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PROCEEDINGS

*Overcoming Challenges, Exploring Possibilities:
New Practices in Languages, Literatures and Cultures*



1st - 3rd August 2023



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**The 12th Malaysia
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Proceedings**

**1st – 3rd August 2023
Bayview Beach Resort, Penang, Malaysia**

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PREFACE

Language, literature, and culture are the intertwining threads that shape the rich tapestry of human expression and understanding. They are the vehicles through which we communicate, explore our imaginations, and connect with one another across time and space. In this compilation of conference proceedings, we embark on a remarkable journey through the realms of language, literature, and culture, delving into the captivating intersections and profound insights they offer in the quest to overcome challenges while exploring possibilities via new practices.

These proceedings encapsulate the spirit of intellectual inquiry, the pursuit of knowledge, and the ceaseless quest to comprehend the mysteries and complexities of language, literature, and culture. The depth and breadth of the topics covered within these pages are a testament to the boundless exploration on these three realms. From the intricate nuances of syntax and semantics to the powerful narratives woven through literary masterpieces, from the exploration of cultural identities to the examination of societal norms, each contribution offers a unique lens through which we can deepen our understanding of the human experience.

Moreover, the diverse range of methodologies, theories, and interdisciplinary perspectives showcased here highlights the dynamism and adaptability required to navigate the complexities of our globalized world and how new practices allow us to explore endless possibilities to overcome on-going challenges. It is a reminder that these fields are not stagnant, but rather, they thrive on curiosity, collaboration, and continuous exploration.

On behalf of the MICOLLAC 2023 proceeding committee, we extend our deepest gratitude to all the contributors and reviewers whose dedication and passion have brought this compilation to fruition. Their tireless efforts to shed light on the intricate web of language, literature, and culture have enriched our understanding and inspired new avenues of thought.

Arbaayah Ali Termizi
Nurul Atiqah Amran

Editors
MICOLLAC 2023 Proceeding

**RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY, SUBVERTING ABLEISM:
CRITICAL DISABILITY STUDY ON GIROUX’S POEM “I AM ODD, I AM NEW”**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Benjamin Giroux, a poet with autism, reconstructs his identity and subverts ableism in his poem "I am Odd, I am New". Using critical disability studies, this article demonstrates how Giroux challenges traditional narratives about disability and creates a more authentic representation of himself. The poet embraces their disabilities as integral components of his identity rather than perceiving them as a source of pathos and pity. It also subverts ableism's stereotyping and stigmatisation of the disabled and provides alternative perspectives on disability that centre on the experiences and perspectives of disabled individuals themselves.

KEYWORDS

Disability studies; ableism; stereotyping; stigma; disabled

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INTRODUCTION

The representation of the disabled in literature faces challenges. It contains stereotypes which can impair identity and self-worth. They are depicted negatively and exaggeratedly pitied due to their limited ability. Ableism which means prejudice and discrimination towards people with disabilities, make it difficult for the disabled to define themselves. Vijayan states that such representation fosters disability stigma, ignoring their true identity and voice. This depiction shapes how people regard disabled individuals (15-16).

Disabled characters are often stereotyped or exaggerated in literature. Captain Ahab from Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is hindered by his prosthetic leg. Ahab's infirmity as a metaphor for his obsessive and destructive attitude perpetuates negative notions of disabled people as defenceless and resentful. In Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 15-year-old autistic Christopher Boone investigates a neighbourhood dog's death. Christopher's distinct worldview shows his intelligence and problem-solving talents.

Despite their sensitivity, non-disabled writers still dominate disability writing even though Mitchell and Snyder declare that "The normal" does not fully represent the impaired (224-27). This article's objectives are to examine how a disabled is depicted by a disabled poet and how this description subverts ableism in the poem "I am Odd, I am New" written by an autistic poet, Benjamin Giroux. As a speaker as well as a writer, he rewrites his own identity and subverts ableism. The following research questions are addressed in this study. The first is how the disabled are represented by the disabled poet, and the second is how this poem subverts ableism.

RELATED LITERATURE

With the emergence of disability literary criticism, the portrayal of persons with disabilities in literary texts has been questioned. The content of ableism in the presentation of disabled characters was criticised because it reinforced a stigmatised and prejudiced view of the disabled. Similarly, works of literature portray the disabled in an exaggeratedly positive light. From time to time, disabled characters in literary works, such as Frankenstein in *Frankenstein*, Colin in *The Secret Garden*, and Benjy in *The Sound and Fury*, are portrayed negatively or are overly privileged, as in Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and Hazel Grace Lancaster in *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Disability literary criticism arose to critique the aforementioned phenomenon of representation of the disabled. This criticism derives from critical disability studies, which are the study of the numerous representations of individuals with disabilities. Disability studies, a relatively new academic discipline that gained prominence in the late 20th century, has made important contributions to the literary criticism of people with disabilities. Scholars in the field of disability studies have claimed that negative preconceptions and prejudices about people with disabilities are often reinforced through fictional depictions. They have, however, brought attention to the power of literature in combating such stereotypes and advancing the cause of equal rights for people with disabilities. Some scholars on disability studies have proposed their ideas.

Disability is a cultural construct shaped by social and political variables. Disability is integral to human diversity, which Western civilization has ignored. It should be seen as identity politics that challenges cultural norms and values (Tiebers 15). Disability stereotypes shape people's physiques and identities. A disability is a societal construct that enforces

physical and mental capacity. Since "disability" implies an inability to execute specific tasks, and "ableist" terminology is so pervasive, he argues that it should be rethought (Davis 28).

American literature and culture, according to Garland-Thomson, represent people with physical limitations. Disability is a social construct shaped by societal norms and expectations. Deformed bodies in American culture through sentimental novels, African-American literature, and cultural rites like the freak show is the example of how the disabled depicted. The "normate" is "the figure who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority." The normate body, unlike the "stigmatised" body, is considered "normal." The normate and stigmatised binary organises American culture and shapes disability representation and understanding (37).

METHODS

Critical disability study methodology is used to examine this poem. Close reading and analysing disability depictions are the initial steps. This involves studying how handicapped characters are portrayed and how disability is defined as well as the underlying themes and messages about disability (Edward-Mangione 34).

The second phase is confronting negative perceptions and prejudices, and advocating for more diverse disability representations. This paper examines disability representation power dynamics. This also examines how a disabled character is compared to a non-disabled character, how disability is utilised to reinforce stereotypes or prejudices, and how a handicapped character is denied agency or voice in the narrative (Krentz 28).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the poem "I am Odd, I am New" the speaker, also the author, describes his feelings as a unique person. Giroux struggles with identity and ableism. In line one "I am odd, I am new, I wonder if you are too," Giroux begins by making the reader feel different. He claims a unique perspective by having comparable experiences to others who feel different. This flashback prepares the reader for the poem's theme of diversity.

In line two "I hear voices in the air, but I see you don't, and that's not fair," Giroux uses sound to show the author's distinctiveness. He hears "voices in the air" that most people cannot, demonstrating his unique intuition. This graphic criticises the assumption that society should conform, which denies the validity of different experiences.

Giroux wants to "not feel blue" (4) and be accepted in the next portion of the poem. By expressing "I pretend that you are too," (6) he wants others to comprehend his perspective and accept their uniqueness. "I feel like a boy in outer space, I touch the stars and feel out of place" (7-8) shows the poet uses his thoughts to solve his issues. Giroux's figurative journey is to escape society's expectations and find a place.

In lines "I worry about what others might think, I cry when people laugh, it makes me shrink." (9-10), the poet's sensitivity reveals how ableist beliefs can damage disabled persons emotionally. Giroux disputes the assumption that discussing a disability should be sad or funny. Instead of pitying or mocking others, he seeks compassion.

In the line "I understand now that so are you, I say I 'feel like a castaway,'" (12-13) the poet recognizes everyone has strengths and weaknesses, regardless of disability. This admission disproves the concept that disability is special. The poet's hope of a day where being an outsider is okay emphasises how crucial it is to include everyone and end ableism.

Giroux accepts his strangeness and rebuilds his identity in this impassioned and contemplative poetry. He fights ableism by putting himself in a vulnerable position and helping people accept disabled people. The poem encourages people to shift their worldviews and love the variety of human situations. It also helps people appreciate others' differences. It reminds people that disabled people have the right and demand their position in society.

CONCLUSION

Giroux's poem explores how disabled people define themselves. The poet uses a vulnerable perspective to help abled people understand and appreciate human diversity. Giroux presents himself as distinct and worldly. This perspective challenges social norms. He believes that people with disabilities have the right to show the world who they are and seek their proper place in society. The poem concludes by emphasising the value of human variation. Sensory imagery conveys the poet's uniqueness, struggle, and desire to break out of society. The poem underlines the need to challenge ableist views and encourage the identity creation of individuals with disabilities.

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