

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO LITERATURE AND DISABILITY

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi - 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107087828

DOI: 10.1017/9781316104316

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First published 2018

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Barker, Clare, 1980- editor. | Murray, Stuart, 1967- editor.

TITLE: The Cambridge companion to literature and disability / edited by Clare Barker, University of Leeds ; Stuart Murray, University of Leeds.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2017024675 | ISBN 9781107087828

SUBJECTS: LCSH: People with disabilities in literature.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PN56.5.H35 C36 2017 | DDC 809/.933527-dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017024675>

ISBN 978-1-107-08782-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-45813-0 Paperback

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II

MICHELLE JARMAN

Race and Disability in US Literature

In “Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal” (2006), Chris Bell challenged the field to recognize its pervasive whiteness, in large measure by addressing its dearth of engagement with concerns of disabled people of color, and by critically integrating and participating in race and ethnic scholarship more broadly.¹ Over the past decade since this critique, a good deal of work has been done in this area. Bell’s 2011 edited book, *Blackness and Disability*,² was an early contribution, and many scholars such as Jennifer James, Sami Schalk, Anna Mollow, Therí Pickens, Cindy Wu, and Ellen Samuels, to name a few, have made substantive contributions to literary analyses of disability and race. Nirmala Erevelles, working in education, has been a driving force in disability studies to push for greater attention to the intersecting material effects of race, ethnicity, class, and disability in national and global contexts.³ In a recent meditation upon the growth of the field, rather than hoping for something more abstract or edgy, Erevelles dreams of a “future that is simply more accountable” to the complex material intersections of disability and race.⁴ In this spirit of accountability, and in an effort to return to Bell’s critique, I ground my approach to disability studies in critical race, especially black feminist, theories. Disability studies owes a great debt to civil rights activism and critical race theories, and while this debt is largely acknowledged, it is often more gestural than substantive. Also, although disability studies scholars have rightly called attention to ableism embedded at times in racial justice activism and theory, we need to extend these critiques toward relational, not oppositional, approaches to disability and race, approaches that highlight new knowledge but also engage with pain, suffering, and the violent production of disability.

Because the fault line of racial tension falls so explicitly along a black/white divide in the United States, this essay focuses heavily on blackness and disability, and draws largely from African American literature. The urgency of material accountability is also shaped by contemporary racial injustice. In light of

intensifying protests against police violence since the 2014 deaths of Eric Garner in Staten Island and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (to list only a few), and over the senseless deaths in 2015 of Freddie Gray and Sandra Bland while in police custody, I ask how disability studies in general, and our engagement with literature more specifically, can be more accountable to such material realities of race? How do we attend to the danger people of color experience on the street, especially knowing disabled people of all races and ethnicities are also at risk, vulnerable to being (mis)read as threatening and targeted as a result? Indeed, in some of these cases, disability has been used to diffuse charges of racism: Eric Garner's asthma, obesity, and cardiovascular condition were cited as contributing factors in his death; Sandra Bland's suicide was attributed by some to depression and epilepsy rather than to police harassment. Such troubling intertwinings of disability and race have a long history in the United States, and this chapter reads those material realities within literary analysis.

Mapping a chronology of sorts, I turn first to slave narratives as a framework for disability and blackness, one insistent upon reckoning with disablement in a context of captivity and loss. In the early to mid-twentieth century, with the rise of eugenics, race and disability become interconnected through diagnostic systems and rhetorical overlays. Through these periods, and into contemporary texts, I focus upon the unique vulnerability and exploitation of female bodies, the cultural power and endurance of the figure of the "demonic" black male, while also tracing an epistemology of healing forged through relational disabled subjectivity.

Slave Narratives and Economies of the Flesh

As Clare Barker and Stuart Murray point out in their work on postcolonialism and disability, because the various global histories of colonialism are constituted by "mass disablement" and "wider patterns of dispossession," there is "a pressing need . . . to resist the too-easy censure of narratives that construct disability as loss."⁵ In slave narratives, loss in relation to disability is interconnected with larger forces of oppression. Instead of pushing against loss, we might ask how disability shapes or transforms loss? Or, how are pain and loss mediated through disability? In an effort to contribute to a "more robust and inclusive theorization" of loss,⁶ I focus on three themes: first, drawing from Hortense Spillers, I suggest reading the violent production of disability within the context of an economy of the flesh; second, within this context, I suggest a more nuanced engagement between disability and healing; and third, acknowledging the impossible ruptures in kinship and care, I also consider how relations, within and beyond family, become sites of resistance.

Slave narratives were intended, in many ways, to detail the horrors of captivity. Living conditions, lack of food, overwork, and the brutal violence of many slaveholders, all contributed to corporeal and psychic suffering. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850), for example, recounts the “dismal chamber,” built beneath the white family’s home, where all the slaves were forced to dwell.⁷ Truth and fellow captives slept upon loose boards, spread over an uneven dirt floor, where they endured cold, splashing mud, and “noxious vapors” (6). She details these conditions as disabling: “she wonders not at the rheumatisms, and fever-sores, and palsies, that distorted the limbs and racked the bodies of those fellow slaves” (6). Indeed, illness and disability among captives, often produced by slavery, were also treated with brutality or cruel neglect. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), the author describes an incident working in the field, when, nauseous from heat stroke, he fell to the ground. Douglass was living at this time with the notorious Mr. Covey, a man with a reputation for “breaking” slaves, whose response was to beat Douglass horribly with a “hickory slat,” ultimately inflicting a “heavy blow upon the head.”⁸ Risking permanent *damage to property*, white slaveholders attempted to balance the violence they deemed necessary for control with the economic imperative of maintaining able-bodied laborers.

We might better understand the relationship between disability, loss, and blackness by contextualizing slavery within economies of the flesh. In her seminal essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” (1987), Hortense Spillers distinguishes between the “body” and “flesh,” arguing, in fact, that this distinction should be marked as “the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions.”⁹ Captives, caught up in the Middle Passage and for generations after, were severed from individualized domains of gender, maternity, paternity, kinship, language, or community; they were bodies made “flesh.” In this rubric, Spillers figures “the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative” of blackness (206). Further, the dehumanizing alchemy of transforming bodies to flesh deeply intertwines race to disability. In contemplating the corporeal violence prevalent in descriptions of plantation life, Spillers provides more texture to her theory of the flesh:

The anatomical specifications of rupture, of altered human tissue, take on the objective description of laboratory prose – eyes beaten out, arms, backs, skulls branded, a left jaw, a right ankle, punctured; teeth missing . . . These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually “transfers” from one generation to another, finding its various *symbolic substitutions* in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments?

(207; emphasis in original)

The scarring, destruction, and branding of the flesh marked captives as nonsubjects, and provided visual support to position black flesh as always subjugated to white bodies. Further, the presence of disability buttressed racial hierarchies; corporeal and psychic markings were absorbed into the overarching "cultural seeing by skin color."

Addressing Spillers' "disjunctures of the flesh," Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) provides a template for imagining how captives engaged in a process of transforming objectified flesh into subjective bodies. Baby Suggs, who acts as spiritual healer in her community, sees loving the flesh as a process of reclamation and resistance: "Here," she preaches, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it . . . *You* got to love it, *you!*"¹⁰ Baby Suggs names body part after body part, all wounded or stolen by the violence and hatred of "whitefolks" (89). This process of loving one's flesh, of piecing back together bodies and minds, attempts to address and soothe the trauma of bondage. Dancing "with her twisted hip" (89), she demonstrates the most powerful resistance comes in reclaiming—in loving anguish—every scar, pain, and sorrow.

Such contradictory forces surrounding bodies, flesh, captivity, and resistance are prevalent in literature about slavery. Disability, in and of itself, is rarely the central focus; instead, it figures into captivity and the ultimate promise of emancipation. For example, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Jacobs (as Linda Brent), conceals herself in a tiny garret for seven years, where she willingly endures life-threatening illness and disability to avoid recapture. She and friends "feared I should become a cripple for life."¹¹ This fear was not simply ableism, but reflected the material danger disability would likely cause: discovery, capture, and horrible punishment for herself and family members. Katherine McKittrick, working at the intersections of human geography and black feminism, suggests reading the garret as a "usable and paradoxical space" where Jacobs/Brent is able to provide insight into a unique black geography of resistance. McKittrick calls attention to the "disabling confines" of the garret, to the fact that the site of struggle for Jacobs/Brent is deeply inscribed by bodily pain and permanent impairment.¹²

Building upon McKittrick's conceptualization of the garret, I wonder how our analysis might change if we position Jacobs'/Brent's garret as a resistant space of race and disability, as a disabled, black geography? One of the key impulses for Jacobs/Brent in accepting the confines of the garret is maintaining her relationship with family. From her hiding place, she negotiates with the father of her children, strategizes with family members, and keeps careful watch over her children and pursuer, Dr. Flint. In this space, disability

becomes integral to transforming object to subject; being disabled and free is in every way preferable to being an able-bodied captive. Jacobs'/Brent's determination to remain garreted to sustain her kinship relations is a key act of resistance.

Refusing slavery's destruction of kinship bonds was not always possible, but desperate acts of defiance and resistance populate slave literature – especially those of women refusing to become sexual objects or surrender their children. As Anna Julia Cooper wrote, “there is hardly a daughter of a slave mother who has not heard of the . . . heroic soul of some maternal ancestor that went home to God . . . rather than live a life of enforced infamy.”¹³ Thinking about the legacies of ruptured kinship returns us to Spillers' inquiry as to the generational impact of being marked as object/flesh. Using her framework, we might ask how “initiating moments” of violence and oppression still haunt contemporary theoretical and material relations between disability and race.

The Eugenic Turn: Overlapping Diagnostics of Disability and Race

In the early twentieth century, disability and race become increasingly interwoven within eugenic discourse. Focused on improving the quality of human heredity, and specifically interested in (white) racial progress, eugenicists applied biological solutions to increasingly complex social problems such as racial relations (miscegenation), poverty, immigration, non-normative sexuality, addiction, and criminal behavior. In *Cultural Locations of Disability* (2006), Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell situate the emergence of eugenics as a pivotal historical formation of modernism, organized around “diagnostic regimes,” which were largely based upon cognitive disability.¹⁴ Eugenicists used many terms to specify levels of impairment such as “idiocy,” “low-” to “high-grade imbecility,” and “moron,” but “feble-mindedness” soon became a catch-all phrase for mental deficiency. Although targeting intellectual impairment specifically, eugenicists described its characteristics “on physiognomic grounds.”¹⁵ In this way, all manner of sensory, cognitive, physical, and psychological difference fell under this overarching term.

Part of the success of eugenic rhetoric was its adaptability: conservatives used eugenic arguments to support oppressive structures of white supremacy; progressive reformers used eugenic rationale to promote social progress. In either case, specific groups or behaviors were targeted as biologically inferior, and “progress” for one group often depended upon surveillance and control of another. As Snyder and Mitchell explain, eugenicists were mindful of social context; but their solutions slipped to the biological: “While nearly all eugenicists explicitly identified the social environment as

the causal agent of displacement, eugenicist actions continually targeted individuals rather than environments as that which needed to be fixed."¹⁶

Mitchell and Snyder also pay critical attention to the deeply intertwined and imbricated rhetoric of race and disability in eugenic discourse. However, I worry that their positioning of disability as the "master trope" of human disqualification actually puts race and disability into unnecessary competition.¹⁷ More accurately, this insight should be acknowledged as a necessary critical demand for cultural and race theorists to pay more attention to the specific oppression and violence enacted on disabled bodies; further, disability studies scholars could attend to coupling this critique with direct engagement with racialized locations of disability and the material complexities of disabled people of color.

Eugenic social controls impacted on people in widely diverse ways, depending upon class, race, gender, ethnicity, and geography. For example, although eugenic sterilization had been legalized in several states, the 1927 Supreme Court decision in *Buck v. Bell* authorized eugenic sterilization at the federal level, making the numerous inmates in state institutions newly vulnerable. By the 1920s, mental institutions housed nearly 275,000 inmates nationwide,¹⁸ making people with disabilities particularly exposed to medical intervention. Early institutions largely targeted poor whites and disabled people from all classes, but racial precursors should be ever kept in mind. As legal and race scholar Dorothy Roberts argues, "Forced sterilizations, eugenicists' favorite remedy for social problems, were an extension of the brutality inflicted on black Americans. Slaveholders' total dominion over the bodies of enslaved Africans – including ownership of enslaved women's wombs, which they exploited for profit – provided an early model of reproductive control."¹⁹ Earlier forms of racial domination cannot be separated from eugenic social programs.

Indeed, growing institutionalization and eugenic social influence took place alongside intensifying racial violence and entrenched segregation, violence that did not always depend upon disability rhetoric. Keeping in mind the enduring process of bodies made flesh, I turn to the racialized construct of the "menacing" black man. In their meticulously researched book, *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson* (2007); Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner piece together an important singular history of the intersecting materialities of blackness, disability, and masculinity. Junius Wilson was born in 1908 outside Wilmington, North Carolina. Deaf from childhood, he and his family struggled to communicate without any shared sign language. However, his state had one of the few deaf schools for African American children, which he attended from age eight to sixteen.²⁰ Here, Wilson gained community, language, and a small level of written literacy; however, instead

of ASL, students were taught a form of “Black Signs,” and the one he learned was specific to his school in Raleigh. As a result, although he could communicate with peers and teachers, his signs would have been indecipherable beyond the context of his school.²¹

In 1924, young Junius Wilson was forced to leave school. After being home for less than a year, Arthur Smith, a close family friend, had him arrested for a fabricated charge of rape – of an African American woman. Because no one established effective communication with officials, he was judged insane, committed to a state hospital, and castrated for his “crime.” In this case, we witness the easy displacement of one disability (deafness) for another (insanity), both of which fell under the larger rubric of “feeble-minded.” Wilson spent the next seventy-six years within the mental hospital system, until his death in 2000. Although the details leading up to his arrest remain unclear, Burch and Joyner suggest that Junius Wilson’s tenuous place within the family was likely exacerbated by the cost of supporting him and the increasing racial hostility in the region.

Indeed, during this period, white racial violence, fueled in reaction to African American success, was erupting in the region; the open activities of the Ku Klux Klan and the threat of lynching were ever present. Philip Bruce, Harvard historian and son of a plantation owner, had originated the idea that black men found white women “strangely alluring and seductive,” and had “a penchant for rape.”²² *Harper’s Weekly* called this the “New Negro Crime” in the 1890s,²³ and the idea proliferated so regularly over the next decades that even progressives such as Frederick Douglass and Jane Addams accepted lasciviousness among many African American men as real. Within this milieu, the risks of being (fatally) misread as a disabled black man were profound. The injustices suffered by Junius Wilson are impossible to calculate, but, ironically, institutionalization may have saved his life.

I pivot from Junius Wilson’s history across the Canadian border to an Ojibway reserve town of Cape Croker to shift from the black/white racial materiality to Basil Johnston’s 1999 memoir, *Crazy Dave*, which traces a family history centered around his uncle, David McLeod, who was born with Down syndrome in 1920. Although McLeod lived in Canada, his narrative has roots in the indigenous territories of the Saugeen-Nawaush peoples, which extended from Minnesota to parts of Quebec. Johnston’s memoir provides a rare glimpse into disability history from an indigenous perspective, and notably, the author critically connects the disability stigma experienced by his Uncle Dave with white people’s disparaging perceptions about North American Indians more broadly. Misconceptions about the Ojibway were grounded in disability-inflected, paternalistic rhetoric: “they were wild”; “they belonged in an institution”; they “were as children,”

needing “guidance and protection.”²⁴ White officials on the reserve applied this logic to David, putting pressure on Rosa Johnston, his mother, and tribal officials to institutionalize him. However, his mother resisted and kept him at home throughout his life. Ironically, Rosa Johnston was unable to stop the removal of her nondisabled sons, all of whom were taken to white-run Indian schools. The reserve community, while they saw David as different, also cared for and accepted him; they socialized with him, disciplined him at times (when he stole from his mother, for example), helped him find work, and protected him as needed.

Reading David McLeod’s history with that of Junius Wilson, I highlight a singular event, the only time David encountered the world outside the reserve. Through an odd combination of events, near the end of World War II, David was driven off the reserve and left in a nearby town. He was dressed in a Canadian army uniform, given to him by his brother, but as he walked in town, speaking in utterances unrecognized by locals, he was misidentified as a “Jap soldier” (294–320), beaten severely by a civilian white man, and thrown in jail. News spread rapidly, and by chance, two Ojibway soldiers on furlough lined up to see the prisoner. These men immediately recognized David McLeod and demanded his release. The incident was an embarrassment to local officials, but also a harsh reminder to the soldiers that their military service did not make them part of the wider Canadian society – a sentiment echoed by African American and indigenous veterans in the United States.

Enduring Enfleshment and Mapping Healing

Toni Morrison’s 2012 novel, *Home*, set in the 1950s, provides provocative thematic connections to enduring eugenic practices and racialized distortions of men of color. In the opening pages, readers meet Frank Money, an African American Korean War veteran, handcuffed to a bed in a Seattle mental hospital. Struggling with emotional trauma from the war, Frank tries to recall what he had done to end up in this situation: “peeing on the sidewalk,” “hollering curses,” “banging his head on a wall”?²⁵ More important, Frank concentrates on executing an escape to rescue his sister, Ycidra (Cee), from the surgical experimentation of a corrupt white doctor. Sarah, a servant in the doctor’s home, had called Frank days before. “Come fast,” she told him, “She’ll be dead if you tarry” (13). Forced to escape the hospital without shoes, he knows this will be his most urgent problem, not because of the cold but because he risks arrest for being barefoot and black – for “vagrancy,” a crime, he thinks, overly applied to people of color for “walking without clear purpose” (9). As a tall, young, black man, haunted by memories of war,

and unable to fully manage his thoughts and behavior, Frank is uniquely marked for white surveillance. After his escape, however, he gains aid from the AME Zion church nearby, and journeys homeward. Morrison's characterization of Frank pushes readers to think through the material complications of intersectional embodiment. Disability is not prop or prosthetic to race, but interwoven into his seeing of the world.

Cee's situation centers on loss through the racialized production of disability. Cee is hired by the white supremacist, eugenic doctor, Beauregard Scott, "Dr. Beau," as an assistant; however, her real role soon becomes medical specimen. In his basement "laboratory," Dr. Beau performs life-threatening experiments on poor women and girls of color – to his mind expendable bodies in endless supply. Dr. Beau's daughters were born with cognitive impairments, then institutionalized, so his motivation to medical research is connected to disability. In this construct, Morrison exposes the ways preventing and treating illnesses and disabilities in white bodies have justified producing illness and disabilities in bodies of color. When Frank finally reaches Cee, she is near death. Dr. Beau has destroyed her uterus, performed untold surgeries, and left her to die quietly in her basement room.

Through Cee, Morrison captures the ways white structures of power, from slavery and eugenics to medical apartheid, have injured, disabled, and rendered disposable women of color. Disability studies must attend to the production of disability in multiply oppressed communities, and to the resistant insights forged in these spaces. Cee's healing, which comes under the attentive nursing of a powerful group of black women in Lotus, Georgia, is also collective resistance. As Miss Ethel and her friends attend to Cee, they also admonish her: "Who told you you was trash?" they ask; "You ain't a mule," "You have to stay awake" to guard against "misery" (121). When Cee recovers, she learns she can no longer have children, but the time with Miss Ethel and the other women has made her more fierce and resolute. This healing is not an erasure of disability or loss, but an integration. Sobbing, she tells Frank, "It's just as sad as it ought to be and I'm not going to hide from what's true just because it hurts" (131). As Anna Mollow has suggested, it is important to attend to the "suffering impairments can cause and the role of politics in producing them."²⁶ Cee's healing engenders resilience and strength through acknowledging loss – and demands that readers reckon with the racialized economy of flesh that produced her impairment.

The Asylum and the Street

Indeed, the need to address structural racism has been in graphic relief as activism against police violence has taken place across the United States.

The grand jury decision on November 24, 2014 not to indict officer Darren Wilson in Michael Brown's shooting spurred intense protests in Ferguson, Missouri. In that highly controversial case, Wilson's imagery describing Michael Brown in his grand jury testimony brashly evoked distorted racial and disability imagery. Wilson described Brown's large stature, like "Hulk Hogan," saying he felt the size of a child in comparison. His depiction of the final moments before shooting are especially telling: "The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked. He comes back towards me again with his hands up."²⁷ This is the moment other witnesses described as Brown putting his hands in the air in surrender, to show he was not armed; this moment provided the symbolic gesture and mantra, "Hands up, don't shoot" for protests against the shooting.

In evoking a large, menacing, angry, black youth, a *demon*, Wilson calls forth a long history of oppressive images. From slaveholders' attempts to diagnose escaped captives as mentally ill, from white supremacist production of black men as "rapists," from Junius Wilson and David McLeod, caught up in webs of misidentification, to black youth still overrepresented as threatening – emotionally disabled – these legacies haunt and animate current racial tensions. The presence of demons, historically, has been used to explain dangerous, violent, or even cruel behaviors. From a disability studies perspective, the demonic calls forth the figurative and material legacies of linking madness (defined broadly), cognitive disability, autism/neurodiversity, and myriad other types of disabilities to spiritual possession, to extra-human evil and violence, and in the modern era, to the diagnostic regimes of psychopathology. In many ways, the demonic, as a term, functions as a powerful negative nexus, an alchemical intertwining of disability and race.

Not only was Michael Brown imagined by his killer as demonic/mentally unstable, his death is also haunted by numerous deaths of disabled people, especially those with mental disability, at the hands of police. We might recall Kajieme Powell, a man with a mental illness diagnosis shot to death after stealing two cans of soda by St. Louis police, just days after Brown was killed. Indeed, prior to the Ferguson protests over Brown's death, activists in New Mexico were protesting police violence against citizens diagnosed with mental illnesses, citing numerous avoidable deaths, mostly of men of color, at the hands of police.

To expand upon these connections, rather than dismiss the term, I suggest a theoretical usefulness of the *demonic*. Sylvia Wynter, whose work in black diaspora studies is widely known, uses the term *demonic ground* as a productive space of theory and praxis; in her framing, demonic ground refers to knowledge and perspectives that emerge from the liminal spaces produced by dominant power configurations. By insisting on incorporating

colonial, racialized histories into so-called master narratives, Wynter's work attempts to map more inclusive, radical, human geographies. Wynter does not exclude disability or use it as a borderline category of the human; however, disability is often mentioned then immediately displaced by seemingly more salient issues of race and class. Ultimately, Wynter's use of the demonic insists upon an engagement with disability studies, especially an analysis of how bodyminds are constructed as threatening and of the danger of using the term *demonic* as primarily metaphorical – standing in for race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, nation – and blurring over phenomenological insights of disability.

A productive strategy along these lines would be interconnecting Wynter's "demonic ground" with Merri Lisa Johnson's and Robert McRuer's "cripistemology."²⁸ Johnson and McRuer see cripistemology as an umbrella term for crip ways of knowing and doing, intrinsically tied to crip ways of *unknowing* and *undoing*. Cripistemology recognizes the situated knowledge of disabled people and seeks to push the boundaries of the disabled/nondisabled binary to a wider sphere of people situated by social or bodily debility.²⁹ Mindful of identity-based theory and activism, cripistemology also challenges the limits of identity. The term offers a place where "varied, unstable crip positions" might push against each other to map new theoretical approaches, questions, and practices.³⁰

In order to think about the relationship between these many themes – the demonic, racial violence on the street, and cripistemologies, I turn to Victor LaValle's 2012 novel, *The Devil in Silver*. An African American author from Queens, New York, LaValle has a personal connection to madness – with diagnoses of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia across both sides of his family. *The Devil in Silver* is a cross between *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* – a twenty-first century horror story set in an underfunded state mental hospital (aptly called New Hyde) in Queens. I focus briefly on two key elements of the novel – the figuration of the "Devil" and the violent death of Kofi Acholi at the hands of the police – to bring together contemporary racialized crip geographies of the street and the asylum.

LaValle features a material/metaphorical "Devil" within the hospital, a patient who has been isolated for years within a repurposed stairwell, who occasionally escapes his chamber to violently attack other patients on the main ward. This figure, later identified as long-time patient Mr. Vesserplien, is cast as demon but also figured to expose myriad dehumanizing structural abuses within New Hyde. Readers first encounter Mr. Vesserplien through Pepper, a forty-two-year-old white man who has been put on a locked ward, not because of mental illness, but for expediency in processing. A few weeks in, Mr. Vesserplien enters Pepper's room from the ceiling, and physically assaults

Pepper, who is tethered to his bed. His description is overtly animalistic: feet like “horseshoes,” a massive head, “covered in matted fur.”³¹ Frail looking, the man is shockingly strong; he rips the restraints, throws Pepper to the floor, and stomps on his chest. When staff members finally arrive, the Devil is still in the room. This makes it more terrifying – “No delusion. No dream. It was real” (108).

Mel Chen’s rich concept of “animacy” explores how discursive gestures to animals have defined humanity – especially in terms of race, sexuality, and disability.³² Physically buffalo-esque, the Devil/Mr. Vesserplien evokes a story recounted in the novel of US army troops driving massive herds of buffalo over cliffs to deprive indigenous people of livelihood. Against this backdrop, the Devil functions metaphorically and materially; however, rather than inhabiting the clichéd madness = demon = animal, like the buffalo, he is caught up in the destructive, violent powers of conquest. At the same time, Mr. Vesserplien *is*, in fact, torturing people on the ward. His materiality is crucial, because, within the hospital, patients’ testimonies are always already silenced. Inhabiting a state hospital, a “mad place,” causes one to be, in Margaret Price’s words, “obliterated as a speaking subject.”³³ The real, the delusional, the material, and the metaphorical are on slippery ground in the psych ward.

In order to avenge attacks of patients on the ward, Pepper and three other inmates – Loochie, a teenage African American girl, Kofi, a middle-aged Guinean immigrant, and Dorry, an older white, motherly woman – plot a mini-takeover to confront the Devil. They pull off a surprisingly effective revolt, where they lock the two staff in a conference room. After that, however, the plan falls apart in spectacular fashion. The nurse ultimately calls the police, who enter to a chaotic struggle. Loochie is fighting with Mr. Vesserplien. In the tumult, Kofi, with a handful of syringes, comes to her aid, but at the last moment, Dorry turns on Kofi to protect Vesserplien. This is the moment the police enter, guns drawn:

An old white woman fighting off an armed black attacker? That’s not a difficult equation to solve. You can do it at home, without a calculator . . . One of the officers ran forward and tackled the old woman out of the way. The rest fired on the crazed man. Then the cops fired forty-one shots. The assailant was hit nineteen times. (210)

The specific details, forty-one shots, hit nineteen times, directly reference the infamous police shooting of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed West African man who was gunned down in the doorway of his Bronx apartment in 1999. The officers misidentified Mr. Diallo as a rape suspect, and when he reached for his ID, thinking he was reaching for a gun, they opened fire. Like the

murder of Michael Brown, this case set off massive protests; the officers, while charged, were ultimately acquitted.

LaValle's reanimation of Diallo's shooting implies that the coercive, violent logics, so easily concealed in the confines of the locked ward, are mirrored and active on the street. Within the demonic ground of New Hyde, Pepper gains important, situated insight. When he sees Kofi's picture in the paper, and the media coverage of an "aggressive inmate" (210), Pepper realizes anyone in the asylum could be produced as *demonic*. This realization reorients him toward the other inmates, not through identification but cripple affiliation. It is through Pepper's relationship with Loochie, especially, that LaValle develops a crippistemology of sorts, especially what Johnson and McRuer describe as "disability-in-relation."³⁴ Pepper comes to understand Loochie's volatility and self-destructive tendencies; however, as their relationship deepens, Pepper reorients to these characteristics as strengths – as her feisty resourcefulness, her instinctual rebelliousness – and ultimately helps her escape, confident she will be able to survive on the outside. Crucially, Pepper's transformation of consciousness, through friendships with Loochie, Kofi, and other inmates, represents an *unlearning* of white masculinity, of transforming self-oriented aggression through racial and disability insight, to relational resistance.

Conclusion

The interrelationship between race and disability in United States literature is complex, multiple, and borne out of distinct yet connected pasts. In tracing specific histories of slavery, eugenic practices, and contemporary injustice with related literary representations, this analysis attends to several dimensions of disability and race: material economies that produce disabilities; the representation and experience of disabled people of color; and the way discourses of race and disability buttress, overlap, or displace each other. In many contemporary works of fiction, authors are rendering more nuanced disabled subjectivities, and within this context, we can uncover insights shaped by racial geographies and crippistemological perspectives, including processes of "unlearning" and learning disability-in-relation. At the same time, we must attend to tensions between disability and race. For example, analyses should critically trace and dismantle both ableist and racist justifications of violence—such as deploying the term "demon"—and resist constructing false divisions or hierarchies between racial and disability justice. Finally, I suggest looking to multi-ethnic literature for more expansive, socio-political engagement with healing, not to reject or overcome impairment, but to work toward mapping more complex, relational approaches to disability.

NOTES

1. Chris Bell, "Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, 2nd edn., ed. by Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 275–82 (p. 278).
2. Christopher M. Bell (ed.), *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2011).
3. For a discussion of disability and intersectionality, see Alison Kafer and Eunjung Kim's chapter in this volume.
4. Nirmala Erevelles, "Thinking with Disability Studies," *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 34. 2 (2014), n. pag., <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/4248/3587>, accessed November 21, 2014.
5. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, "Disabling Postcolonialism: Global Disability Cultures and Democratic Criticism," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 4.3 (2010), pp. 219–36 (p. 230).
6. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
7. Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Toronto: HarperTorch Classics, 2014), p. 6. Further page references to primary texts will be given parenthetically in the body of the chapter.
8. Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 289.
9. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 203–29 (p. 206).
10. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 88 (emphasis in original).
11. Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 127.
12. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), e-book, loc. 262.
13. Quoted in Paula J. Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 1984), p. 87.
14. Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 82.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 127. See Chapter 9 in this volume for a similar argument.
18. Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner, *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 43.
19. Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-Crete Race in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New Press, 2011), p. 37.
20. Burch and Joyner, *Unspeakable*, p. 20.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
22. Quoted in Paula J. Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, p. 27.
23. *Ibid.*

24. Basil Johnston, *Crazy Dave* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1999), p. 11.
25. Toni Morrison, *Home* (New York: Scribners, 2012), p. 13.
26. Anna Mollow, "When Black Women Start Going on Prozac": Race, Gender, and Mental Illness in Meri Nana-Ama Danquah's *Willow Weep for Me*," *MELUS*, 31.3 (2006), pp. 67-99 (p. 68).
27. Damien Cave, "Office Darren Wilson's Grand Jury Testimony in Ferguson, Mo., Shooting," *New York Times*, November 25, 2014, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/11/25/us/darren-wilson-testimony-ferguson-shooting.html?_r=0, accessed October 13, 2016.
28. Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, "Cripistemologies: Introduction," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 8.2 (2014), pp. 127-47 (p. 127).
29. In their discussion of "debility," Johnson and McRuer are drawing from Jasbir Puar's work specifically.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
31. Victor LaValle, *The Devil in Silver* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2012), p. 103.
32. Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
33. Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 27; emphasis in original.
34. Johnson and McRuer, "Cripistemologies: Introduction," p. 141.