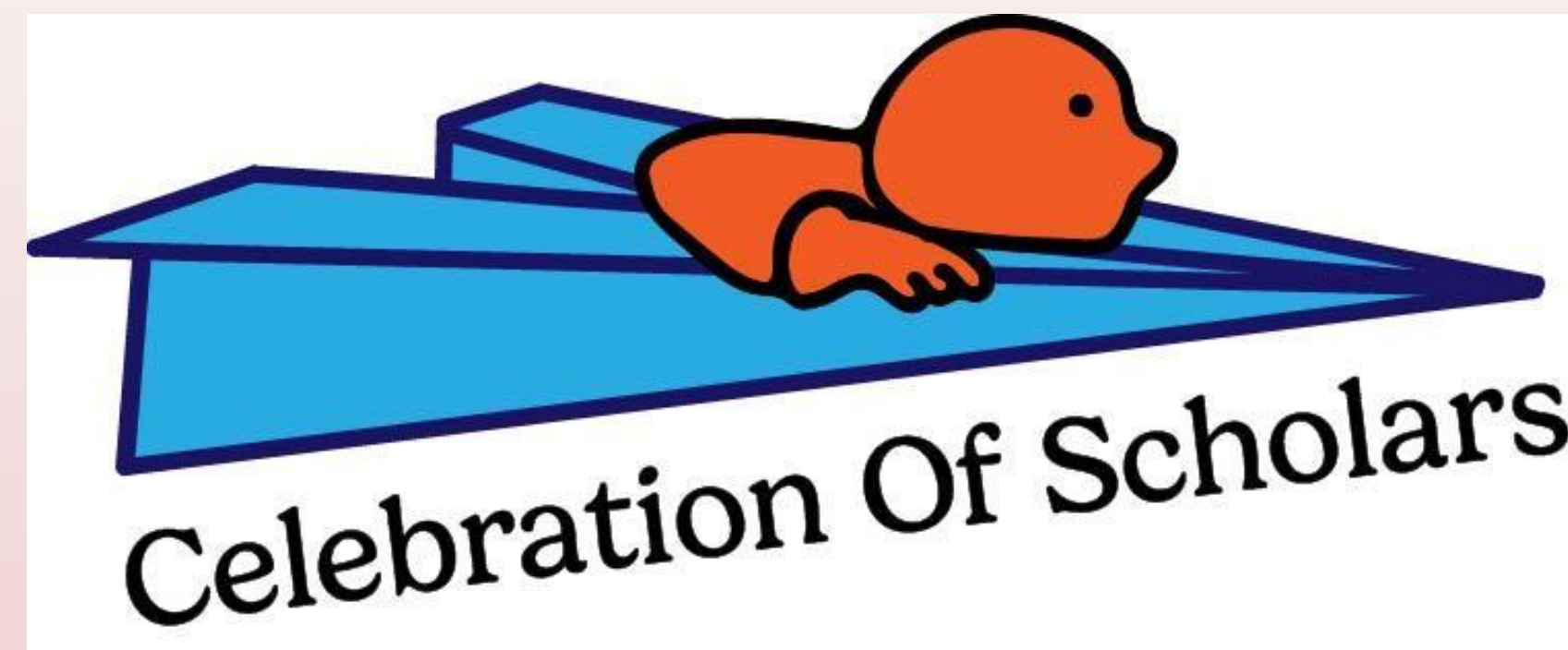


Disability and the Monster: How *Hell Followed With Us* Reimagines



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Ableist Tropes in Literature

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Abstract

Hell Followed With Us by Andrew Joseph White is a contemporary apocalyptic horror novel following the struggle of a sixteen-year-old transgender boy named Benji Woodside as he navigates his escape from a genocidal religious cult that has infected him with a chemical agent that is eating away at his current body. This research project examines how this novel contributes to the idea of the disabled monster through Benji's experiences within the story. The disabled monster is a figure crucial to disability studies, a largely overlooked field of literary criticism. This figure originates far before the publishing of *Hell Followed With Us*. Such a figure has been popularized in Gothic novels such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. This research project examines what the disabled monster represents, how Gothic novels such as those listed above have treated the disabled monstrous figure, and how Andrew Joseph White's novel expands upon the existing framework of the disabled monster and reimagines it into a figure that is empowering toward the disabled community rather than damaging or stigmatizing. This project culminates in a research paper that aims to identify what makes a disability metaphor empowering and what makes a disability metaphor demeaning.

The Disabled Monster

The disabled monster is a figure popularized in Gothic literature and continuing into modern horror, science fiction, and fantasy literature. Popular examples of the disabled monster include the creature from Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the titular vampiric count from Stoker's *Dracula*. These figures act as a physical representation of the ways that disability dismantles the supposed binary of disabled vs non-disabled. Just as a werewolf or a vampire or even Victor Frankenstein's creature begin as normative members of the human species and may be any kind of person prior to their transformation, disability can and will come to members of the human race regardless of ethnicity, age, economic status, religion, or morality. Fears of monsters like Count Dracula also play on societal fears of infection, often related to diseases such as Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, and they traditionally represent both disability and the disabled monster, themselves, as an evil that must be eradicated for the sake of the normative characters within the narrative.

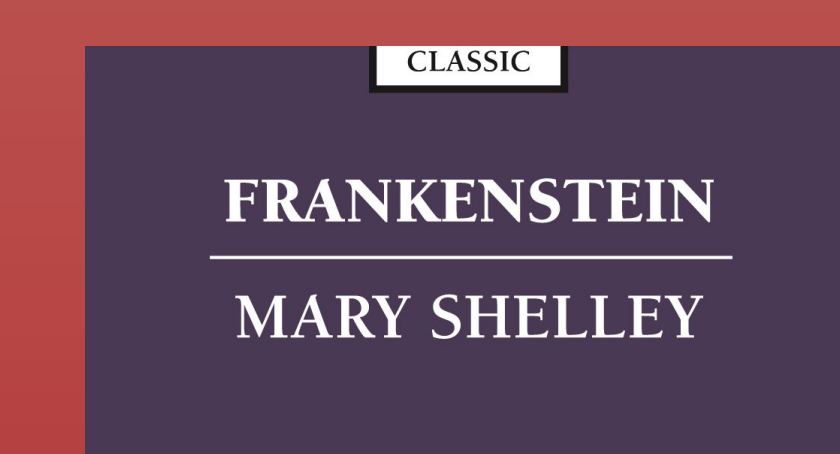
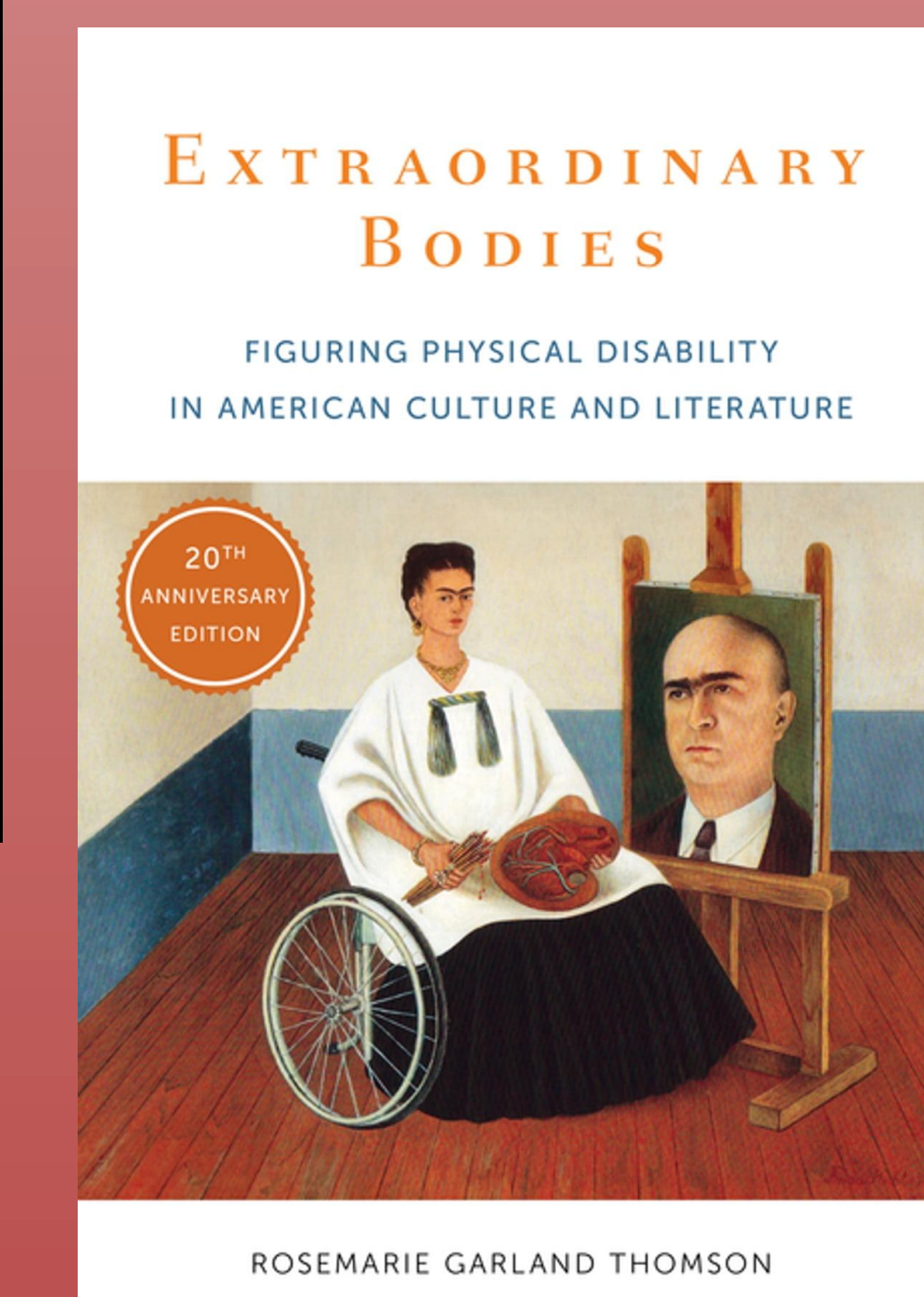
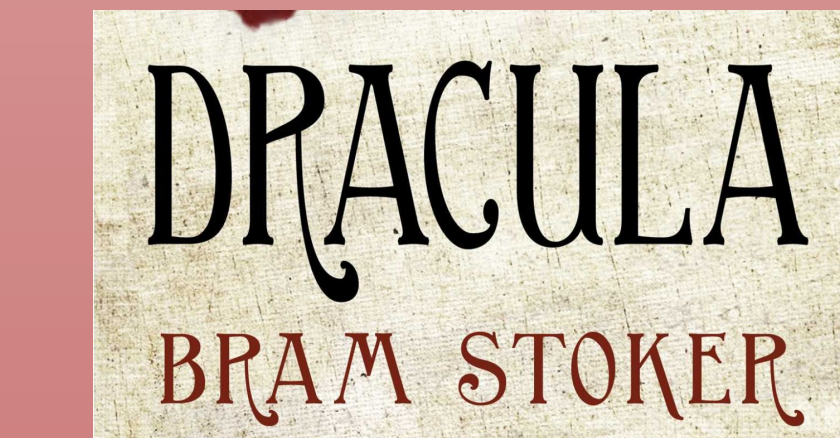
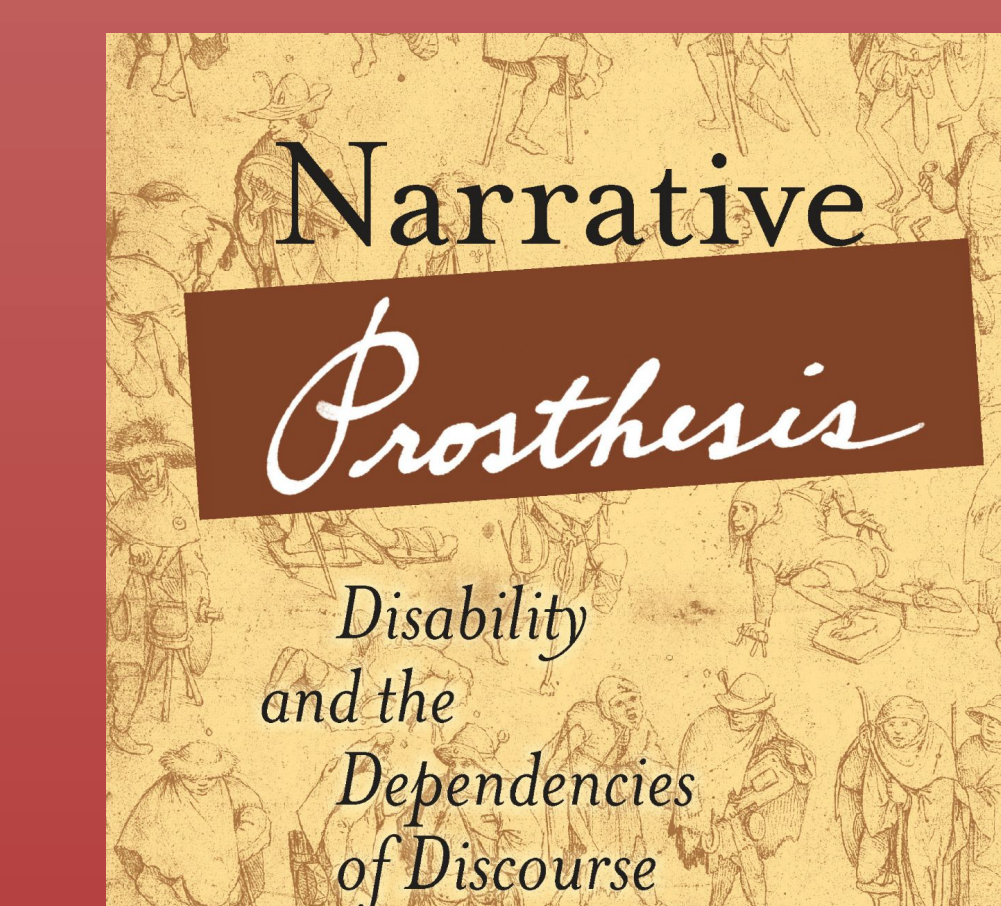
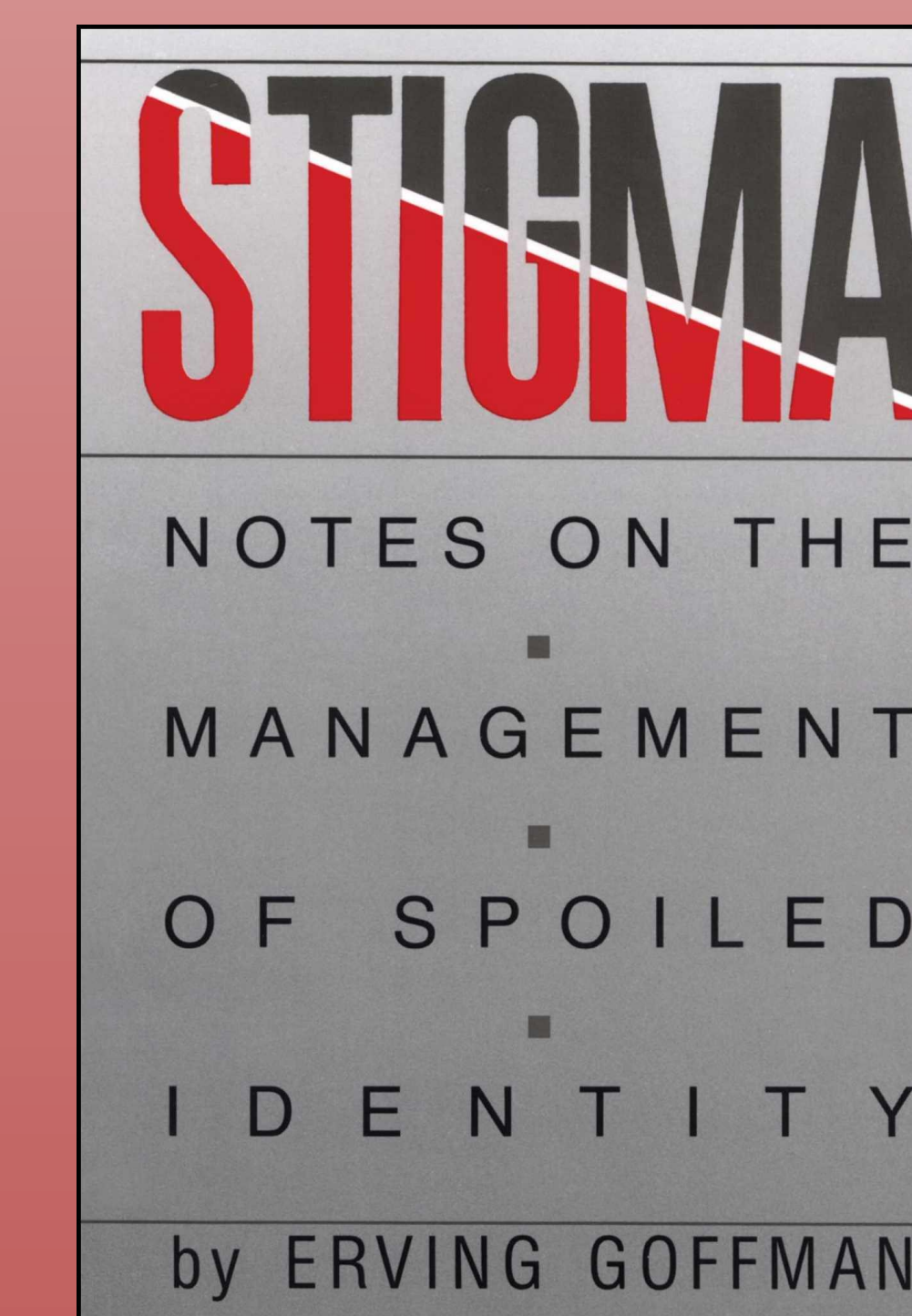
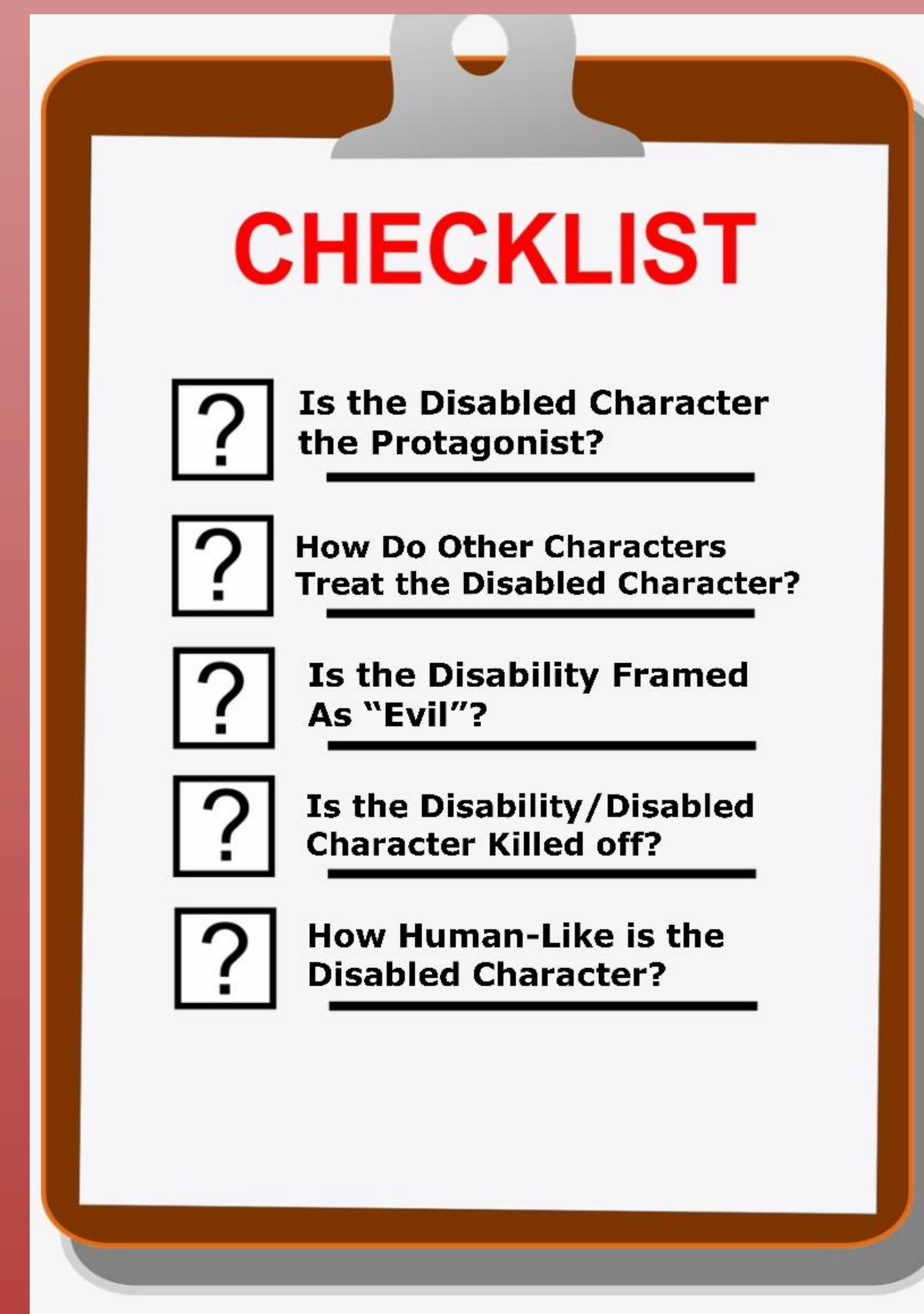
Treatment of Disability in Literature

The disabled monster is one of the most notable ways in which literature represents disability. The studies of these representations and metaphors in literature is referred to as Disability Studies or Disability Theory. Disability Studies is closely related to Queer Theory, but it focuses specifically on the ways that literature approaches both outwardly physically or mentally disabled characters as well as the ways in which metaphors within literary works may represent disability or criticize or promote existing stigma surrounding how society treats disability.

Disability is present overtly and subtly in many pieces of classic literature, but there has also been an increasing prevalence of such themes in contemporary fantasy and horror literature. *Hell Followed With Us* is just one example. Other examples exist in popular book series such as Leigh Bardugo's *Six of Crows* and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* as well as an increasing amount of less mainstream literature. *Hell Followed With Us* marks a positive shift in the attitudes towards disability in contemporary literature and showcases how disability literature can empower its readers. Society can also learn from books like these that disability is not an evil to be eradicated but just another form of human existence that deserves a fair place in society like any other.

Conclusion: Neutral Acceptance

In conclusion to this research, this project poses the idea of **neutral acceptance** and the **continuation of disabled status** as the ideal method of handling disability for the sake of empowerment within a narrative. In this sense, *Hell Followed With Us* represents a positive, contemporary step forward in the world of disability representation in literature, as its main character remains disabled at the end of the novel, and those close to him see his disability not as a superpower nor as a weakness. Benji is simply Benji, and that does not change with the further progression of his status as the disabled monster. This view of monstrosity in literature lends itself to a similar view of disability in society, and this is how all of us should see disability: as simply another part of the human condition, not a weakness nor a superpower.



References & Further Reading

Some books I read for this project that I would recommend to anyone who wants to learn more about disability studies:

- *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* by Rosemarie Garland Thomson
- *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* by Erving Goffman
- *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* by Susan Sontag
- *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* by David T. Mitchell & Sharon L. Snyder
- *Dracula* by Bram Stoker
- *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley