THE DISCOURSE OF NORMALCY AND DEFORMITY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL: A DISABILITY STUDIES' PERSPECTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

In his 1990 work entitled *Literature as Discourse*, Robert Hodge defended the idea that literature should be regarded as a discursive process that was directly influenced by social semiotics. According to Hodge, social semiotics was a mixture of concepts and methodologies from different disciplines and fields (such as sociology, linguistics, semiotics, or literature) that was concerned with the «social production of meaning» (1990: ix). In this work, therefore, he proposed a new way to address literature through new strategies of reading that included social semiotics as a «framework for studying literature as discourse, and literary criticism itself as constituted through discursive processes» (1990: 5). In doing this, Hodge was stating that literature was, in fact, a discourse whose study could reveal much about the ways in which social meaning was created, manipulated, and shaped through cultural manifestations. Furthermore, he saw literary criticism as needing to be readdressed in a way that took into account social discourses, thus implying that literature, as discourse per se, was to be considered always alongside other socio-cultural discourses. This gives social meaning and importance to the culture and contexts surrounding different literary manifestations, and makes the study of literary discourse an essential and necessary point to take into account when working with culture, or in between cultures. That is, for anyone interested in analysing the ways in which discourse, as a term that has «amalgamated assumptions borrowed from psychoanalysis, Marxism and poststructuralism, from analytic philosophy, speech act theory, and pragmatics» (Angermuller, 2014: 6), may translate into different cultural modes, such as fiction, different social realities, while at the same time adding meaning, or influencing these same cultural modes. Thus, it follows that the study of discourse is essential to understand culture, while at the same time the study of different cultural representations and contexts can offer a wider perspective into the ways in which discourse acquires and spreads its social meanings.[1]

Therefore, and as the other chapters of this book illustrate, to work with culture and discourse is a complex issue that requires a critical analysis of very different areas and fields. This task is made more complex when we consider how the openness and scope of the term culture is ever increasing, as very different cultures may co-exist within rather similar contexts. I would like to draw attention, for example, to the very different cultures that, as we all are aware, may co-exist in the same language. A culture of literacy may exist along a culture of illiteracy, and different people in the same geographical areas may identify themselves with rather different cultures. In this sense, this chapter's main concern is to deal with the interconnection between two seemingly unconnected cultures and their discourses as portrayed in literature and the potential of analysis and research that they may offer when they are considered together. In fact, if we take Halliday and Hasan's seminal definition of culture as «a set of semiotic

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systems, a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate» (1985: 4), we may deduce that it is potentially interesting to address the ways in which a cultural meaning may be rooted or influenced by another cultural system that also carries social meaning, since, as the definition above shows, cultural systems tend to be interrelated. I argue here, furthermore, that an analysis of the way in which the discourse of one culture impacts upon another different cultural discourse serves to create yet another different set of social meanings and culture. In doing this, I expect to show you how working with cultural discourses nowadays, in an area like literature, may involve a re-thinking of the boundaries of different cultures, and how fiction may prove to be an ally in order to demonstrate that the discourses of different systems of meaning are extensively linked. In this case I want to show how the discourse of disability is translated into literary discourse in the Victorian period, and how this dialogue of discourses that influence and shape each other, might have contributed to the formation of a third, binarial culture of 'normalcy' and 'abnormalcy'.

This being said, it is important to look into the ways in which those who work with literary culture and its rather idiosyncratic critical discourses have traditionally looked on the alliance between the cultural discourse of the human body, and literary discourse. During the last years of the twentieth century, the attention directed towards the representational value of the human body in literature took a rather radical shift in its object of study. The main reason for this, was an increase of academic interest on disability. Whereas previously most critics working with the body and literature focused on its relationship with such issues as gender, race, sexuality, or even psychology, those that set themselves to articulate a new methodology around disabled bodies, found that to engage with these bodies was, in fact, to engage with all the other issues. Soon, the disabled body, and the body in general, were defined by critics working with disabilities as a socio cultural construct that offered a blank space in which to inscribe ideologies and comment, challenge, or perpetuate cultural notions about corporality. The current of cultural and literary criticism that uses this approach to re-investigate the role of the body in the creation of aesthetic, cultural, narrative, and representational values, is known as Disability Studies. Disability Studies is a tool that effectively demonstrates how the discourse of two different cultures, disability and literature, may permeate each other. Furthermore, the existence of Disability Studies demonstrates that, as John Flowerdew has argued, context is a «dynamic construct» (2014:5). This is so because this new field of studies, with its very own discourse and socio-cultural set of meanings, establishes a new context for critics, readers, and, in general, all those interested in the culture of disability to think about the human body. It is remarkable, also, that Disability Studies provides us with this new context through literary discourse, thus proving that the union of these two cultures is a fruitful example of the interrelation of systems of meaning.

In contrast to other studies that made of the body a departure point from which to study issues such as gender, sexuality, or race in literature, critics working within Disability Studies focus on the disabled, or, as Lennard J. Davis was to call it, the «abnormal» body (1995: 2). This is worth considering since it serves the purposes of this chapter, as it depicts the wide range of clearly separated critical discourses surrounding the human body. So different are the cultural and social meanings that bodies produce, that different critical fields must be established to study them. In this sense, Disability Studies were thought of by its main theorists as a tool through which to give disabled characters its proper importance within the literary canon, while at the

same time spreading an ideology of equality and normalisation. In fact, critics with an interest in disabilities and literature, such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, or David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, agree that the disabled body as represented in literature is not a mere melodramatic or simplistic trait of a character, but rather a place in which ideologies clash and are negotiated between the author, the reader, and the context. In other words, these critics defend the idea that the disabled body is a socio-cultural construct whose complicated relationship with science, society, and literature make of it a powerful trope of study. Furthermore, it is impossible to address the disabled body in literature without, for the reasons exposed, also producing an analysis of other important issues in literature related to the body, such as a gender, sexuality, race, or even justice. The cohabitation of all these discourses in this area of literary and social analysis make it specially fruitful for an approach on the ways in which different cultures ally with each other and create different social meanings.

As the influence of Disability Studies keeps growing within the area of literary analysis, its discourse and its relationship with other systems of meaning become more and more defined. For instance, in this chapter, I will apply the main theories of this field to equally popular Victorian novels. To carry out such a study may be of special interest if we consider the important, and culturally pervading, constructed connection between (disabled) bodies and minds that was present throughout Victorian pseudoscience and society as well as the high rate of disabled, or 'deformed', characters that appear in Victorian novels and their seemingly simple function. The two novels to be analysed here, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), present a clear example of how different discourses representing different sets of meaning ally interconnect themselves through fiction to create interesting objects of study for new disciplines such as Disability Studies. Furthermore, this collision of different discourses is articulated and achieved through the representation of 'deformed' or othered bodies.

To approach these texts and analyse and highlight the issues within them that may be of interest from the perspective of Disability Studies, the chapter is divided in different sections. In the first section the main theories proposed by critics working with Disability Studies, as well as the development of the field, and the ideologies at work behind these theories will be briefly discussed. In doing this I hope to prove how the representation the representation of disability in the Victorian novel has led to the creation of new critical discourses that, at the same time, help us to understand how the discourse of literature and science create new discourses. This section will be mainly concerned with presenting the disabled body as a construct in which, as said before, different experiences and points of view may be inscribed, and rather different discourses articulated. By presenting the disabled body in this way, all negative assumptions about it must necessarily give way to wider, new, possible significances encoded within it. Furthermore, concepts, such as the dichotomy of 'normalcy' and 'abnormalcy' will be presented so as to justify the disabled body's perceived Otherness and impact on culture. A subsequent section of this chapter will focus on the way in which Victorians regarded the body as linked to personality. Here, Victorian assumptions generally made about the body - and therefore about the disabled body - and their popularity, will be considered, thus showing the potential of Victorian fiction as a vehicle for this cultural system.

In the analytical section of this chapter, the theories and contextual evidences developed in the previous part will be used as a lens through which to look at the

novels. This section will address how different Victorian social and cultural meanings are represented through 'deformed' bodies, and what this has to do with the period's development of the discourse of 'normalcy', or what can be considered as normal or abnormal. This chapter seeks, in doing this, to address the complexities of Victorian literature by positioning disability as a tool through which to look at important issues within Victorian Studies, such as the creation of new cultural meanings and the representation of pseudoscientific ideas. This, hopefully, will show not only how Victorian representational codes in fiction are deeper than they have been supposed to be, but it will also present the body and its representation, as an essential tool for anyone interested in the contemporary discourse of 'normalcy'.

2. NEW CRITICAL DISCOURSES: DISABILITY STUDIES

The last years of the twentieth century saw, in terms of literary criticism, an increasing interest in the study and theorisation of the human body. As much as this interest in the body of characters in critical discourse adopts and approaches through it issues of «race, gender, sexuality, and class», it also neglects one of the most common and, arguably, meaningful characteristics of bodies in literature: disability (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997: 5). This neglect becomes remarkable when we consider how the presence of disabled characters in literature is far form being uncommon, as this presence can be felt in all cultures and literary genres, from the Greek Tragedies to the most popular works of fiction directed to children. But the amount of disabled characters that can be found in almost any literary genre does not signify that there has been, traditionally, an important amount of critical attention directed towards them, as have been said before, and proper critical discourse about this phenomenon was lacking until relatively recently.

In 2007, the University of Liverpool presented the first issue of the *Journal of Literary Disability*, as a response to what seemed to be a newly invigorated academic interest concerning a much-ignored aspect of many literary works: the presence and representation of disabled characters, and their importance within our culture. In the introductory section of the journal's first issue, its author, David Bolt, states that it arises as «a response to a series of interrelated absences, the most fundamental of which being that disability is implicitly and/or explicitly present in all literary works, but too frequently absent from literary criticism» (2007: 1), addressing, at the same time, the main aim of the literary field of Disability Studies: to analyse and question disability and what it implies. Significantly enough, the name of the journal was changed in 2009, only two years after its first publication, to *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, as, indeed, those critics that focused on the area came to the conclusion that to investigate literary embodiments of disability means to uncover and engage with multiple socio-cultural areas in which the contemporary concept of the disabled body is embedded. According to Martha Stoddard Holmes «the [literary] trope of disability enables the exploration of many other tropes [as it] raises difficult questions about the bodies in which we live, work, and relate, especially with reference to power relations, values, justice, and communication» (2004: 12). In this sense, to study the disabled body invariably implies making use and studying other significant critical discourses such as gender, race, or sexuality. Indeed, in the recent years the number of monographs, journals, and conferences that try to raise awareness of the impact of the discourse of disability and its function and alliance with literary discourse has increased so much, that new terms have been coined to deal with very different aspects within this field, from studies of the binary dependency/independency and interdependency, to theories that represent disabilities as metaphorical devices.

Critics like Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, who have paid special attention to the development of Disability Studies and to its theorisation, have stated on many occasions that in order to carry out a study of the disabled body in literature, it is necessary to transcend the boundaries imposed upon it by the traditional field of health science (born, as will be explored, in the nineteenth century), that has always framed disability as a «medical problem needing a medical solution» (2013: 915). The ideology behind this problematisation of disability has configured our conception of disability as something negative. This does not signify that the work traditionally carried out by professionals of these areas is something negative or illegitimate, but rather that it simplifies, or even ignores, how the disabled body is read and interpreted by non-professionals that may regard it according to medical assumptions whose impact on the impaired person are not taken into account. In a new line of thought that opposes this conception, Disability Studies take a radically different approach to the disabled body, reading it as a «representational system rather than a medical problem, a discursive construction rather than a personal misfortune or a bodily flaw» (Garland-Thomson, 1996: 181). From this perspective, the impaired body as portrayed in literature becomes a textual representation of deep-seated constructions that have been present in our culture all throughout history, or at least ever since medical and social discourse appropriated it as something that needed to be cured or treated, that is, as something abnormal. When we approach these cultural constructions, however, through the lens of Disability Studies, we find that they also act in many texts as prolific ground to discuss the dichotomy between what is considered as normal and abnormal, thus producing at the same time a questioning of the time-honoured negative quality attached to disability. Indeed, the discourse of disability as adopted in literature, is liable to be readapted to a brand new set of meanings, and the apparition of yet a new discourse of criticism that words these meanings, allows anyone interested in this phenomenon to perceive how a brand new culture of the body might have emerged from this interconnection of discourses.

The critics that have been traditionally concerned with the nature of disability as a socio-cultural, or even political (in cases such as obtaining the sympathy of voters), discursive construct, have based their claims in multiple socio-historical facts and to the work between different cultures. For instance, in their introduction to *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (1997), two critics in the field of Disability Studies, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, trace the discursive construct to the first instances of «professional and academic disciplines that concentrate upon the management, repair, and maintenance of physical and cognitive incapacity», that addressed the disabled as «populations seen as inherently lacking and unproductive within the social circuit», albeit their «willingness» to attend them (1997:1). The very existence of this notion of disabilities or impairments as something that must be medically observed, signifies that there exists a dichotomy between «normal» and «abnormal» bodies (Davis, 1995: 2). This dichotomy maps disability within the area of that which is not common and thus positions those characters that can be labelled under this construction as ‘Others’.

3. THE DISCOURSE OF NORMALCY

This chapter aims to investigate the Victorian novel from a different perspective, that will allow the reader a clear insight into the ways in which it has influenced, and still influences, cultural discourses that were created through interrelation with other discourses, such as those of medical (pseudo)science, or statistics. I shall argue that, to

reconsider Victorian literary representations of the body form a perspective that combines Disability Studies discourse with Victorian popular pseudoscientific discourses, may shed new light into both the ideologies at work behind the Victorian era, and our own contemporary culture of the body. To study this relationship through this methodology will hopefully show how different cultural discourses are translated into each other and how a knowledge of literary and medical discourses from the context of Victorian criticism may be helpful for an understanding of our own contemporary discourse about the body, thus showing how different systems of meanings influence each other and must always be taken into account when working in between different cultures. But, before analysing any novel from the perspective of this methodology it is important to consider why the Victorian period is of especial interest to apply it.

Many of the theories developped by Disability Studies critics are directly related to the Victorian era. Disability theories have continually pointed to the Victorians as a parting point to re-consider settled attitudes towards the human body. One of these theories is of central importance to this paper, because it favours a reconsideration of the novels that I propose to analyse further on. This theory was first enunciated by one of the leading scholars in the area of Disability, Lennard J. Davis, and had at its core the concept of 'normalcy'. According to Davis, it was in the early Victorian period that the idea of 'normalcy', of a norm that had to be followed and enforced first appeared (1995: 4). Previously, this word had only made reference to a tool used by builders, but from this period onwards, 'normalcy' and the discourse of normality as we know it nowadays emerged. It was mainly due to the work of staticians, as Adolphe Quetelet, that the concept of 'normalcy' was first applied to the human body (1995: 26). If previously in history, the perfect human body was an unattainable ideal, now, statistics promoted the idea that the perfect body was a 'normal' body, a body that was within the average, in the middle, just as the middle class that came to represent it and to hold sway over most of the cultural impacts of the nineteenth century. This so-called 'normal' body, desired and exposed as a sign of healthy social progress, excluded from its definition everything that could be considered abnormal, such as disabled, or deformed people (1995: 4-7).

According, then, to Davis, «we live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavours to be normal or else deliberately avoids that state» (1995: 23). Of course, this statement is closely linked with the dichotomy between 'normalcy' and 'abnormalcy' that, as explained above, configures the different attitudes toward different bodies. It is therefore especially interesting for the present study to consider how, in Davis's words, «the word normal as 'constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard, regular, usual' only enters the English language around 1840» (1995: 24). This fact gives a clear view of until what extent 'normalcy', and its discourse, became an important concept in the Victorian period. All the previously explained theories, in fact, can be applied to nineteenth century literature to obtain a clear view of many of the on-going social and cultural changes that emerged in the period, as, once again according to Davis, the normal:

> «arises in a particular [Victorian] historical moment. It is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie. The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production» (1995: 49).

Furthermore, Davis's concept of 'normalcy' is clearly influenced, and directly complements Foucault's idea of 'bio-power'. According to Foucault, bio-power begins in the late eighteenth century and develops itself along the Victorian period. The movement that 'bio-power' defines, is made up by the usage of new measurements of the population's births and deaths, rates of reproduction, fertility, and diseases. For Foucault, the rise of these practices and discourses carried with it an increase in the government's interest to control and restrain the population. It led to a new type of medicine that sought to normalize, regularize, and, above all, to facilitate the easy classification of people so that the population could be easily controlled (Tremain, 2005: 4-5). The enforcement, therefore, of 'normalcy' by means of 'bio-power' discourses, shaped the medical thought of the Victorian period, as these two concepts managed to get hold of the culture of the period. Thus, the discourse of pseudosciences that favoured the classification, and organization of the population according to norms, was soon widely spread among the medical community, the press, and literature. These pseudosciences had the capacity to objectivize people, and therefore, the power to determine an individual's social value. The two pseudosciences that more influence held across this period were physiognomy and phrenology. These two medical discourses became quite popular, and their presence in the literature of the period is vast. The main point of physiognomy and phrenology was that an individual's mind was inscribed on his or her body, thus making the human body a surface in which personality's secrets could be read. This way of attaching meaning to the body was especially relevant in a period that, as has been said above, sought mainly to classify and normalize its population. To fully understand the complex meanings that pseudoscientific discourse acquired in the Victorian era, and its relevance to analyse the creation of new meanings through fiction, a more in-depth account of these practices and their origins is necessary.

4. VICTORIAN PSEUDOSCIENCE: BETWEEN MEDICINE AND SOCIETY

Symptomatic of this cultural obsession with 'normalcy' is the fact of how Victorian fiction is almost inseparable from the concept of disability, as almost all major works belonging to it represent in some way or other the unusual body, as opposed to the 'normal' body. Popular writers like Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, or Charlotte Brontë, as well as almost any other canonical Victorian writer, give readings of the disabled body in a domestic or conventional context, and these readings were mostly accompanied by the new social discourse of the middle classes. In fact, if, as said before, we regard the creation of a culture of 'normalcy' as a consequence of the development of the middle class and its medical discourse, and we regard the novel as the main cultural vehicle of the Victorian middle-class, then, as Davis says: «The novel form, that proliferator of ideology, is intricately connected with concepts of the norm» (1995: 49).[2]

This social discourse was characterised by a tendency to classify people according to their social status, a kind of classifying that made popular the dichotomy between normal and abnormal in a social sense too. This dichotomy, much alike that concerned with the human body, sought to define and conventionalise the middle-upper

[2] There have been many studies carried out concerning the relationship between the emergence of the middle-class and the rise of the novel form, specifically since the publication of Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1980). Today, most Victorianists agree on the fact that the novel was closely related to the Victorian middle-class and its ideology and discourse.

classes, and to stress the difference of these with the lower classes. Indeed, according to Davis, the beginning of this process, of this social discourse of what is 'normal' and what is not, can be found even before the nineteenth-century, as he suggests that the novels of Daniel Defoe, and specifically *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), in its exaltation of the middle-class, sums up the ideology that, when applied to the body and as has been explained before, led to develop the Victorian scientific obsession that «justif[ied]» and demanded «the notion of a norm» to which the normal body ought to adapt (1995: 27).

Social factors, however, are not the only ones that influenced Victorian cultural conceptions of the disabled body. As has been said above, in fact, the new medical system and the discourse and practices that emerged with it was essential in developing a new cultural conception of the disabled, deformed, or 'abnormal' body. This new discourse emphasised the idea that the human body is a text that needs to be read. Thus, according to Lillian Craton, Victorians adopted pseudo-scientific practices that «offered to read the body for moral and social meaning» (2009: 32), while at the same time the medical culture that endorsed these pseudoscientific practices kept classifying and aiming at the normalisation of the human body. This understanding of the body as a textual product in medicine was, probably, the reason why Victorians writers, as stated before, decided to use disabled characters with so much frequency. Fiction replicates the «desires and scientific beliefs that if a body be properly read it will regulate social interaction» (2009: 32). Indeed, Kate Flint writes of Wilkie Collins's obsession with characters that experience «obstacles to full physical functioning» (2006: 1) and his, and his fellow writer's, concern with the disabled body:

> «This concern was not only demonstrated in popular texts […] It was also found within scientific works which explored developments in physiology and psychology, and which, in their turn, paid as much attention to variation and aberration within human perceptual systems as they tried to generalise about what constituted the 'normal'» (2006: 1).

The physiological works to which reference is made are precisely those that more helped in creating the role of the body as a readable surface, and in emphasizing the possibility of classifying the human physique around the cultural and social discourse of 'normalcy'. More specifically, the branches of this new system of medicine that more accomplished this function were, as has been said in the previous section, the pseudoscientific practices of phrenology and physiognomy, two extremely popular trends in medicine during the whole Victorian period. The discourses of these trends systematically and effectively linked the personality of an individual with his/her physical peculiarities, both in social and medical cultures. Phrenology, for example, was developed in the early nineteenth-century, and defended by well-respected physicians like George Combe, who in 1824 published *Elements of Phrenology*. According to him, the practice of phrenology makes possible to find out the «mental power» and personality of an individual by «inspecting the cranium» (2002: 377). Thus, it is possible for the practitioners to read in the form of the head of a person his or her personality. This is an example of the afore-mentioned Victorian obsession with cataloguing and classifying, as well as how the body is turned into a metaphor that holds more complex meaning waiting to be read in its physicality. As Flint says, however, this practice was not only displayed in scientific discourse, but also in novels and other works of fictions written by popular authors of the time.

The relationship between pseudoscientific discourse and fiction came to be symbiotic, in as much as narrative became an important tool to fix the importance of phrenology and physiognomy in popular Victorian culture, while it also used it in its plot to give them a touch of scientific realism and pragmatism that, due to the popularity of these pseudoscientific discourses, was very appreciated at the time. Well-known writers of the time used the relationship between body and mind as described in phrenology and physiognomy to justify their character's personality or the way the live. For instance, in Charlotte Brontë's canonical novel of 1847, *Jane Eyre*, there is a moment in which Mr Rochester, disguised as a gipsy fortune-teller, examines and describes Jane's personality by looking at her head, as he declares:

> «Destiny is not written [in the palm of the hand]. It is in the face: on the forehead, about the eyes, in the eyes themselves, in the lines of the mouth […] I see no enemy to a fortunate issue but in the brow; and that brow professes to say, 'I can live alone' […] The forehead declares, 'Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away'» (2000: 230-31).

And, more than ten years later, George Eliot in *The Lifted Veil* (1859), accounts for the whole life of the main protagonist as having been based upon a phrenological analysis made to him in childhood:

> «Mr Letherall was a large man in spectacles, who one day took my small head between his large hands, and pressed it here and there in an exploratory, suspicious manner […] The contemplation appeared to displease him […] 'The deficiency is there, sir – there; and here', he added touching the upper sides of my head – 'here is the excess. That must be brought out, sir, and this must be laid to sleep'» (2009: 6-7).

The popularity of both authors is a confirmation of the popularity of the practice of phrenology, and illustrates quite clearly how the body was thought of as a readable text, in these cases in a twofold manner, scientifically and literary. Thus, both the popular novels of the era, as well as (pseudo)scientific discourses reinforce the conception of the body as a text, that can be read in metaphoric terms as an embodiment of an individual's personality, and as a key to the normal/abnormal spectrum. The «allure of easy physical judgements» (Craton, 2009: 31), then, in Victorian society, finds an ally in fiction, where disabled characters acquire multiple significances.

As a consequence, the human body in Victorian literature can be seen as performing a whole range of representational functions. If we take into account the influence of the previously described pseudosciences, and their strong discursive presence throughout the pages of the most popular Victorian novels, it is easy to see how an approach to the representation of disability can tell us much of the ways in which Victorians thought, both about the relation between bodies and mind, and the relationship between those bodies that broke 'normalcy', or those that are abnormal, and their society. Therefore, and as I stated previously, a methodology that analyses Disability discourse and New Historicist approaches to the representation of abnormal bodies in the discourse of Victorian fiction and medicine, can be very revealing of the ways in which science, and literature contributed to the creation of modern ideologies about human bodies, most of which still influence contemporary thought. To show this, I will now proceed to analyse the two popular late Victorian novels that have had an enormous impact on cultural manifestations ever since their publication: Robert Louis

Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

5. Analysis: Literature, Deformity and normalcy

Even before the beginning of the Victorian period, an interest in fiction concerning the human body is to be seen in such major works as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1816). Echoing the period's concern with scientific development and morality, Shelley's deformed monster already presents many of the characteristics that the deformed bodies of much later fiction will also present. This concern, this problematic of until what extent is science moral, is fictionalized in Shelley's novel through the ethics of the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his creation (Mellor, 2003: 9-25). Nevertheless, it is in later novels of the period that we can say that the discourse of 'normalcy' and 'abnormalcy' is more directly used as a comment on society and morality. The whole Victorian system of pseudoscience, literature, and 'normalcy', and their complex relation, seem to be better articulated towards the end of the period, when new practices and methods in criminal science gave new importance and validation to theories about the deformed body. This is not to say that in previous novels the discourse of 'normalcy' is not also consolidated and, indeed, popularised, by means of the alliance between medical/pseudoscientific and literary discourse. Apart from Shelley's masterpiece, the mid-century is also a vast field of interest for anyone who wants to consider the triangular relationship between the cultures of disability and 'normalcy', Victorian medicine, and Victorian fiction. Works on the area, such as Karen Bourrier's *The Measure of Manliness: Disability and Masculinity in the Mid-Victorian Novel* (2015), point to the middle years of the nineteenth century as the peak of this relationship. However, I think that a study of later novels may be of more interest taking into account the degree of popularity, and the extent of cultural impact that these two novels, i.e. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, still hold in contemporary critical, fictional, and popular discourses.

Traditionally, these two novels have been seen within the tradition of Late Victorian Gothic as two clear examples of the Victorian concern with an ever-changing sense of modernity, and an anxiety-producing debate around morality, degeneration, and the disintegration of Victorian society (Byron, 2000: 133). Most critics that have worked with Late Victorian Gothic have traditionally related the representation of the abnormal or deformed body present in these tales with fears of degeneration, relating their representation with animal behaviour and physicality (Hurley, 2002: 190). However, by applying the proposed method of analysis, I shall argue that the deformed body in Late Victorian Gothic novels is more interesting in its relation with humanity, and medical discourse that studies humans, than in its relation with animals. If we read these deformities as inherently human features of the body, instead of relating them with the degenerative fears associated with animal behaviour, we may obtain much information about the ways in which human qualities, and their implied 'normalcy', or even morality, have been explored through fiction by means of the body's representational power.

Thus, for instance, in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the figure of Edward Hyde is constantly described by all who face it as having something lacking, as an incomplete body. This «impression of deformity» (Stevenson, 2012: 13) is precisely what alerts beholders of Hyde's evil character and make them be repelled by him, echoing pseudoscientific discourses on the body's resemblance to personality. His deformity, unspecified and seemingly invisible, runs counter to the Victorian concept of 'normalcy', as it defies classification and control, and thus threatens the foucauldian culture of bio-power. We can say, therefore, that what is really scary about Hyde for Victorians readers, is not so much his wrongdoings, as his physicality, and what it has to say. If we guide ourselves according to Disability Studies theories that see the body as a construct of ideologies, as previously explained, Hyde's body is a representation of Stevenson's and the period's notions about morality and evil. If we contrast the able-bodiness and benignity with which the novel's middle class, professional men's bodies are represented with Hyde's perceived deformity, it is easy to deduce that the author is making use of the previously mentioned pseudoscientific beliefs of the era to differentiate the 'good' and the 'bad' characters of the novel. Furthermore, the discourse of 'normalcy' and the way it is jeopardized by disability is completely articulated in the novel, as such descriptions of Hyde as this one seems to testify: «there was something abnormal and misbegotten in the very essence of the creature that now faced me – something seizing, surprising and revolting» (2012: 53). The feeling produced in Utterson, the narrator, by Hyde's presence is constructed around his physical appearance, which directed is termed as 'abnormal' and as a producer of revolt.

Therefore, if 'normalcy' is threatened by deformity, or, what is the same, disability, while at the same time deformity acts as a marker of evilness, the lack of representation of an specific deformity enables the middle-class reader to picture whatever his or her personal fears and anxieties make them think that is more threatening to their moral codes. Is Hyde's deformity related to his skull, thus relating him to Cesare Lombroso's criminal phrenology? Is his deformity of a character that would be related to sexuality and, thus, unspeakable?[3] This absence of definition, of specific discourse, carries with itself the unseen presence of a personal monster, which changes depending on each reader. This absence/presence can, furthermore, be easily related to a concept that has been traditionally linked with critical studies of the body in literature and medicine: the phantom limb. According to Elizabeth Grosz's seminal study *Volatile Bodies* (1992), the phantom limb is something distorted and phantom-like, not of the present, but rather, it is the past, refusing to leave (1994: 71-3). The Victorian period is especially interesting to consider this phenomenon since it was the age in which the American physician and scientist, S. Weir Mitchell, developed his research about this concept, and even wrote some popular fiction in order to make people familiar with its consequences.[4] In this sense, Hyde's phantom deformity equals Victorian moral codes and strong, enforcing sense of 'normalcy' refusing to be erased even nowadays.

This analysis hopefully shows how medical Victorian discourses are used to reinforce cultural perceptions about normalcy and its relationship with being 'good' or

[3]In 1876, Cesare Lombroso published *The Criminal Man*, an immensely popular text with pretensions of science that re-shaped the study of criminology to include phrenology in the classification of criminals.
[4] *The Case of George Dedlow* (1866) was written by Weir to illustrate his thesis of the phantom limb, thus fictionalizing his medical and scientific observations to achieve a greater diffusion.

'bad', or what is the same, social moral values.[5] The popularity, as will be exposed in the conclusion of this chapter, of this tale in contemporary culture suggests, furthermore, that this same reinforcement is still carried on and that, therefore, Victorian medical culture and system of meanings, and social moral values, are still easily accessible within collective imagination.[6] Stevenson successfully managed to translate into his best-known tale many of the cultural and medical landmarks of his period, thus creating a worthy object of study for anyone interested in the formation of the discourse of 'normalcy' that still surrounds us in most aspects of our lives (Davis, 1995: 23).

This same sense of the complicated interrelation between different discourses and 'normalcy', is maintained in Oscar Wilde's only novel, another excellent venue of analysis to which not much attention has been paid in terms of disability criticism. In the same sense that Hyde's deformity remains unplaced, but perceived by everybody, in Wilde's revolutionary *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the body that appears in the portrait as Dorian's acts become more and more sinful according to Victorian parameters of behaviour, is deformed and disabled in an unspecified way. The portrait's «misshapen body and failing limbs» (Wilde, 2012: 139) suggest disability and physical deformity. The severe threat that Dorian poses to Victorian morality is manifested in bodily decay, thus suggesting that Wilde also had in mind Victorian pseudoscientific discourse when writing the novel. The body's capacity to transmit meaning as if it were a text is clear in the dichotomy that can be observed between Dorian's body, and his body as it should be and is represented in the picture. In fact, everyone who hears any «strange rumours» concerning Dorian «could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world» (2012: 39). Observers of Dorian's body, completely faithful to Victorian pseudoscience and medical discourse, cannot help but to find it impossible to link Dorian's look of «purity» with the «stain of an age that was at once sordid and sensual» (2012: 139). Meanwhile, his real body, the one that is in the picture and that should be his due to his actions, has an expression «horrible in its cruelty» (2012: 130), and resembles a corpse which the «leprosies of sin were slowly eating» (2012: 170).

This dichotomy of bodies perfectly summarizes the dichotomy of normalcy and abnormalcy as defined by Davies, and supposes one of the most clear ways of observe how the alliance between the discourses of medical pseudoscience and social morality articulate this dichotomy. Whereas Dorian's body as perceived by the public is the perfect representation of how a 'normal' body is regarded to equal a pure personality, the other body, the one that is a 'magical mirror' is the literary equivalent for just the opposite. In fact, Wilde describes the function of this mirror as follows: «it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul» (2012: 116). Therefore, it is licit to say that the discourse of 'normalcy' is as present here as it is in Stevenson's work, and that fiction, once again, serves the purposes of medical pseudoscience and social morality. Dorian can, in fact, be read as the ultimate threat to the concept of bio-power and 'normalcy', as his worst acts, just like his portrait's deformities, remain mostly unspecified through the narrative.

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[5] For a more detailed analysis of how the discourse of disability is used as simplistic and, most often, melodramatic tool in Victorian fiction to clearly separate types of characters, consult Martha Stoddard-Holmes *Fictions of Affliction* (2004).

[6] There are, according to the Robert Louis Stevenson Archive's Web (http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org), some 134 films versions of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Whether we talk about Hyde or Dorian Gray, it is clear, after this analysis, that they are constructed through the discourses of pseudoscience and morality being translated into popular fiction, and that they serve as intermediaries between different, seemingly unrelated, cultures in the Victorian period. Fiction, as a vehicle that works between cultures, allows for the consolidation of popular ideologies that mix these same cultures to create, or rather, to popularise, new ones. In this case, the new culture is that of 'normalcy', whose complex process of creation is validated and spread through literature. This new culture of what means to be 'normal' in the Victorian period, furthermore, is still present in contemporary systems of meaning, due mainly to the popularity that these texts still posses in our period and that has allowed the discourse of 'normalcy' to keep growing, even if Victorian pseudoscience and moral codes are far behind us. The contemporary critical discourse and reconsideration of disability as favoured by the field of disability studies, furthermore, is yet another culture that participates on this process by facilitating, through applying its main theories to different texts, our understanding of the difficult and widely different ways in which cultures influence, shape, or spread each other.

6. CONCLUSION

In last instance, both Stevenson and Wilde play with the age's believe in pseudoscience, with Victorian fears about 'normalcy' and the control and hegemony of the middle-class, and with the deformed body, to communicate a sense of Gothic fear to their readers. The implications of this are vast and require much space to be analysed, opening new and interesting venues of research for anyone interested in either Victorianism, or the representation of the (disabled) human body. However, what the popularity of these texts both in the Victorian period and now seems to prove, is that the construct of deformity as something related to evil and the breaking of 'normalcy' is still embedded in our culture. The numerous contemporary adaptations of these texts, be it in literature, films, or in TV shows, exploit and display deformity as an essential part of Hyde's and Dorian's wickedness, therefore perpetuating this relationship in popular discourse. The impact and variety of appearances in popular films and TV shows of Stevenson's character is considered to have a «profound and enduring effect on popular audiences» (McNally & Florescu, 2000: 163), and many critical works evidence the impact that Oscar Wilde and his only novel have had on these same media (Buckton, 2009: 305-337). Recently, in fact, the two characters appeared alongside Showtime's popular TV show *Penny Dreadful* (2014-16), in which their deformities and evil personalities were fully displayed, thus effectually allying Victorian beliefs about 'abnormalcy' with the contemporary discourse of fear and suspense.

Thus, it is possible to state that the Victorian novel still plays an important role in consolidating our culture by still presenting to us, in diverse forms, the same systems of meanings that, through medical pseudoscience and literary discourse, created the whole culture of 'normalcy' that still inhabits our constructions of the world The popular images of the bodies of Mr Hyde and Dorian Gray, still reminds us that the deformed or disabled human body is an important vehicle of meaning. By analysing, then, Victorian pseudoscientific discourse and culture with the discourse at work in the field of Disability Studies, it is easy to observe how Victorian novels are still relevant to our own representational codes, and our understanding and preservation of 'normalcy'. Furthermore, this shows, arguably, how the discourse of disability and medicine has been translated into literary culture in order to form new cultures that have reached our own period. This is evidence of how working with different cultures nowadays

supposes to consider a great variety of factors, both historical and contemporary, and how different discourses may create great impact on each other through literature.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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