

Exploring Disability and Sexuality in Eighteenth Century British Literature

In the realm of Eighteenth Century British literature, an era predominantly depicted by classic works from renowned authors, discussions around disability and sexuality remain a fascinating aspect to explore. Through the writings of the time, we can analyze the representation of disability and its intersection with sexuality, uncovering the various attitudes and perceptions prevalent in that era towards individuals with disabilities.

The Historical Context

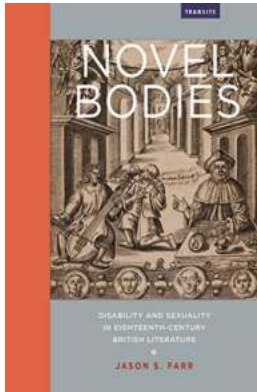
Understanding the context in which these literary works were produced helps us comprehend the societal views that influenced the portrayal of disability. The Eighteenth Century encompassed the Enlightenment period, characterized by scientific and intellectual progress. Despite these advancements, people with disabilities faced marginalization and were often excluded from participating fully in society.

It is important to acknowledge that attitudes towards disability varied across class and gender lines. The higher social classes often had the means to access better medical care, while the lower classes struggled to find support or aid. Consequently, the treatment and perception of disabilities diverged significantly based on an individual's societal standing.

Novel Bodies: Disability and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century British Literature (Transits: Literature, Thought & Culture 1650-1850)

by William Edelglass (Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5



Language	: English
File size	: 4449 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 201 pages



Disability Portrayal in Eighteenth Century British Literature

Works such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* provide insights into disability representation during this period. In *Pamela*, the character of Lady Davers, who is hard of hearing, is portrayed as stubborn and ignorant. Her inability to hear serves to highlight her limited understanding and intelligence, reinforcing the notion of disability as a negative attribute.

Similarly, in *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding portrays disability as something to be ridiculed. He mocks the character of Parson Trulliber, a disabled clergyman who is depicted as a foolish and greedy individual. This characterization perpetuates the flawed perception that individuals with disabilities are somehow lacking intellect or moral virtue.

The Sexual Aspect

The intersection between disability and sexuality is also explored through various literary works of the period. In Fanny Burney's novel *Evelina*, the character of Sir Clement Willoughby is disabled, yet his sexual prowess and charm are

emphasized. This contrasting portrayal suggests that disability does not necessarily hinder one's sexual attractiveness or desirability.

Another example is found in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, where the protagonist becomes involved with a disabled man, expressing her attraction and desire for him. This challenges the notion that individuals with disabilities were devoid of sexual desires, highlighting their capacity for intimate relationships.

Shaping Societal Perceptions

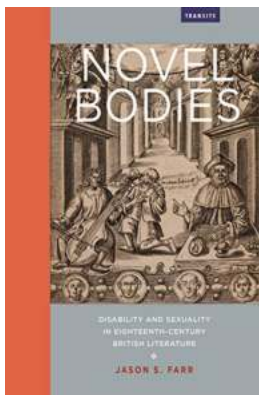
It is crucial to note the influence of literature on shaping societal perceptions. These works, although products of their time, continue to influence our understanding of disability and its intersection with sexuality. They highlight the need to critically assess and challenge the underlying assumptions and biases that prevail in our own contemporary society.

Modern representations of disabilities within literature have evolved, building upon the foundation laid in Eighteenth Century British literature. Authors such as Toni Morrison, Hanya Yanagihara, and David Mitchell have crafted narratives that delve into disability and sexuality with more depth, creating complex and nuanced characters.

The exploration of disability and sexuality in Eighteenth Century British literature transits provides valuable insights into societal attitudes and perceptions surrounding these topics. Despite the prevailing marginalization of individuals with disabilities during that era, there were occasional glimpses of multidimensional portrayals that challenged prevailing stereotypes.

By revisiting these literary works, we gain a better understanding of how societies viewed disabilities and how these views intersected with human sexuality. Such

reflections allow us to reassess our own perceptions of disability and promote inclusivity and understanding in our contemporary world.



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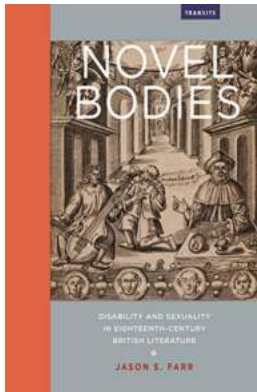
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Novel Bodies examines how disability shapes the British literary history of sexuality. Jason Farr shows that various eighteenth-century novelists represent disability and sexuality in flexible ways to reconfigure the political and social landscapes of eighteenth-century Britain. In imagining the lived experience of disability as analogous to—and as informed by—queer genders and sexualities, the authors featured in Novel Bodies expose emerging ideas of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality as interconnected systems that sustain dominant models of courtship, reproduction, and degeneracy. Further, Farr argues that they use intersections of disability and queerness to stage an array of contemporaneous debates covering topics as wide-ranging as education, feminism, domesticity, medicine, and plantation life. In his close attention to the fiction of Eliza Haywood, Samuel Richardson, Sarah Scott, Maria Edgeworth, and Frances Burney, Farr demonstrates that disabled and queer characters inhabit strict social orders in

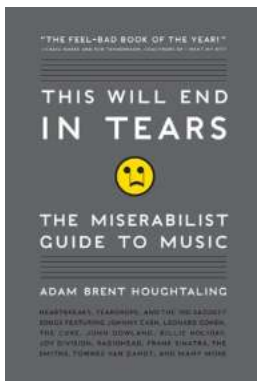
unconventional ways, and thus opened up new avenues of expression for readers from the eighteenth century forward.

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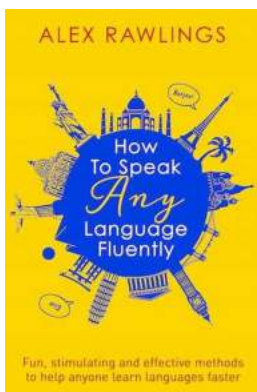
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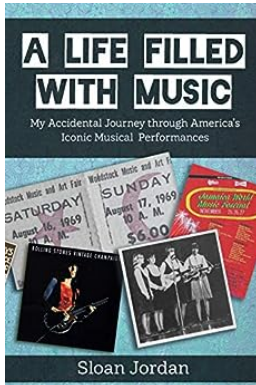
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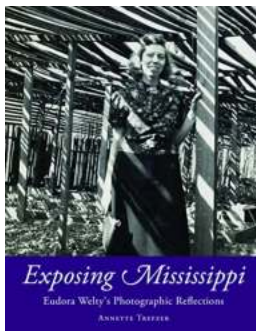
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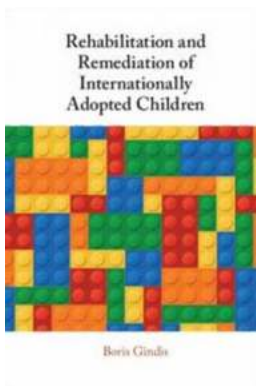
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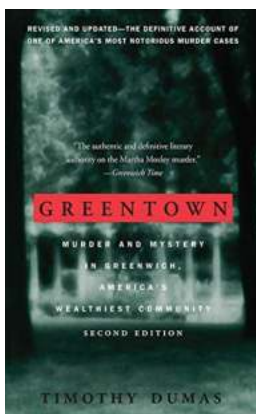
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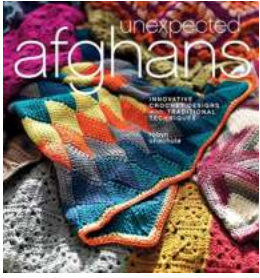
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