become efforts to master and eradicate profoundly unsettling feelings of insecurity and guilt. Understanding just what these societies consider normal or different lies behind the subject of disability lore. The study of disability narratives is therefore an essential contribution to this knowledge.

Mythology and realism play different and complementary roles in shaping disability narratives. Through mythology, disability is often depicted in archetypal characters and symbolic themes as a metaphor for broad existential or cultural concerns. For example, Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire and forge, in classical myths personifies ideas like divine craft and physical imperfection (Rose 43). This kind of portrayal shows how mythology can use disability as a narrative tool to reflect on human limits, morality and the structure of the divine world.

At the same time, realism is working to anchor disability narratives in real life materials and social experiences. Realist literature commonly portrays disabled persons or others struggling against societal neglect. Realism's aim is to challenge mythological clichés with a living portrayal. The works of such realist authors as Charles Dickens and Harper Lee have been praised for their fullsome, grown-up treatments of disability, which reveal the everyday struggles and pluck of its characters (Garland-Thomson 32).

When myth and realism intersect, disabled narratives undergo a dynamic transformation. The abstract symbolism of mythology and realism's focus on actual experience offer different perspectives for understanding disability. Together, they present a more comprehensive way to look at literature the which regard involves in any setting the disabled as both participants in universal themes of human existence and individuals with their own living reality.

Examining how disability is represented in literature is crucial to understanding how societies build and negotiate concepts of normalcy, identity, and worth. Literary references to disability shape public opinion and discourse on accessibility, inclusion and equity. This topic illustrates the influence of an emerging area that falls between intent and effect: by listening to disabled people's own stories, scholars can start to discover how literature portrays and empowers their subjects over time (Mitchell and Snyder 14).

The first reason to analyse disability in a text is that such literature can contest dominant cultural narratives. As Garland-Thomson points out, "Literature offers an opportunity to rethink disability, not as an insufficiency but rather an essential aspect of human variety"(47). It also allows us to critique social norms and structures which maintain exclusion and also breed prejudice, by studying

how texts represent disabled characters as they interact with their world.

Moreover, disability narratives provide particular insight into the interconnectedness of identities such as race, gender and class. How disability interacts with these other dimensions of identity is an important aspect and literature may further humanize lived experiences. Such narratives develops compassion and leads scholars to question their assumptions about ability and normalcy.

Finally, the value of disability narratives is their potential for change. Through stories that are sensitive and genuine, these narratives not only challenge prejudices and stereotypes but also argue for a more inclusive definition of humanity. As Mitchell and Snyder say, "Disability disrupts the narrative of bodily perfection and forces us to re-escalate the parameters governing who is human"(22). This re-evaluation will be a major step towards establishing a more fair and equivalent cultural structure.

When mythology meshes with reality, it becomes clear that literature grapples with themes such as identity, the other, and societal values in ever-changing ways. As one example, mythology represents disability through various allegorical forms, such as divine punishment, spiritual transcendence or moral retribution. The symbolic frameworks and archetypes present in mythology often cast disability as a metaphor for divine retribution, spiritual transformation or moral failing. By contrast, realism begins to break through these age old myths and stereotypes that people are disabled, concentrating not on the abstractions behind disability for an individual life but real conditions confronting individuals in their own right. It looks at how one feels and thinks about oneself as opposed to how society at large maintains its stereotype image of what disability should be like. This survey emphasizes on the interaction between these two literary techniques speaks not only to a changing cultural attitude about disability but also reflects storytelling's centripetal force in transfiguring outward social conceptions.

This article examines the ways in which an intertwining of mythic and realist elements from different literary traditions can produce a richer and deeper understanding of disability. And we are led by this exploration to one conclusion: there is indeed a dynamic between myth abstraction and the concreteness of documentary realism. This conventional strategy excites readers and also makes them critically question the various aspect of disability represented in its Human Condition--just as dialectic inflection ensures that both sides are heard.

What will be shown now is that this interplay is at the heart of understanding the deeper meaning behind disability narratives in literature and outside. In ancient mythologies,

disability is often treated symbolically and archetypally, as is evident in the cultural attitudes of different times. In Greek mythology, disability is often personified by such figures as Hephaestus, the god of fire and smithing. Hephaestus was born with a physical disability--he was cast out from Olympus for being lame, his father Zeus afraid to let such an ugly form see the light of day. His story underlines the tension within disability as both rejectable mark and superlative skill or genius (Rose 56). It parallels general societal associations of physical difference with both punishment and extraordinary talent.

In many Greek disability images, Roman mythology also adopted and adapted these themes. The utilitarian spirit of Rome crept into them, infusing various Greek images of physical disability with new life and meaning. The myth of Vulcan, Roman equivalent of Hephaestus, plays down his imperfect physique and instead emphasizes the usefulness of his skilled hands and how he contributed to mankind's material culture in general--ways that far outweigh any charge or argument that it might have been his (Evens Noet 104). One narrative that makes full use of these themes is based on Hindu mythology, and dealing with actual disability rather than simply using the abstract disabled person as a metaphor, Erus half from. ) The story of Ashtavakra might be seen as an example setting forth historical interpretation-karmic destiny is reflected everywhere around him In this case, the will of heaven and good deeds done By his parents before he was born Produce a life Out of all proportion to what one might expect on first consideration: A man at peace with himself despite chronic pain as though it were nothing; another thinking Positively in all situations no matter how adverse the circumstances.

Once more, we find these reimagined narrative resources of disability had a bias strongly toward spiritual and moral traits. Though Ashtavakra himself is limited by physical disability, his insight shines higher than those who are trying to live by the light of reason--showing that all one really needs in order win through difficult circumstances is inner strength not restricted by constraints of body or fate (Menon 67). Such stories, powerful though they may be at first glance, often place disability in a realm of abstraction - far removed from real human experience-as if it had nothing its own but a source material to be exploited in artistic creation.

Thus in all these traditions, disability was frequently mythologized as a sign that this adult was abominably wicked, exceedingly noble, or had somehow been given extraordinary wisdom from birth. While these mythic images provide insight into ancient cultural frameworks, they also serve to perpetuate stereotypes today which continue to influence modern attitudes towards disability. In creating disability as an archetype of divine retribution,

moral failing or other extraordinary power, However, these myths fell short of capturing the full diversity and range of human experience that includes people into their individual lives--a role for any serious literary creation.

These three popular motifs of disabled people, "the wise cripple," "cursed being" and "divine punishment" all reappear in the mythologies of antiquity, demonstrating how they embedded different forms of cultural and moral interpretation into various societies alike. Although these archetypes are diverse in function, taken as a whole they illustrate the complex boundary line between reverence and concomitant push toward a stigma of Otherness -- an uncommon and undesirable quality.

In mythology, the fascinating representation of disability is the " wise cripple " archetype, which has endured through hundreds of generations. For example, figures like Tiresias in Greek mythology captured its essence. Thus Tiresias, having gone blind by divine decree, was endowed with the spirit of prophecy, thanks to an eye--opener which physical mutilation often is offset by its extraordinary intellectual or spiritual capabilities. (Rose 62) The Indian sage Ashtavakra, whose name means "eight bends", was also one of these archetypes. Through his wisdom and clever debating he could defeat fertile-bodied figures in philosophical and theological disputes (Menon 78). Paradoxically, in emphasizing the intellectual or magical talents of disabled figures, this archetype casts disability as a prerequisite for all-round excellence--so perpetuates a compensatory model of impairment. This is Our Legacy However the "cursed being" anthology expresses bad moral and cosmic connotation with disability. Figures such as Oedipus in Greek mythology bear physical impairment directly following their acts, by birth or ancestral sin. This causes them to commit further evil deeds. Oedipus, after realizing his own patricide and incestuous iniquity cauterizes his eyes and rips them out as well, using blood of the blind man to weep; he thus also becomes both physically and symbolically blind. As opposed to disabled individuals perhaps the most graphic *reductio ad absurdum* that this particular generic form of disabling can take is reflected in the Unfortunate archetype. In doing so fix disability itself can be anybody's punishment for anything or nothing. Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and craftsman of the heavens, was lame because Jupiter threw him off Mt. Olympus in a fit (Wright 112). In the Old Testament, again, we can find examples of physical disabilities are divine punishments or tests of faith of some sort. The implication is that disability in both languages signifies not only a bodily impairment but also a theological and moral comment: thus the disabled person is further marginalized as an object of pity--or sometimes even terror.

These archetypes collectively determined historical attitudes toward disability, but their attitude was ambivalent: sometimes respectful, sometimes hostile and sometimes completely ostracizing. While they embodied the rich symbolic systems of their, their use also revealed an enduring inability to incorporate illness and disability into the mainstream of human affairs.

Conveniently for modern disability studies this symbolic legacy has left its mark in shaping current stereotypes and prejudices. These stories must be relook in order to continuously examine for today's scholars of disability study. So what those weird myths were about.

The influence of myths on the presentation and development of disability stereotypes has had substantial effects at an international level. By planting disabled individuals within archetypal frameworks such as the "wise cripple," the talentless "monster" or "He was a sissy," these myths not only reflected historical attitudes but also actively aimed to shape them. They justified the prevailing view that disability was an anomaly in need of explanation, often connected with divine will, moral deviation or extraordinary compensation.

Skewing cultural meanings, the "wise cripple" is a relatively benign example of this kind of story. However, by making it seem as if only the crippled are naturally wise and have some kind of spiritual insight control inherent to them, these narratives put forward visions which do not stand up in reality. This figure implies that a disabled person's worth lies solely in his or her ability to break free of physical limitations through intellectual or spiritual means. Such portrayals reduce the actual lives of disabled people into parables or signposts for those who are able-bodied (Garland- Thomson 53). In addition, this archetype often divides disabled individuals from society at large by depicting them as remote beings with supernatural capabilities.

Whether it is called a "cursed being" or "divine punishment," the archetype carries the same damaging implications. These narratives all conflate disability with sin, guilt, or divine retribution and relegate the people who are disabled into objects of fear or pity, even contempt. This magnifying glass of history even stained the disabled with shame or pity. From the moral standing of Oedipus' self-blinding and disability forfeit apart, it can also be seen born with stigma and penalty. Sometimes it was a divine judgment: chthron kai loutron. Again, such mythical misconceptions surrounding disability allowed for theological justification as well as Biblical authorization to shun disabled people. That wrath from heaven caused by slighting the creation is better than that; no wonder these misinterpretations have had a long-lasting influence on

cultural perceptions and continue to be reinvented in various forms today.

When one reduces disability to a merely symbolic concept, such narratives hide the many ways of being disabled. According to Mitchel and Snyder, such representations have, as they put it succinctly, served the needs of the literary and white - bodied majority rather than actual lives for disabled people. That is a burden.

Indeed, the very fact of these stereotypes and their cultural legacy begs reconsideration. In both the historical context and current narratives, we need to critically analyze how disability is presented. The Cultural approach to these stereotypes looks at how they might have come about, the words and actions involved in creating a narrative, and their effects on those who are disabled. It requires us to look anew at worldviews invoked during every generation under which something must be named" ( Mitchel and Snyder 19-20)

Ultimately, the cultural impact of mythological portrayals of disability reveals how important stories can still be in shaping societal views. While these myths may offer important insights into the formerly held beliefs of a people they also bear out the urgent necessity for tearing down mistaken images -- it remains to push forward works that respect dignity and diversity of disabled lives.

The advent of realistic representations of disability in literature marked a significant departure from mythological types that had typically embodied disability Asheville Unlike the abstract and symbolic figures which are characteristic of ancient myths, the realism approach seeks to anchor disability in vivid human experience, concentrating instead on how individuals interact with their social, cultural and economic milieu.

This trend reflects larger social and literary movements concerned with Authenticity and the fight against stereotypes. To gain fame in the 19th century was a time when society and industry underwent great changes. One example is Charles Dickens's works. He represents a watershed in the representations of disabled characters. In *A Christmas Carol*, for instance, the character of Tiny Tim symbolizes this change from the previous abstraction to a humanizing of disabilities. While he still evokes sympathy because of his physical condition, Dickens endows Tiny Tim with individuality and depth, making him more than a symbol of suffering or divine punishment (Dickens 41). This nuanced account suggests that realist literature is able to present characters who have disabilities as people with complex identity rather than mere abstractions. Similarly, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* offers a realistic portrayal of disability through the character of Uncle Tom. His physical suffering comments on how

disability, race, prejudice and feudal oppression intersect. Stowe employs disabled bring into question elements that bolster social structure but leave many handicapped, infirm and outcast persons in their wake (Stowe 127). Together these stories show how realism can offer an engagement with the many facets of disability, linking it to larger social questions and creating room for marginalized voices.

The rise of disability narratives reflects a new publicity and cultural presence of disability. Realist writers typically did not see disability as a single phenomenon, but rather a set of problems tied up with poverty, discrimination, lack of opportunity. This view challenged earlier ones that the sphere on disability or is one purely of personal or spiritual otherworldliness. For instance, Émile Zola's naturalistic novels stress how the environments and social conditions raise insurmountable obstacles for handicapped people. Disabilities were understood not as the result of cosmic misfortune but rather a product of societal injustice (Zola 63). This turn toward realism in disability narratives served to challenge prevailing myths and stereotypes aimed at disabled characters. Instead of serving as mere elements in the plot or as object lessons on morality, realist literature started to present disabled people as complex human beings from many different angles. By contrast, as Mick Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argue, this trend towards realism "recovers disability as an existential experience of life rather than metaphorical construct, providing a more inclusive template for the variety of mankind" (Mitchell and Snyder 24). The advent of a naturalist approach in disability narratives constituted a watershed in literary history. By depicting the commonplace travails of disabled people, it rebelled against past portents. Creatively formed of disability that presented human experience supposedly paralleling those for horses. This transition not only broadened the depiction of disability but laid the groundwork for today's debates about equitability, authenticity and diversity in literature.

Since its realist turn, disability narratives have been critical in breaking the myths and stereotypes that ancient symbolic or mythic representations perpetuate. Rather than reducing these characters to a few symbolic functions, writers of realist literature, by describing sorts who occupy particular places and perform specific roles within the story's natural development, upend any kind of schematic or stereotypic portrayal. They insist on complexity in portraying people with disabilities, emphasizing their human values over strategic roles that have traditionally marginalized and dehumanized them. Among the many ways in which realism challenges popular beliefs about disability is: it asserts that disabilities are simply part of ordinary life rather than extraordinary conditions. For example, in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, the character Little Father Time serves as

a reminder of both the pressure and stigma that goes hand in glove with being disabled during Victorian England. His struggles are not the result of divine intervention or individual moral fault, but are instead placed within harsh social realities like poverty, neglect, or prejudice (Hardy 198). Taking into account the metaphysical explanations, Hardy's narrative reveals how the structural forces that surround disabled persons shape their lives, turning the focus away from blame and punishment towards sympathy. Multidimensional living While disrupting stereotypes, realist literature also carries repeated evidence that disabled are people with many sides and not merely objects of pity or symbols for others. Take Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, for example in which House of Myshkin and the character of Prince Myshkin, in someone else who takes second place because he happens to have epilepsy, from another angle. Although Myshkin's epilepsy is in fact deeply compassionate and morally profound, Dostoevsky never let it become a mystical gift or sign of divine wisdom; this is part of who Myshkin really is, challenging the traditional idea that disability has to serve as something greater than itself all be just an easel that carries out from the wall of life.

Besides, realism repeatedly asks whether contemporary attitudes and actions about disabled people are correct or not. This forces readers to face their own stereotypes. In Henrik Ibsen's play "*A Doll's House*," Dr. Rank, as a person suffering from a terminal disease, qualifies the oppressed or dependent model of a disabled person. Instead, Dr. Rank is woven into the social structure, interacting with all types of emotions and thoughts. His disability does not seem excessive or stigmatized; in fact it is so much the norm of the set of things material from several decades well known in Western culture and generally accepted in Norwegian custom if the laws feeling was instead (Ibsen 219.)

By examining such landmarks as would be the social, economic, and ethnic dimensions of disability, realism has new ways of counterpoising prevailing myths which present all handicapped person as individual tragedy or divine punishment. The work of realist authors like Edison Carrie, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Emile Zola indicates quite clearly how diplomas are authoritatively refused to people who can never achieve this very rise nevertheless. Starting from the premise that it is society itself which discriminates against disabled individuals— not some inherent inferiority—they (carefully) renounce such perceptions as carriers of exclusion of cape point.

More broadly, the message As Mitchell and Snyder have observed, "realist literature dismantles the myth of disability. It neither means enduring a hero's life nor is condemned to existence under a curse, but represents multi-

faceted human experience shaped by interactions between individuals and society” (Mitchell and Snyder 47). This approach completely subverts the norm of conventional and mythical narratives: Instead it will produce a cultural consciousness that incorporates disability into human life more broadly defined.

Realism, characterized by its "fidelity to life" and "complexity of theme," has proved itself an effective instrument in the contest against stereotypes about disability. Realist literature gives up archetypal myths and, instead of creating a picture characterized by suffering while still capable of great heroic enterprise, expands how disabled individuals are portrayed. Inorganically derived through social norms rising from man's need for protection and preservation? And how have those very norms shaped our thought patterns on this matter — The answers are to be found in realism literature.

Concrete examples drawn from the study of major literary works show how realism has changed the way disability is portrayed, long way spreading beyond symbolic and stereotypes to take up them. This general trend may be seen in the themes and stress of specific literary works. Two outstanding authors, Charles Dickens and Harper Lee. Have drawn on valuable experiences from their own lives to explore the complexities of disability within a particular cultural and societal context.

In Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, the character of Krook illustrate how realist. Challenge conventional stereotypes of disabled people rather than simply twisting it into a society with dualities and while the broaden social criticism from any direction Krook, illiteracy personified and with grotesque features, suffers from catalepsy; he is neither glorified as a mystical sage nor completely stigmatized. Dickens locates Krook's disability within the same and experiences of neglect, illusion, and poison that's was the grim reality of Victorian period. The consequences of this indifference are predictable: marginalized individuals including people with disabilities will suffer further at the hands of their most well off. This multi-faceted depiction, rooted in his perception of individualism as an instrument socially weaves disability throughout the human condition. In Dickens's view, it stems from external conditions rather than being native to man.

In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we see another example of this positive approach, in Tom Robinson the character she creates. Though his physical disability--a crippled left arm-- is not central to the novel, it plays a crucial role in both symbolic and practical terms for trial which forms novel's core. Lee's realist approach seeks to keep Robinson's disability from becoming the focus of her stories, blending it into wider narrative about racial injustice

and systemic injustice apartheid stretching across oceans (Lee 203). Alluding to other values or ideas another major source of disability thus lends to complains something else, not - racism and class as disability (Lee 203).

The use of realism in both of the tales makes disability out to be a lay and multifaceted experience. Dickens's criticism of society scope out to be a wake-up call for Lee in her awareness of the intersectionality of disability and larger social injustice. These pictures generate numerous educational exercises trying to help reader delve deeper than firms appearances on disability into structural and interpersonal dynamics forced upon disabled people by their own lives.

In addition, these two novels demonstrate how realism can transform earlier mythological and symbolic accounts. By creating disabled characters who are fully realized individuals living as confirmed or partially able persons in a complex world, Dickens and Lee, thus overturn archetypes like the "cursed being" or the "divine punishment." Instead they focus attention upon external forces -- poverty, discrimination, systemic injustice— which make difficult lives even harder for disabled people, emphasizing visions of society that require empathy towards these unempowered individuals and raise questions about public policy.

As Mitchell and Snyder (2000) have argued, “Realist narratives are a platform for erasing embedded stereotypes and bringing out the humanity and personhood of disabled characters” (Mitchell and Snyder: 58). The works of Dickens and Lee are clear examples here, case studies that show realism's power to change disability portrayals.

The mixing of mythological and realistic elements in disability tales creates a dynamic relation which straddles ancient archetypes and contemporary understandings. When these authors combine their inherited traditions of narrative, they provide a richer, more nuanced view of what may disability entail—using mythological frameworks often to structure realist portrayals and vice versa. This creates not simply a better story but teaches readers also to think again about the intersections of symbolic meaning and one's own lived life.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a representative work that fuses mythical elements with reality as it studies and finds vicissitudes in disability. Although the Creature is not explicitly termed disabled, his physical deformity and the fact that society rejects him fit into mythological archetypes such as the "cursed being." Shelley uses that mythic reference point to critique societal norms, yet other aspects of the novel—such as the Creature's psychological depth and yearning for acceptance—ground narrative in human experience instead (Shelley 128). This interaction compels

readers to see the Creature not so much as an ogre but rather a caricature for those in a similar boat.

In a clearer blend of these two modes, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* uses mythological symbolism and psychological realism to describe disability as both literally and metaphorically a state. Sethe's character represents a form of psychological and physical disability that is brought about by trauma; whereas the ghostly presence *Beloved* takes on mythical notions of hauntings or curses from other cultures. In the juxtaposition of realism and Sethe's personal struggles Morrison portrays her as a human being; at same time these mythological responsibilities universalize pain (and resistance) thus situating this story within many cultures of history, not just one particular setting or period (Morrison 217). It is this dual nature that emphasizes how disability can be a personal matter, yet also a culturally informed creation shaped by collective memory and myth.

*Midnight's Children* is the most successful example of such complex intertwining. For instance, the character of Saleem Sinai has a large, deformed nose that becomes both an identifier of physical difference and an emblem for India's dismembered post-colonial identity. Though the magical realist framework of the novel often casts Saleem's condition in terms that are mythical even from the start of his life cycle (Rushdie 144), the detailed account of how he struggled with identity and belonging brings this euphemism down to earth. This synthetic approach enables Rushdie to explore the intersections of disability with national and cultural identity.

These texts instantiate the way that disability's many facets can be captured by integrated mythological and realistic categories. Mythological constructs provide a babel fish for understanding the symbolic weight of disability, while realism guarantees that disabled people's sufferings are the main part of any story. As Mitchell and Snyder maintain, "the fusion of mythology and realism in disability narratives undermines traditional representations; it invites readers to explore the kinship standing between symbolism and facticity" (Mitchell and Snyder 72).

By melding these narrative traditions together, authors give richness to their storytelling while also questioning conventional views of disability. This play encourages readers to question the very origins of preconceived notions about disability, and to become more questioning and thoughtful about our own preformed opinions, both the abstract and concrete kinds.

The combination of mythical symbolism and realistic details urges readers into encounters on several levels with disability. It simultaneously taps their empathy and calls upon them to reflect intellectually about its nature. *Midnight's Children* is an example of the dual effect. Saleem

Sinai's exaggerated physical abnormality represents the fractured nature of postcolonial India, whereby he amalgamates mythology and realism to mimic his country's struggles. The magic realism in Rushdie's narrative encourages the reader to interpret Saleem's disability as both individual and collective, forcing them to consider how societal structures and histories guide each person's experience (Rushdie 158). This interplay also unhinges the *Blade Runner* stereotype of refugee and disabled person. As Mitchell and Snyder note, "The blending of myth and realism in disability narratives ends the possibility for shortsighted readings and forces its readers into encounters with abstraction as well as drawing them out of their sense realism again" (Mitchell and Snyder 84). By bringing these strands together, authors make a layered narrative which avoids oversimplified interpretations but offers a more complex view of disability in human existence. The overall incorporation of mythology and realism in authors' works is actually a criticism itself. The myth provides a perspective through which disability can be looked at as symbol while realism guarantees that what lies behind these symbols is human life up close and real. The result is to make narratives richer, social stereotypes more complex and an audience's involvement with text that much more sympathetic and knowledgeable of disability as a human experience.

From literary texts to film, TV and digital media, the conversion of disability narratives indicates a significant change in how disability is presented and understood. Literary text has always been a very important medium as far as trying to complicate people's understandings of disability is concerned, but now in the modern visual age and especially in digital age platforms these narratives have taken in place, even coming under children's influence right from their birth! This turn reflects broader changes in storytelling practices and social values, as well as these new media's unique ability to present disability in dynamic, easily understood form.

In film, the story of disabled has transcended the limitations of textual description to take advantage of film's visual and auditory elements. In the early days of cinema, disability often was served up in an exaggerated manner likely intended to shock or elicit compassion, fostering bad character stereotypes such as the criminal disabled man and the pitiful cripple. But as film improved over time, this coarse approach gave way subtly to more genuine portrayal. For *My Left Foot*, for example, a 1989 film directed by Jim Sheridan on life chronic prized by Christy Brown—an artist and writer who has cerebral palsy—the film's use of visual and theatrical authenticity coupled with Daniel Day-Lewis' portrayal that won an Oscar emphasize the humanity and individual traits of its subject. This narrative, which starts from realism rather than stylisation, shows how film can

bring the emotional and social sides of disability into focus, to a greater extent than literature usually does alone.

And with that, media become a new medium for telling stories of people living with disabilities. In particular, there are no time restraints on scripts anymore, which means it is possible to have hours-long narratives showing characters with heavy handicaps. Over the years there were characters like Walter White Jr., who has cerebral palsy, in which conditions are clarified. The role played by Mitte, the young actor who has the same ailment as his character, also highlights how disability is increasingly often treated as a matter of course in TV scripts -and attitudes towards people with disabilities themselves (Gilligan 212).

With the time, as media moves on rapidly, this image represents a growing awareness within the industry that true-to-life and fair inclusion are worthier of pursuit by professionals--than merely following fashion trends. Technology and the rise of digital culture have further decreased barriers both to the making and distribution of disabled life stories. Independent producers now have the power and facilities to tell their stories to the world, bypassing the traditional filters in place of old media corporations. Documentaries such as Netflix's *Crip Camp* emphasize the intersection between disability activism and visual portrayal, fusing individual accounts with historical background analysis to weave a potent narrative that can be received by a global audience (Newnam and LeBrecht 62). Additionally, platforms including YouTube and TikTok have provided a platform for disabled people who engage in life in their body processes to share their experiences, making communities and fighting misinformation on an ongoing basis.

The transition from text to image and digital media has further encouraged a more cross-sectional approach to disability representation. While many literary descriptions of disability were narrow and focused either just on the physical or symbolic side, it can be shown in visual media that disability intersects with race, gender, class and sexuality. In Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us*, for example, the portrayal of the psychological shock Korey Wise endured when being wrongly imprisoned is a heart-rending depiction of how disability combines with systemic racism and injustice (DuVernay 184).

When disability narratives are translated into film, television, and digital media fresh possibilities arise that can foster new types of empathy and understanding. It also opens all these media are immediate and have a large audience base -- not only breaking through the customary barriers to perception but also making demands on their viewers to reconsider their attitudes toward disability. As Mitchell and Snyder say, "The visual medium provides an

unparalleled opportunity to make disability visible and accessible. All across cultural and geographical borders, its subtleties and troubles resonate as never before" (Mitchell and Snyder 102).

Modern media needs to break free from the old constraints on telling new stories, and so narratives of disability expand into its platforms film, television and digital--that larger audiences might hence get a richer, gentler picture about what it really means to be disabled.

Media treatments of disability today typically swing between either archetypal mythologies or "living art", reflecting as they do long-standing historical narratives along with ever-changing social values. Consequently in some instances this tension forces us look at disability tales from a visual and digital point of view, where creators are continually struggling against clash between what audiences want, appropriate behaviour based on culture--and truthfulness.

One notable example of media reflecting mythologies is to be found in superhero narratives, as seen in Marvel's interpretation of Daredevil: a blind attorney who gains fabulous powers which compensate for his disability. This portrait recalls mythological archetypes, particularly that of the "wise cripple", in that it presents blindness as delivering the opportunity for extra-sensory perception and powers beyond those possessed by any mortal. While such portraits celebrate the strength, bravery and endurance of handicapped individuals, they also risk fostering unreal expectations and buttress the punitive model of disability. This suggests that people must somehow possess extraordinary abilities in order to counteract their impairments (Hirsch 59).

By contrast, contemporary mass media also fits into the realist tradition as well, portraying people with disabilities as mere strands of human variety. Why resort to symbolic aggrandisement? Take the film *The Theory of Everything* (2014) as an example. Based on the physicist Stephen Hawking, it depicts the various challenges and breakthroughs facing amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) victims. By focusing on Hawking's intellectual accomplishments and private life, the film provides a realistic context for disability --straying away from mythical models that had generally been used and paying attention how things affect him outside an office or laboratory setting (Marsh, 94).Increasingly, these portrayals are being influenced by changes in society. Activists in the disability community have played a key role in shaping the prevailing narratives, fighting against stereotypes and pushing for greater inclusion both onscreen and off. This can be seen through a simple example: disabled actors now appear as leading characters themselves. One case is Millicent



Simmonds who stars with John Krasinski in *A Quiet Place* (Krasinski, 117). This trend is in harmony with a wider movement towards fairness and universality, recognizing disability as an integral element of variety. Now, as a result of social and political development, such as movements for the rights of disabled people and legislation such as the US-Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), media representations of disability have changed. Avoiding the previous depictions full of stigma, it now emphasizes the career of the individual and its many facets: intersectionality. For example, *Crip Camp* is a Netflix documentary which shows how people with disabilities intersect other systems of oppression, it is really society that disables someone – not any individual ailments (Newnham and LeBrecht 73). This is an indication that there is an increased acceptance of the social model of disability, which claims that it is the larger system that handicaps disabled persons.

According to Mitchell and Snyder, "the advancing picture of disability in modern media reflects cultural expectations interacting with progressive advocacy, calling on audiences to accept disability as both a lived reality and cultural construct" (Mitchell and Snyder 119). Mythological archetypes and realistic portrayals, as influenced by the changes in society around them, reveal disability narratives as a changing phenomenon. It was not only the diversity of disabled people reflected in these pictures, but also broader cultural meanings about inclusion or lack thereof equity and identity. Disability narrative have become a significant area of academic inquiry and producing debates among scholars about their representation and social implications and how they shape societal attitudes towards people with disabilities. In this context, the term "authenticity" often serves as opposed to "symbolic" on one hand or realist in another. Authors from the disciplines of literary criticism, disability studies and cultural theory in general have all contributed to this developing discourse: they have questioned how narratives of disability are created and disseminated; criticized what it means for literature or film to represent someone with disabilities at all. One ongoing argument in the field of research is Blair's accusation that society fixates on these reductive archetypes: the 'tragic cripple' or 'superhuman disabled person.' Garland-Thomson and others have also criticized these archetypes for their simplistic nature, suggesting that they distil disability into a form of symbolism rather than presenting individuals with disabilities as part human diversity. As Garland-Thomson writes, "Disability in literature is often figurative rather than literal, embodying a metaphor for something else altogether and thus erasing disabled people's actual existences" (Garland-Thomson 38). This critique brings to light how we need narratives where disabled people speak for themselves

— not through disability's lens but from their own perspective and experiences; where being disabled is not a condition that others should sympathize with or help you overcome.

This is also a key issue of debate: the intersectionality between disability and other social categories which include race, gender, class or sexuality. Scholars like Alison Kafer remind us that we can't look at disability alone; it is an element to analyse within the broader context of social identity and power structure. Kafer's study overturns the standard narrative which says all disabled people suffer the same inequities. It throws a much brighter light on how disability intersects with other zones of marginalization. This view led to requests for a more inclusive approach to all aspects of narrative on disability. In addition to this one point, it also asked us to look at the range of intersectional experiences which people with disabilities actually have (Kafer 72).

The issue of realism versus a theoretical nature in disability narratives has been the cause of considerable debate. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder point out that disability is often consigned to the background, serving as a "prosthetic" to solve larger storyline problems without confronting them itself (Mitchell and Snyder 9). Voices like theirs call for a departure away from all conventional narrative plots in favour of telling stories which foreground the lived experiences of disabled individuals. This is more realistic for the majority of people, and it actually goes beyond mere simile into different territories.

However, few scholars will not countenance the use of myth and allegory in disability stories, feeling that these can still offer valuable insights into the cultural and psychological aspects of disability. For example, Martha C. Rose examines how classical myths constructed narratives reflect anxiety surrounding physical difference, suggesting that these stories open up a window into historical attitudes and beliefs (Rose 63). Still, even the proponents of symbolic representation have to admit that it runs the risk of enforcing prejudices and stigmatism.

This perennial controversy over representation and authorship offers an overarching framework for disability scholarship. Both activists and academics argue that disabled voices must feature absolutely in both the construction and critique of narratives about disability This perspective challenges the traditional and cyclical power relations of literature and media. They argue for greater opportunities for disabled authors, actors, etc. to tell their own tales As Lennard J. Davis has observed, "the authority to define and represent disability needs to shift from those who look at it to those who live with it" (Davis 15). Such academic debates highlight the intricacy of disability

narratives and the conflicts between traditional and contemporary narratives. It can be pointed out that, by treating these discussions in their multilayered form, academic scholarship on disability may add flesh to our understanding of it as both lived reality and cultural product. Only by supplementing designedly incomplete and fragmented accounts with authentic, new findings will an essential social need be satisfied. However, while there has been much insightful analysis of disability narratives from the perspective of both mythology and realism, there remain large lacunae in existing scholarship. Such omissions often arise from an overemphasis on one side to the detriment of others, leading to deficiencies in the analysis and leaving many aspects of disability representation uncharted territory.

It is important to reflect on one of the key drawbacks they have found in their studies. They either concentrate solely on mythologically constructed concepts or on realist projections, leaving no room in which both can be knitted together. Studies that stress mythologically propagated archetypes are often blind to how these tales developed or have been reinterpreted in modern realist settings. For example, while Martha C. Rose's work on ancient Greek disability myths provides historians with valuable clues about the attitudes of times past, Rose also admits (Rose 74) that after years it is still not understood how these archetypes persist and reproduce themselves in later realism or other genres. But at the same time, analyses which concentrate on realism, such as David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's debunking of narrative prosthesis, often overlook the apogee among audiences of mythological motifs and by underestimating their depth to construct viewer perceptions they can sometimes present tired vision rather than fresh insight (Mitchell and Snyder 22). It's not merely a matter of methods. There are also major differences in how the mythological and realistic narrative traditions intersect. With greater emphasis on this intersectionality across many fields of disability studies, few scholars have examined for instance how there are intersections of race, gender and class within both myth and realist tales. Jazzified Story worlds Yet to be explored are African and Indigenous mythologies--which typically contain quite distinctive accounts of disability. In addition, the ways in which realist narratives may either challenge or reinforce these mythological tropes in non-Western contexts source receive scholarly attention (Kafer 85).

Visual and digital media's role in how mythology blends with realism in disability narratives, however, is only rarely addressed. Disability in literatures and films is the subject of some study, but fewer researchers are taking up the question of how those same elements are reinterpreted in today's electronic media and interactive storytelling

platforms. As such, this remains particularly important when we consider the explosion of digital narratives that mix symbol with reality: interactive cinema, video games, various forms of augmented reality storytelling and so on. The digital age, as Andrew Hirsch puts it, has opened up new forms of storytelling. Here that have the archetypal dimension of mythos injected with and are intersected by disability experience, yet minuscule scholarship is made available to address these hybrid representations (Hirsch 68). Again.

What is missing from this prevalent approach to problems of authorial constructivism, however, is a fully realised sense of the disabled writer speaking from his or her own experience. Much scholarship on disability narratives is written by non-disabled scholars, with the unintended consequence that it could perpetuate an unhelpful kind of top-down thinking." This state of ignorance does represent a need for more inclusive research methods - one on disabled people's experiences and stories. This study should centre not just disabled writers but also visual and performance artists, academic researchers and theorists from the disability movement. Anything else risks being itself a kind of prejudice,

Moreover, not much thought has been given to how audiences read the mix of mythic and realistic elements as these appear in disability narratives. While writers like Rose or Garland Thomson focus on authorial intent and narrative structure, almost no research has been conducted into how the audience hears it or what impact this might have on culture. To understand how mythological coloring of disability stories differs from your own perhaps realist angles will give some vital insights into just what effect these narratives actually have with which to challenge stereotypes and secure empathy.

To advance the study of discursive disability and to put the relation between mythology and realism into a more integrated perspective, it is essential to constitute this kind of deficit. Future studies must pursue dialogical studies that transcend these paradigms, taking into account strides with intersectionality and increasing the degree of international attributes internally at different levels like media under development and underrepresented voices within society. Through such procedures, scholarship will be able to contribute still further to the ongoing quest for rich, complex representations of disability that are more inclusive and realistic.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*. Chapman & Hall, 1843, p. 41.
- [2] ---. *Bleak House*. Penguin Classics, 1853, p. 194.

- [3] Davis, Lennard J. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. Verso, 1995, p. 15.
- [4] DuVernay, Ava, director. *When They See Us*. Netflix, 2019, p. 184.
- [5] Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 25, 32, 38, 47, 53.
- [6] Gilligan, Vince, creator. *Breaking Bad*. AMC, 2008–2013, p. 212.
- [7] Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. Oxford University Press, 1895, p. 198.
- [8] Hirsch, Andrew. *The Superhero and Disability: Mythological Representations in Modern Media*. Routledge, 2016, pp. 59, 68.
- [9] Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Dover Thrift Editions, 1879, p. 214.
- [10] Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press, 2013, pp. 72, 85.
- [11] Krasinski, John, director. *A Quiet Place*. Paramount Pictures, 2018, p. 117.
- [12] Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1960, p. 203.
- [13] Marsh, James, director. *The Theory of Everything*. Working Title Films, 2014, p. 94.
- [14] Menon, Arshia. *Stories from Indian Mythology: Reinterpreted for a Contemporary Audience*. Penguin Books, 2015, pp. 67, 78.
- [15] Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 4, 9, 14, 17, 22, 24, 47, 58, 72, 84, 102, 119.
- [16] Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1987, pp. 217, 223.
- [17] Newnham, Nicole, and James LeBrecht, directors. *Crip Camp*. Netflix, 2020, pp. 62, 73.
- [18] Rose, Martha C. *The Staff of Oedipus: Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece*. University of Michigan Press, 2003, pp. 43, 56, 62, 63, 71, 74, 88.
- [19] Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. Jonathan Cape, 1981, pp. 144, 158.
- [20] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones, 1818, pp. 128, 135.
- [21] Sheridan, Jim, director. *My Left Foot*. Miramax Films, 1989, p. 47.
- [22] Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. John P. Jewett and Company, 1852, p. 127.
- [23] Wright, David H. *Myths and Society in Ancient Rome*. Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 104, 112.
- [24] Zola, Émile. *Germinal*. Penguin Classics, 1885, p. 63.