

‘Normal’ Bodies: Disability and Victorian Ideologies in Fiction

Resumen/Abstract:

The advent of Disability Studies as a critical area that aims to explore and re-think cultural and literary representations of the disabled body, has supposed a reassessment of the extent until which the Victorian era has had an impact on the creation of what we consider 'normal'. In his 1995 monograph *Enforcing Normalcy*, in fact, Lennard J. Davis pointed out clearly that the concept of normalcy in itself is deeply rooted in Victorian social and medical expectations. Following this trend of thought, critics like Martha Stoddard Holmes or Karen Bourier have reconsidered fictional representations of disability and their complexity in relation with several aspects of Victorian literature.

In this paper I aim to explore some of these aspects by addressing the previously mentioned relationship between normalcy and the disabled body in Victorian literature and fiction. To do so, I shall address how two very different Victorian authors constructed different views of the human body in their novels and how these views were related to the normalization of Victorian gender codes. By doing this I hope to expose the role of Victorian fiction in consolidating Victorian ideologies through its representation of human (disabled) bodies.

In order to do this, I shall focus first on George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879), in which the author's disability contrast with his ironic comment on the potential sexual symbolism of the 'normal' human body. Then, I will move on to Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), whose disabled narrator can be interpreted as a reflection of what defines the 'normal' division of genders according to Victorian society and culture. These two novels ultimately reflect on Victorian pseudoscientific and popular ideologies about gender, sexuality, and the (disabled) body, thus offering a perfect starting point from which to rethink how literature uses these ideologies to shape 'normalcy'.

Bibliografía/References:

Davis, Lennard J. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*. London: Verso, 1995. Print.

Nota biográfica/Bio note:

Manuel Hueso Vasallo earned both his BA and MA degrees in English Studies from the University of Málaga, in 2014 and in 2015 respectively. Now, he is a PhD candidate at the University of Málaga under the direction of Professor Rosario Arias. His main academic interests include Victorianism, Disability Studies, and the relationship between pseudoscience and literature.