Narrative Prosthesis and Complex Embodiment:

A Critical Analysis of Disability Narrative in Two Young Adult Fiction Novels

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Growing up I do not think I identified as disabled, and I think I still do not identify as disabled. However, looking at my body's condition medically, I believe it would be defined as disabled. Unlike many other people who have more visible disabilities, I can pretend I function just the way people around me think a healthy young woman should be able to. They do not see me fainting when my body has been overexerted. Or that after the occasional night out I need to go to sleep at nine for at least three weeks with the occasional afternoon nap, because otherwise I would not be able to function. The exhaustion is always present. The only difference is whether it is manageable and I can enjoy life, or whether I can feel the exhaustion in my limbs and functioning becomes challenging. I am terrified of identifying as disabled: I am afraid that I will not be able to find a job; I am afraid that people will not take me seriously because my limitations are not visible. Every time I went to the doctor for a cure, I never felt I was taken seriously, even though I could not manage a week of school without calling in sick. I have sometimes been told that it is 'ableist' of me not to embrace identification as disabled, but my identification, of course, is no-one's to judge. I will not open myself to the critique of those who think I should just go to bed earlier, or see people afraid to depend on me because they assume I will drop everything because I am a little tired.

As a millennial, I spend a fair share of my time online reading blogs and watching YouTube videos. I came upon channels by people who have disabilities, for example Jen Campbell and Jessica Kellgren-Fozard. They made me realise that society is disabling to those who have a disability. Through book and movie reviews by people like Campbell, I realised that I did not understand how problematic the representation of disabled characters was. Through my own experience of feeling that the world is not made for people who have a body like mine, I became interested in the portrayal of disability on page and screen and started wondering what effect those representations have on people who identify as disabled. I discovered that there were more characters with disabilities than I ever realised, even in books and films that I loved and read and watched many times. For example, it took me a long time to realise *Finding Nemo* has a character with a disability. I needed someone to point it out to me that Dory has a cognitive disability. Further, I realised that in my own language use I used words like "blind spots" to talk about gaps in my knowledge. Through an awareness of ableist language in my own vocabulary, I suddenly found it everywhere in fiction.

Through research I realised that misrepresentation can be very disabling to a minority community. And while I believe that in today's society authors do not necessarily mean to harm the disabled community, the misrepresentation of characters with disabilities is in fact harmful. I think it is important for people to be educated about the effect their words can have. Therefore, I am writing my thesis about disability narrative, and hope to contribute to the research and awareness of the effect of narrative devices like language, structure and characterisation on disability (mis)representation.

1.1 Disability in History

Two perspectives dominate the history of disability: one focuses on the actual lives of people with disabilities, the other on their cultural representation. Historically not much is known of the personal experience of people with disabilities, because outside of medical case histories, "history has failed to include disability" (Ware 109). Outside of medical documentation no (or no surviving) records exist of the personal experience of disability in, for example, Antiquity or the Middle Ages. People with disabilities have been portrayed in fictional and religious writing. They appear in classical myths, reflections by ancient philosophers like Aristotle, the bible, medical case histories and psychoanalytical works. These different areas have all contributed to the perception of disability in society today.

A major cultural influence is mythology. In classical Greek myths, characters with disabilities already appeared. One famous example is Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. Oedipus's disabilities are metaphors "of personal and social ruin". His "lameness and blinding" present an "abstract social commentary" through Oedipus's "tangible body" (Mitchell and Snyder 10). Furthermore, the narrative needs his lameness so he can solve a riddle, which is crucial for the plot. His blindness enables him to become a seer. The narrative uses disability to further the narrative and signify its metaphorical meaning. The myth is still relevant in today's discussion on disability, because it has been "reinterpreted and reworked" again and again in the West (Stiker 47).

One of the main influences on disability perception is religion. Looking in particular at Western society, Christianity is the main religious influence. Henri-Jacques Stiker argues that in the Old Testament people with disabilities were considered "blemished", both spiritually and physically. They were considered impure and thus

disqualified "from active participation" (24). He argues that the message of the New Testament is different and Jesus was "the wrecker of the prohibition" (Stiker 33). "The sick, the disabled, the marginalized, are the first in the Kingdom of God" (Stiker 34), including them instead of excluding them like in the Old Testament. Jesus healed the sick and disabled. Thanks to Jesus a blind man regained sight. Jesus told him: "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight" (KJV Mark 10:52). A mentally ill man was freed from a legion of demons (Mark 5:1-20) and the lame could walk again (Luke 5:17-26). These healings were often also accompanied by the forgiveness of sin: "thy sins are forgiven thee" (Luke 5: 20). Stiker argues that Jesus included the disabled, contrasting the dominant culture that rejected them. Their healing reintegrated them in to a society that perceived them as blemished and unclean while disabled. However, the co-occurrence of disability with forgiveness of sin, incompleteness, and demonic possession – despite its possible disconnection – allows for the interpretation that disability needs curing or exorcising, and, repentance and forgiveness. Therefore, interpretation of the New Testament still allows for those with disabilities to be excluded in society on religious grounds.

Science became more and more influential after the start of the Enlightenment in the sixteenth century. The age of reason allowed for research in to medical causes of disabilities, rather than primarily religious interpretations. Philosophers and psychoanalysts who still have major influence today commented on disability and contributed to the social attitude towards disability in their time and today. Their opinions and analytical insights were accepted as science and truth and are still influential today. For example, Sigmund Freud conflated "the inner and outer selves", concluding that "deformities of character are the results of physical disabilities" (Garland-Thomson 37). Such opinions from people in positions of power resulted historically in the embedding of "stereotypical and archetypal constructions", which in turn resulted in the subjugation, marginalisation, exclusion and ostracisation of "individuals with disabilities" (Smith-Chandler and Swart 420).

These religious, cultural, philosophical, psychological and medical perceptions influenced society's views of people with disabilities, and laid the foundations for the stigmatisation of disability in western society today. As Linda Ware observes, "Cultural perceptions of disability do not emerge in a vacuum; they accrue slowly and over time, informed by normalizing discourses in medicine and psychology and reinforced by

institutions and unchallenged beliefs of deficiency and need" (107). Despite a growing awareness of the existence of this societal stigma, its roots are deep and change slowly. One of the results is a long history of fictional representations that adhere to what scholars of disability studies now consider misrepresentation and narrative exploitation of the disabled body.

1.2 Disability as a Social and Cultural Model

Until the rise of disability studies in the latter part of the twentieth century, disability was considered just a medical (and for mental disabilities, psychological) concept. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines 'Disability' as "a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movement, senses, or activities" (*OED* 'disability'). However, scholars of disability studies have argued that disability is not just a physical or mental condition. They broaden the concept of disability to include a social experience of disability, which is often oppressive. Their argument refers to the reality of a society that is not accommodating to those with disabilities, both in its practical structures and in people's attitudes towards those with disabilities. For example, buildings that are inaccessible to wheelchair users are a disabling environment. It is not the body but the design(er) of the building that prevents them from entering. Len Barton argues that "the fundamental issue is not one of an individual's inabilities or limitations, but rather, a hostile and unadaptive society" (qtd. in Ware 108), making disability not just a medical condition but a social one as well.

The social model of disability focuses on society's unaccommodation for people with disabilities. Tom Shakespeare broadens the meaning of disability further by arguing that people with disabilities are "'objectified' by cultural representations", adding a cultural layer to the experience of disability (qtd. in Waldschmidt 22). This approach identifies the exploitation of disability in artistic outlets. Rosemary Garland-Thomson points out that "disabled characters usually remain on the margins of fiction as uncomplicated figures or exotic aliens whose bodily configurations operate as spectacles" (9), while "the actual experience of disability is more complex and more dynamic than representation suggests" (12).

Disability studies scholars like Garland-Thomson have deemed the representation of characters with disabilities problematic because of their mainly negative and passive portrayal and simultaneous omission of the lived experience of

disability. This entails, among other things, practicalities like an accurate representation of the use of aids, but also the social experience. Fiction often fails to include an inaccessible environment and the social oppression that people with disabilities encounter. In order to accurately portray characters with disabilities these aspects should be considered in the narrative, also when it is not essential to the plot. (Mis)representation is not limited to narratives set in realistic settings: "some narratives can be perceived as realistic even if they belong to the fantasy genre, as long as they possess cultural and generic verisimilitude" (Kokesh and Sternadori 143). But this leads us to a complicated question: Does fiction have any obligation to realistically portray disability?

Olan Farnall and Kim Smith researched the effect of mainstream media portrayals of disability on social reality. Their research concluded that "stereotyping results from long-term cumulative exposure to portrayals of minority groups in the media" (659). They gave the side note that this result was based on the assumption that minorities are uniformly portrayed all over media (660). Disability representation in fiction has a shockingly uniform portrayal as "weak, pitiful, dependent, passive, tragic, and many times deserving of their predicament" (Gilman qtd. in Ware 107). Art can function both to reflect culture and influence it. This binary role is illustrated by Mitchell and Snyder in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. They use Deborah Kent's example of a disabled woman: her portrayal "may serve as a barometer to measure how she is perceived by society. Conversely, the literary image of the disabled woman may influence the way disabled women are seen and judged in real life" (21). The influence of fiction on the social reality of people with disabilities gives creators a responsibility to portray characters with disabilities realistically. For continued stereotypical representation could result in the persistence of societal oppression of people with disabilities.

Historically, fiction has functioned as a powerful tool to critique social injustice and such novels helped raise awareness and contributed to a change in perception. For example *Uncle Tom's Cabin* critiqued the institution of slavery and those who were upholding it. The novel's portrayal of slavery is an interpretation by an author who was neither a slave nor of African descent. Despite this, Gerardo Del Guercio claims that "No book was more influential" during the years before the abolition of the institution of slavery (145). He argues that *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s goal was "to convince Americans to

break the Fugitive Slave Law" (146). He believes the novel played a part in the process of the abolition of slavery through its "themes and theories [...] that made the North and South equally responsible for slavery (107). Fiedler and Thomson point out that "the literary encounter with deviance at first heightens alienation and then ultimately collapses the distance" (qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder 39). The novel also holds people who were not slave owners responsible for slavery. Ultimately those who were passively against slavery decided to act and the institution of slavery was abolished in the United States of America.

Unlike novels that tackle social injustice, most fictional representations of disability do not challenge existing stereotypes and opinions. Instead their portrayals uphold them. In order to contribute to the collapse of disability stigma in society, the analysis of disability in fiction is necessary to create awareness of the tropes that require change and what should replace it. Mitchell and Snyder observe that because "the seemingly abstract and textual world affects the psychology of individuals (and, thus, the cultural imaginary), the interpretation of these figures and their reception proves paramount to the contribution of the humanities to disability studies" (42).

1.3 Disability as Identity

Alongside the medical, psychological, social and cultural aspects, disability also functions as an identity category. However, this category is not homogeneous. Disability entails many forms and gradations of physical, mental and cognitive disabilities which affect the lives of those who have them differently. No overarching cultural disability identity exists other than "the shared experience of stigmatization" (Garland-Thomson 15). Disability is an individual identity within a shared social context. Fiction often fails to recognise this heterogeneous nature of disability identity and presents a single disability experience. Characters with disabilities are depressed, filled with self-loathing, inherently evil, or searching for a cure.

These depictions answer "Yes" to society's underlying ableist question: "Wouldn't you rather not be disabled?" This question is the equivalent of asking "Wouldn't you rather be white?" or "Wouldn't you rather be male?" These discriminating questions implicitly dismiss the identity of the person in question; an identity they cannot change. Further, minorities do not desire a different identity, but for an end to the oppression, exclusion and stigmatisation they face because they are black/female/disabled. While

people can be both depressed and disabled, this situation can be either causal or unrelated. Furthermore, these stereotypical depictions do not comprise the majority of real life experiences of disability. Therefore, the critique is not on the existence of such characters, but the persistent one-sided occurrence of this stereotype, whose depictions implicitly dismiss the identities of people with disabilities.

Aside from fiction's inadvertent contribution to the implicit dismissal of disability identity in society, representation also influences individual identity formation through the process of identification with characters. Cohen defines identification as "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from inside, as if the events were happening to them" (qtd. in Kokesh and Sternadori 142). Jessica Kokesh and Miglena Sternadori argue that "identification is one of the main mechanisms through which people develop their social attitudes and construct their identities" (143). The stereotypical and overly negative portrayal of characters with disabilities is problematic because people with disabilities either have difficulty identifying with characters or misidentify with negative and/or ableist portrayals.

Another problematic notion is that disability is often perceived as a master category (Schaller 90). This means that "it takes precedence over all other features as the distinguishing personal trait" (90). For her research, Janet E. Schaller interviewed people a number of people with disabilities, focusing on how those people identified themselves. Her research shows that people do so in a multitude of ways: for example as athletes, students, mothers, musicians, but also as insecure, confident, kind, clumsy, and talented, black and homosexual. People are multifaceted and their multitudinous identities show this. Her conclusion is that while disability is often perceived as a master identity category "[n]one of these [identity] positions requires the presence or absence of dis/ability" (93). This means that while people are never without "their physical particularities", it does not define them (93). The research also showed that even though these women identified as disabled, they did not primarily define themselves as disabled, whereas for onlookers, even close friends, being disabled was their master identity. Therefore, for accurate complex characterisation a character should identify as more than just disabled. Disability should influence the other identity positions when necessary, but not just to reinforce the character's identity as disabled.

1.4 Disability in Popular Culture

In 1996, Giroux identified the necessity to reconstitute traditional binarisms "through complex representations of identification, belonging and community" (qtd. in Ware 112). More than two decades later, the disability/ability binary is still pertinacious in pop culture, and the necessity for complex and diverse representation has largely gone unanswered. From children's to adult fiction, disability is continuously presented as the opposite of ability and health, or the outward signifier of aberrant motivations.

Peter Pan is a popular children's story, both the original book by J.M. Barrie (1911) and the Disney adaptation (1953). Captain Hook is the villain of the story and Peter Pan the hero. The vendetta between Hook and Peter originates in the 'prank' of Peter feeding Hook's hand to a crocodile which left Hook disabled. His thirst for revenge is a common disability trope that portrays disabled characters as vengeful for their disablement. The problem in *Peter Pan* is threefold. While Peter Pan has maimed Hook, Hook is the villain of the story because he is disabled; this links disability with villainy. Second, a prosthesis is supposed to help its wearer gain greater independence. However, as a villain Hook's use of a hook gives the prosthesis a menacing connotation, and it can make its readers weary of prosthesis wearers. Thirdly, Hook is identified by his aid; Hook's individual identity has been replaced by the lifeless prosthetic that signals his disability. This results in the conflating of disability and identity and adds to the stereotypical notion that disability is someone's master identity category (Schaller 2006).

Nowadays, minorities take to the streets to demand equal rights with the able-bodied middle-class white man. Authors add characters of these minorities to their works. Their intention of providing 'good' representation is often still disabling for those with disabilities. Disability representation is not binary. It is not divided in good and bad representation. Pointon and Davies address that there is a consensus by disability scholars of what entails bad representation. However, "the identification of 'positive' is fraught with difficulty" (qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder 1). A minority character whose actions are defined as positive does not necessarily portray an accurate representation. In the same way, a positive story about how happy certain slaves are on their particular plantation does not change the wrongness of the institution of slavery. A positive portrayal of a character with a disability does not erase the social oppression of people with disabilities. It might even reinforce the cultural perception that those with

disabilities should be able to suppress their disability so those who encounter them do not feel uncomfortable (Couser 604). Further, a thriving disabled character has their disability erased by their success in the eyes of readers (David qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder 30), problematising the right to be disabled and successful at the same time.

P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) is a historical figure who became successful through exploiting people with rare disfigurements and disabilities. He bought 'freaks' in order to display them in a circus show. He played a major role in monetising the 'spectacle' of disability. In 2017, a film adaptation about his life was released. One of the problems of disability representation in popular culture is that the representation often fails to be empowering to its characters with disabilities. The film does not offer a critique on a now recognised problematic case of human exploitation. Instead it romanticizes able-bodied white male Barnum and celebrates him for being an embodiment of the American dream. Even the title of the movie underscores this concept: *The Greatest Showman*. Furthermore, the cast comprised of able-bodied non-disfigured actors who were made 'freakish' through prosthetics and make up, instead of hiring disabled and disfigured actors whose acting options are even more limited by the continued oversight to offer them roles. Both in its storyline and casting, the film failed to empower and recognise its disabled and disfigured characters. This film is an example of the continued dismissal of people with disabilities in popular culture.

1.5 Narrative Prosthesis

The problem of disability is not underrepresention, as is the case with the representation of for example ethnic minorities. Contrary to what calling disabled people a suppressed minority suggests, characters with disabilities exist in abundance. However, they are severely misrepresented. Mitchell and Snyder argue that most disabled characters are used to fulfil a narrative function, for example in *Moby Dick* (1851) by Herman Melville. If Captain Ahab had not lost his leg, his desire to kill Moby Dick – and thus the narrative – would not have existed. His wooden leg is the embodiment of the crutch on which the whole narrative is built. The function of disability as a narrative crutch is termed "narrative prosthesis" by Mitchell and Snyder.

Mitchell and Snyder identify two main purposes for the presence of disabled characters in a narrative: "disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization, and second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device" (47). This

means that contrary to a 'normal' able-bodied character, a disabled body automatically invites storytelling – "How did the character become disabled?" An able-bodied character will not invite the question how he wound up being 'normal'? Secondly, as a metaphor disability is used to physically signify underlying problems. In Ahab's case, his disability is the visible signifier for his madness, which was caused by becoming disabled. This presents the problematic image that to become disabled is to lose one's sanity.

Another narrative function of disability is that it can further the plot, while disability is ignored when not essential to the story. For example in *Oedipus the King,* Oedipus's disabilities are mentioned at crucial moments in which they further the plot, for example with his lameness and his ability to solve the riddle "we must assume that his own disability serves as an experiential source for this insight" (Mitchell and Snyder 61). Furthermore, his disabilities are ignored after his difference is established (62). *Oedipus* is an ancient narrative, and one might think that in modern times the same oversights are no longer made. However, even now authors still ignore disability until the moment that it can be used to give the plot a twist. A modern example can be found in the *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series by Sarah J. Maas, one of the main characters, Lucien, has a prosthetic eye, which enables him to see magical glamours. The extra ability in a character with disabilities is a stereotypical disability trope that narratives can use to advance past an impasse in the narrative. In *A Court of Wings and Ruin* (2017), Feyre has glamoured her tattoos, which show where her loyalties lie, to bring down another court. Lucien, who is part of this court, should be able to see through the glamour and therefore identify her as a traitor. However, he does not see this and the court falls. When the skills of the master tinker who made Lucien's prosthetic eye are questioned, Lucien reveals the special use of his prosthesis to persuade others of her capabilities and their need for her help to win the war. His disability is only a quirk of his characterisation and forgotten in the narrative until the moment when its existence indirectly gives them an advantage in the war.

The "materiality of the metaphor" is one of the biggest problems that is encountered in fictional disability representation. The "physical and cognitive anomalies promise to lend a "tangible" body to textual abstractions" (Mitchell and Snyder 47). Physical anomalies give 'visible' indicators to anything that is further wrong with the disabled character. For example in *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, Feyre's father's knees

are smashed – leaving him crippled. This serves as his punishment for his laziness in trying to pay off his debtors and his failure to provide for his family. His severed limb is there as a reminder for the rest of his life and for the reader of his laziness in providing for his family. Further, the father's life is rendered useless, which presents disability as a lack of ability. In the final instalment *A Court of Wings and Ruin*, he is redeemed when he uses his negotiation skills to provide his daughters with the necessary armies after which he dies, which is another trope – the disabled character redeems himself or dies, or in this case both.

Mitchell and Snyder point out that "disabled characters were either extolled or defeated according to their ability to adjust or overcome their tragic situation" (19), which implies that the problem is not necessarily just character based, but that being disabled automatically makes the character tragic and that the narrative begs a solution. G. Thomas Couser argues that all narratives are expected to "conform to, and thus confirm, a cultural script" (604). This cultural script means, "in effect, [that] people with extraordinary bodies are held responsible for them, in two senses. First, they are required to account for them, often to strangers; second, the expectation is that their accounts will relieve their auditors' discomfort" (604). Narratives work the same way, the narrative needs to provide its reader with a solution so as not to burden the able-bodied readers with solutions which will leave a sense of guilt. The next paragraph will illustrate this.

The 2018 movie *Braven* starts by showing the lived experience of having an elderly parent with brain trauma. Joe Braven is a family man who has taken his father Linden in after he has suffered brain trauma. Linden's ability to live independently is deteriorating and the question arises whether or not to put him in a home under professional supervision, as it is causing a strain on the family. However, Joe does not want to put him in a home. The film is about Joe who kills a drug gang after they try to kill him and his family. To balance the negative connotations of murder, Linden functions as a plot device to portray his son as a good man. However, after establishing how much Joe loves his father and wants to take care of him, the problem is being 'resolved' by having Linden die at the end of the film. Both the continued challenges of taking care of Linden at home and his placement in a nursing home would leave the audience with a sense of distress or guilt at the conclusion of the film; his death avoids this dilemma.

In short, narrative prosthesis centres around the concept that disabled characters are the foundation on which stories are built, erase their storylines from existing narratives, predominantly ending up with uninteresting, uneventful stories. However, they are used as a means to an end, while ignoring the complexities of living with a disability and life being more than just being disabled. Characters with disabilities are therefore frequently just one-dimensional; their only attribute is their disability.

But why is this notion problematic? Able-bodied characters can also be one-dimensional only to support and further the narrative. However, as mentioned earlier, fictional disability representation affects the social reality of people with disabilities. This influence on real life problematises the negative and one-dimensional portrayals of disability. Narrative prosthesis is not inherently problematic. However, the majority of representations of disability use disability as a narrative crutch, while omitting the complexity of identity and lived experience of people with such a disability. These one-dimensional disabled characters contribute to the sequestering, exclusion and exploitation of people with disabilities (Mitchell and Snyder 8). This relationship between narrative and disability is predominantly based on the exploitation of disability by the narrative. These narratives do not offer an accurate portrayal of those represented. This results in a stigmatised perception on partial inaccurate representations.

Narrative prosthesis is almost unavoidable in fiction. This relationship does not need to be based on exploitation. Complex embodiment looks at how the body and environment constantly influence each other (Siebers). When the narrative influences the representation of disability and is influenced by disability through an accurate depiction of its lived experience the relationship can be a symbiotic. Furthermore, a complexity of identity and refusal to conflate disability with character or narrative provides a representation that challenges cultural stereotypes. This still allows for narratives to use the narrative potential of disability, while refusing to sequester, exclude and exploit them through their literary representation.

1.6 Why Young Adult Fiction?

With the start of the digitalisation of society, it was believed books would be replaced by digital entertainment such as games, films and television series. Those who would be particularly affected would be the generations growing up in the digital era who would

not read much outside of school. However, since the turn of the century more than 30,000 young adult (YA) fiction novels come out each year, while in 1997 a relatively small 3000 were published (Bowker qtd. in Cruger 115). With the rise of online platforms reader communities like Booktube and Goodreads have emerged. Users of these online platforms share what they have read and their opinions online and some reviewers have a large following. PolandBananasBooks is one of the largest BookTube channels and has over 407.000 subscribers in 2019. Goodreads is a website on which people can track their read books and gain inspiration from other people's book choices. With features such as yearly reading goals, many of its users challenge themselves to set reading challenges that push them to read more than they did the year before. From a book a month to more than a hundred books a year, reading habits are expanded. Via such online platforms, the digital generation is encouraged to read, and many do.

Katherine Cruger argues that "YA franchises do cultural work, meaning that they are both constitutive of and constituted by our larger cultural and social ideas about gender, romance, sexuality, heroism, and ideology" (115). These books help its teenage readers "understand who they are and what is moral and immoral behaviour" (115). While disability is not discussed specifically in this study, the concepts of influence still apply. Books will influence their readers, Cruger argues. Therefore, authors have the responsibility to create characters whose identities and actions reflect the complexity of the minorities they choose to portray. Even further, quite a few of the YA novels are picked up for movie or television series adaptations, such as *Teen Wolf*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Mortal Instruments*, *Twilight*, and *Harry Potter*, giving them a larger influence as the stories are now available for non-readers.

Even though YA fiction has become influential in popular culture, it is often not considered a "legitimate field of study" (Cruger 115). YA fiction should be considered a legitimate field of study especially in its portrayal of minority characters, because of its major influence on the identification process and social reality of its young readers. Even though YA fiction attempts to provide empowering narratives to minorities through adding them to the narrative, they often reinforce stereotypes that are negative for and disempowering to the represented minority. Using Mitchell and Snyder's critical theory of narrative prosthesis, I will analyse *Tower of Dawn* by Sarah J. Maas and the *Six of Crows* duology by Leigh Bardugo both of which portray characters with disabilities and for which television series are in production. This thesis aims to demonstrate which

aspects of disability narrative empower its characters with disabilities and which metaphorically disable them even more. I argue that complex accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities can coexist in a narrative alongside narrative prosthesis. On the condition that it is a symbiotic relationship instead of an exploitative one – incorporating complex embodiment. Further, I argue that an author's close familiarity with a disability provides insights that lead to a more complex and accurate portrayal, while unfamiliarity results in portraying a character that adheres to existing stereotypes.

Chapter 2: A Textual Analysis of Disability Narrative in *Tower of Dawn*

Tower of Dawn (*ToD*) is the sixth novel in the *Throne of Glass* YA fantasy series. It is the companion novel to the fifth instalment *Empire of Storms*. *ToD* tells the story of Chaol Westfall, former Captain of the King's Guard. At the end of *Queen of Shadows*, Chaol suffered an injury to his spine through demonic magic. *ToD* starts a couple of months later when he, in his new function as Hand of the new King of Adarlan, arrives in Athica on a double mission: to form an alliance with the Khagan – title of the monarch – of the Southern Continent and to seek healing at the famed Torre Cesme – an institute for magically gifted healers.

After five previous novels that portray primarily white and able-bodied characters, *ToD* portrays characters of colour, characters on the LGBTQ spectrum and characters with disabilities. As the sixth instalment of the series, *ToD* did not receive official reviews. However, on online reader platforms like Goodreads, *ToD* was reviewed by its fanbase, which resulted in contrasting opinions concerning the execution of its portrayal of characters with disabilities.

Emily May is the username of a reviewer on *Goodreads*. Her review summarised *ToD* as being "an overlong healing process with a love story" with the unsurprising ending of Chaol magically recovering "from the disability that put him in a wheelchair". She set aside Chaol's character as having become "whiny and bland" and deemed the novel a "poor representation of marginalized characters" (Emily May "Review"). These statements correspond to stereotypical disability tropes that scholars like Mitchell and Snyder identified as problematic. The review, though not official, gives some insight into the reception of the novel.

Contrastingly, Brittney – a teenage girl who regularly requires the use of a wheelchair – praised *ToD* for the manner in which disability was portrayed. According to her blog post, her experience of disability is similar to Chaol's. She linked her blog about *ToD* on *Goodreads*. She writes that she has not encountered this "dedication from an author to a disabled character in a fantasy novel" before. The "raw and honest" portrayal of his journey meant a lot to her (Brittney "Review").

The contrast in these two reviews shows that while stereotyping is problematic, there are readers with disabilities who identify with the disabled character and

recognise their own experience in the portrayal. The question this raises is: What characteristics does the novel contain that it elicits both critique and praise?

In this chapter, I will analyse *ToD* for its portrayal of a character with a disability and identify what characteristics are empowering and which are further disabling. Maas said in an interview that she used sensitivity readers to portray Chaol's experience accurately (Brittney "Review"). While she did not elaborate on what she meant by sensitivity readers, my impression is that she asked wheelchair users for feedback and applied this to the narrative. This creates the expectation that the novel is empowering, complex, and inclusive to its characters with disabilities. However, the narrative shows both an awareness of the lived experience of having a disability and the prevalence of stereotypical disability tropes and ableist language that undermine an empowering portrayal of disability.

2.1 Narrative Prosthesis

The narrative in *ToD* exploits disability as a narrative device. Narrative prosthesis is the concept that disability is exploited by a narrative. This means that the narrative uses the potential of disability for easy characterisation and plot development. While the narrative does not provide the same support to the people it depicts (Mitchell and Snyder 2008). Often narratives leave out the complexity and lived experience of having a disability, fostering "discrimination against disabled people" through "images consumed by readers and viewers" (20). In *ToD*, the lived experience is incorporated but for the most part it reinforces Chaol's identity as disabled, denying him the complexity of character that other nondisabled characters have. While not necessarily all cases of narrative prosthesis are problematic, the majority, including *ToD*, in fact is.

Chaol's disability is the driving force for the narrative itself and it supplies the missing piece for the series to reach a victorious ending for the protagonists. At the start of the novel, Chaol arrives at the Khagan's court. He discovers that the court is in mourning. The question of alliance is immediately turned down because of this. However, they are not sent away, because the Khagan's "beloved wife will be deeply upset if [he] were to deny an injured man a chance at healing" (23). Therefore, his disability enables Chaol and Nesryn – the new captain of the guard – to stay at court and change the Khagan's mind. Without his disability, the narrative would have ended as soon as it began. The novel unfolds around Chaol's disability: his experience, healing,

struggle and society's reaction to it. Thus, *ToD* is a novel that relies heavily upon the story which a disability invites, meaning that a disabled body is not neutral but "calls for a story" – an explanation (Couser 604). For the whole series, the healing of Chaol's demon-inflicted disability provides the key to the eventual defeat of the demonic armies in the final instalment of the series. Without the knowledge that the demon-infested armies can be 'healed' the series would have ended with the demon king's victory.

Amanda Cachia points out that the majority of disability narratives leave out the lived experience of having a disability (249). This means that one of the pitfalls of the use of disability as a narrative prosthetic is that after the "difference is established" it is overlooked (Mitchell and Snyder 62). Interestingly, *ToD* religiously mentions the practicalities pertaining to Chaol's disability. His disability is not forgotten when not essential to the development of the plot. His wheelchair is pushed (23) and touched (443). In a restaurant, "one of the chairs [was removed]" to make room (387). When he regains some independence after a brace for horse riding is made, he does not just appear on top of the horse. Instead "he silently studied the saddle before him, assessing how he was to get one leg over the other side of the horse" (175). The lived experience in the novel shows some of the practical aspects, challenges and possibilities of living with paraplegia. However, most of the lived experience does not function to provide an accurate image of having a disability. It functions to limit Chaol's identity to disabled and establishes ablebodiedness as the preference through implied comparisons.

Chaol's wheelchair is not just his new means of "seeing the world" (3). It is also "his prison" (3) and thus the physical signifier of Chaol's negative feelings towards being disabled. His gradual healing and ability to walk again coincide with his growth as a character, which is limited to his attitude about disability. The immobility of his lower body is linked to the immobility of his emotional state (Mitchell and Snyder 126), which regains the capacity to change when his lower body gradually heals. After the promise of freer movement through horse riding, he regains some agency for the first time "wheeling himself around the corner" (195) after been passively pushed around before.

His sexuality also goes from stagnant to gradually more active as he regains more movement. At the start of the novel Chaol's libido is not absent but he does not act on it because he is not "able to take her the way he'd once done" (34). Then with the first sign of healing when his toes start "curling and uncurling" (207), Chaol "grabbed her by the wrist and tugged her down, and kissed her" (225). Later when he

can walk with a cane his full libido returns: “Between bouts of lovemaking [Yrene had] gone to move his cane within easy reach of the bed” (519). His libido is used as another signifier of his emotional stagnancy while being disabled and its return through his physical healing. The novel uses sexuality as a “symbolical symptom” (Mitchell and Snyder 49) and it reinforces the disability stereotype of not being a sexual being. Garland-Thomson identifies this stigma as “asexual objectification” of people with disabilities, in a society that assumes “that sexuality is inappropriate in disabled people” (25).

2.2 Mimesis and Diegesis

The novel’s central message is that disability does not reduce one’s value. Chaol is “as much of a man in that chair, or with that cane, as [he is] standing on [his] feet” (624). However, there is a discrepancy between the way in which the negative image is portrayed at first, and how the novel tries to rectify this at the end. The portrayal of the experience of disability undermines the inclusive message at the end.

This discrepancy is made clear by the difference between Socrates’s concepts of diegesis and mimesis as explained by Stephen Halliwell. In modern phrasing it relates to the writer’s advice: “show, don’t tell”.

> Without leaving behind his earlier, global model of authorial responsibility, [Socrates] pursues the idea that mimesis, whether in its own uninterrupted form (i.e. as drama, 394b–c) or as one element in compound diegesis, such as Homeric epic, entails a particularly intense and therefore psychically dangerous mode of narrative imagination. The fear of narrative which powerfully foregrounds various characters’ viewpoints is brought out especially clearly at the end of the analysis (397d–398b), where Socrates brands the “mimetic” poet as manipulating a kind of multiple personality and creating works which induce others (not least, performers of poetry) to introduce imagined multiplicity into their own souls—something which threatens the “unity” of soul that is foundational to the psychology and ethics of the entire Republic (130).

Socrates places great importance on mimesis. He is concerned about the manipulating qualities that mimeses contains. With mimesis the reader might not even notice the message being conveyed, while with diegesis the message is made explicit and can be either accepted or refused. Socrates cautions against mimesis. He considers it a "seductively perspectival psychology and its consequent inducement to the mind to step inside, and assimilate itself to, the character's viewpoint" (131). For Socrates mimesis threatens the "unity of the soul", which means that it can disrupt society by bringing in new and paradigm provoking ideas. However, for *ToD*, the problem lies with the opposite implication of Socrates's concern. Instead of the disruption of the unity of the soul, *ToD* fails to disrupt the society's unity about a disabled stereotype. You can convey a certain message through diegesis, if the mimesis in the text conveys a different message it has a more lasting and powerful impact than what you tried to convey through diegesis. In *ToD*, the message that the author tries to convey is that being disabled is equal to being nondisabled; that it makes you "as much of a man" (624). However, this message is told. It is explicitly said through diegesis. While the greatest part of the novel undermines this message by showing that being nondisabled is the ideal. Continuously, the nondisabled body is presented as desired and superior, and the idealising of this able bodied state oppresses Chaol and presses him further down the ranking, which in itself should not exist in a novel with a central message of inclusion. The disruption of society's stigma towards disability is necessary in order to change this oppressive stereotypical perception towards an inclusive attitude about bodily difference. In failing to disrupt the stereotype *ToD* becomes just another novel that contributes to the stigmatisation and oppression of people with disabilities.

There is a discrepancy between the diegesis and mimesis of the presentation of the wheelchair. The diegesis tells that Chaol's wheelchair is "lighter and sleeker than he expected", with the wheels "rotat[ing] easily", "capable of swivelling in any direction he chose", and it moves "smoothly" (33-34). The chair is presented as an aid that gives its user freedom of movement. However, most of the other mentions before his healing describe the wheelchair as an unnatural transgressive presence. Chaol "hated one sound above all others. Wheels" (4). In comparison to the soft sounds of "rustling clothing", the wheels "clatter and squeak" breaking the silence (8). The chair 'clatters', 'rattles', 'thunks' (3), and 'squeaks' (8). These descriptions present the wheelchair not only as a thing Chaol hates, but also as disruptive for society as the noises it produces disrupt

peace and tranquillity. The mimesis presents the chair differently from the diegesis that explicitly describes the chair's effective functionality. The description is not able to uphold the neutral practical image in between a majority of negative lexemes.

Not only does the wheelchair disrupt by making noise, its image as a "prison" (3) overrules its ability to swivel "in any direction he chose" (34). In the beginning Chaol is passive and is wheeled everywhere. When Nesryn goes out to visit her family, he says "I'd join you, if I could" (75), though there is no good reason why he cannot. He could wheel himself, or Nesryn could push him. Instead they both assume that he cannot go because of his wheelchair. His inability to use his legs, confines him to an overall resignation that he cannot function. Earlier Chaol "could not go to her" to comfort Nesryn after they received bad news. As a former soldier his upper body is strong and muscled, and despite this in many instances Chaol thinks he cannot achieve anything because of his chair. This passivity begins to diminish first when he discovers he can ride again and then more fully when he gradually regains movement in his lower body. This portrayal conforms to the stereotype of people with disabilities as "weak, pitiful, dependent, [and] passive" (Gilman qtd. in Ware 107). The mimesis shows the wheelchair as imprisoning its user to inability and passivity, and not as an aid for independence of movement.

Chaol's negative attitude towards the wheelchair and being disabled changes as he heals: first his toes, then his feet, lower legs, knees, till he can stand and walk again. Mitchell and Snyder argue that "[d]isabled characters were either extolled or defeated according to their ability to adjust or overcome their tragic situation" (19). With Chaol's healing his story ties in to this problematic disability trope. However, he does not stay fully able-bodied. Chaol gives up his life to save Yrene, after which he can only be partly healed. This gives him an acceptable reason to be disabled, tying in to our culture's narrative that you cannot just have a disability and live a valuable life. And now that he has done something "heroic and noble" (Serlin qtd. in Smith-Chandler and Swart 420) being disabled is acceptable.

Furthermore, because the cost for his life is his ability to stand, he fully accepts the wheelchair as the cost to live. "It is no burden, Yrene, [...] to be given this. It is no burden at all. [...] using the chair is not a punishment. It is not a prison," he said. "It never was. And I am as much of a man in that chair, or with that cane, as I am standing on my feet" (624). However, despite the positive attitude of the quote towards disability the

mimesis in the novel changes from: “Wouldn’t you rather be [healed]?” (Ware 111) to “Wouldn’t you rather not be dead?” The diegesis tries to present disability and equal to ablebodiedness by having Chaol declare he “is as much a man in that chair” (624). However, the mimesis prevents the reader from accepting this conclusion by presenting ablebodiedness as the ideal, but disability as preferable over death.

In short, despite the novel telling the reader through diegesis that being disabled is just a bodily variation that is equal to being nondisabled, the mimesis suggests a different message. This mimesis shows an unable, passive, pitiful character and the few mentions that claim the opposite are drowned out by a majority of remarks and (in)actions that confirm disability stereotypes. In the next section, I show how ableist language in the narrative is another powerful tool of mimesis that affirms the nondisabled body as preferable.

2.3 Ableist Language in Disability Narrative

Although *ToD* revolves around a character with a disability, the narrative and characters, even Chaol, are foremost ableist, relying on Chaol’s disability to “narrate the story of a healthy body” through the “contrastive device of disability” (63-64). Ableist language use is one of the devices that makes *ToD* an ability narrative despite its portrayal of a protagonist with a disability.

The unconscious belief in the superiority of ability is ingrained language. The English language is filled with metaphors and figures of speech that rely on the explicit and implied comparison between ability and disability; with ability being used to convey superiority and positivity and disability to indicate flaws. Phrases such as *to be blind to something* indicate a lack in knowledge or insight. While the phrase *I see* indicates a gained insight. *ToD* manages to keep negative disability metaphors to a relative few. Nonetheless, the novel still implies the superiority of nondisabled bodies through its language use. The novel’s praise of able-bodied characteristics inadvertently implies the opposite about being disabled. The ableist language creates a division and subsequent comparison between the nondisabled characters and its main character with a disability.

As former captain of the guard, Chaol has an aversion to seeing the guards when he comes to Antica. The guards are described as “standing proud”(5). Chaol compares his former self to them as they are positioned “where he himself would undoubtedly have been standing” (5). A continuously reoccurring ableist association is between

standing and *proud* – explicit or implied. Chaol's food becomes tasteless as he sees the guards standing "so tall and proud" (117). Yrene is praised for entering the royal banquet "straight-backed as any noble lady" (49), while Chaol has "to look up, [and face] this mighty warrior-king in that chair" (14). This contrastive image between standing and pride, and sitting and having "to look up" implies that sitting is not a position of pride. Furthermore, the contrast between standing and sitting is heightened by the presence of the Torre. The Torre Cesme is the tower which houses the healers of Antica, and it is presented as "[t]he shining pillar [...] standing proud over it all" (10). Even Chaol's hope for healing serves as a reminder that one has to stand to be proud.

Tobin Siebers identifies this superior image of ablebodiedness as part of a persistent "ideology of ability", which he defines as "the preference for ablebodiedness" (273). *ToD* continuously presents ablebodiedness as the ideal. Prince Kashin is moving "with the ease of a person confident in his body's unfailing strength" (29), while looking at Chaol with "pity" (32). This is perceived by Chaol whose body has 'failed' him. Failure conveys negativity, and even though the novel does not spell out the comparison, presenting a nondisabled body as "unfailing" implies failure for the opposite. Even the elderly Khagan is described with "shoulders still broad, spine still straight" (20). Implying a comparison between the Khagan's functioning spine and Chaol's injured one. A continuous presentation of the superiority of ability weaves through the novel through implied comparison with Chaol's disabledness. This ideology of ability is even presented in Chaol's own body as the text splits his body in two halves: his "powerful" upper body (311) and "unresponsive" lower body (8). These comparisons create a hierarchy in which disability is placed in the inferior position.

ToD also uses different grammatical structures when saying something positive about its characters who have disabilities than it does when praising the others. Instead of saying something outright positive, the novel uses a double negative to praise characters with disabilities. That is until the final few pages and Chaol has finally accepted his changed body. The use of double negative to convey something positive results in a focus on the reverse. Chaol describes Shen – the other character with a disability – as "[u]nbroken this man before him. No less of a man for his injury, for finding a new way to move through the world" (309). By describing Shen as unbroken, the question is raised whether you should consider him broken. Further, by using "no less a man" it is implicated that he could be considered less. In another instance Chaol

tells himself that: “The chair was no prison, nothing that made him lesser” (440). Instead of focussing on his change in attitude, this phrasing redirects the reader’s thoughts to the beginning when Chaol did find the chair a prison. Resulting in an image of the wheelchair as a prison, instead of the message that it is not a prison. Double negative connects the disabled body with negativity, undermining its positive message.

Furthermore, in *ToD* the narrative seems preoccupied by leg movement. Aside from the healing process during which the healer prods and twists toes, ankles and knees, the novel details almost every movement of the other characters’ lower body. Kashin’s “long legs [eat] up the distance” (18). Yrene draws “up her legs” (158). Nesryn’s “toes curl” (233). There is hardly a page in which some leg or toe movement is not mentioned. The constant focus on walking and limbs serves as a constant reminder of Chaol’s now disabled body, and his inability to use his legs. The mentioning of these movements is not problematic in itself, as leaving out all walking or running from other characters would feel strained as well. However, the amount of mentions of anything related to leg movement creates serves to highlight Chaol’s inability to use them so that it undermines the message at the end of the novel: that having a disability is just a different variety of body, which does not require healing.

Moreover, figurative uses of words related to legs are just as extensive. Yrene “walk[s] along the patient as they travel those hard, dark paths” (102). Chaol is questioned about “what path do[es] [he] walk now? ” (109). These instances focus on the figurative meaning of walking, while the person in question is unable to walk. The use of such language, especially when the person in question has not yet accepted their changed body can be extremely insensitive and offensive, and it normalises ability. That such language is used by both nondisabled people and people with a disability alike does not make its use less problematic. The body is “normalized within language” especially through its figurative uses (Castle 296), which adds to the presentation of disability as differing from the norm and thus abnormal and unwanted. The absence of commentary on this language in *ToD* is a missed opportunity to educate its readers about the effect such language can have on people with disabilities.

Even though phrases like “half a smile kick up on one side of his face” (160) and he “[ran] an eye over her from foot to head” (349) are not negative, their use alongside all other literal and figurative uses of leg movement makes it awkward phrasing. Farnall and Smith’s research concluded that cumulative exposure to a certain image creates a

stereotype in people's minds which influences their social reality. The text of *ToD* is flooded with ableist images through its language, and the other mentions of literal and figurative leg movement adds to the mental image of what a normal body should be able to do, and cast bodies that are different as lacking.

Two blatant ableist metaphors are used in the novel that draw on disability for its imagery. One of these is made into a disability metaphor, even though the official metaphor does not draw on disability. ""But it won't stop Aelin Galathynius or Aedion Ashryver from drinking you under the table". "Or under a chair" Hasar Crooned" (507). This sentence portrays Hasar in a negative light and it is one of the many insensitive things she has said to Chaol in order to provoke him. She knows that he cannot react because she, as princess, can kill anyone who dares oppose her. As one of many, this insult is not added for its depiction of people's cruelness towards those with a disability. The insult serves to spice up an uneventful passage. As a reaction Yrene pushes Hasar with her chair into the pool, becoming terrified when she realises what she did. Through the help of the princess's wife and brother's laughter they are spared and Hasar reacts with the second ableist metaphor: "I was wondering when you'd grow a backbone" (509). Yrene's reaction to the first insult shows some awareness of the unacceptableness of such comments. However, glad they are alive, the second one slips by uncommented on. The insult also functions to move Chaol's and Yrene's relationship to a next level. Because of their near death experience, Chaol and Yrene have sex. Disability serves as the catalyst for the scene to evolve, using it for its potential to add sensation to another otherwise uneventful passage.

The language glorifies ablebodiedness. Therefore, the novel is not a narrative about disability, but about ablebodiedness. Chaol's disabled body is the "contrastive device" (Mitchell and Snyder 34) through which the preference for a nondisabled body is heightened. Even when the novel shows some awareness of ableist metaphors, the narrative uses it for creating narrative tension. The ableist metaphors are used to spice up the narrative instead of commenting on society's problematic use of ableist language.

2.4 An Oppressive Society in an Oppressive Novel

Mitchell and Snyder point out that literary narratives use characters with disabilities as a "crutch [...] for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight" (49). This often causes singular personalities that do not truly represent but are

only used as a narrative function. Tom Shakespeare addresses the social realism critique that fictional portraits "often ignore 'the way in which disability is a relationship between people with an impairment and a disabling society'" (qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder 23). Even though, Chaol's disability is still used as a crutch for the narrative, the novel also provides an insight in to the social stigma that people with a disability have to contend with on a regular basis. These passages still exploit Chaol's disability as the contrastive device to the ideology of ability. However, they also provide commentary on the stigmatisation and discrimination people with disabilities face. Despite its awareness of societal oppression, the novel itself contributes to the oppression of people with a disability by deploying oppressive stereotypical disability tropes. The novel presents disability as Chaol's whole identity, restricting Chaol's identity to the same stereotype about which the novel tries to raise awareness.

As *ToD* is the sixth novel in the series, Chaol's character has been established and developed in the previous instalments. However, his former identities are erased and replaced by disability. Schaller's theory about multiple identity positions overturns the notion that disability is a master identity category by proving that it is an identity position that might or might not influence any other identification categories. Most fiction contributes to the false notion that disability is a master identity position by portraying one-dimensional characters that have no complexity of identity. During the course of the novel, Chaol attempts to regain some of his former identity positions. However, these attempts are often cut short through the interference of other characters or his own ableism. Leaving him a disabled character instead of a character who is also disabled.

Yrene has spent most of the novel letting Chaol move himself around. She refuses to help with things that he could do himself. And when he says, "I cannot do that while in this chair". She replies: "You certainly could do such things from that chair" (98). The first part focuses on all the things Chaol cannot do while being disabled, or more accurately, what people and he himself think he cannot do. Yrene tries to encourage him to see what he can do, but his refusal overpowers her voice. He sees disability as fully disabling. As an ableist character, Chaol limits himself. This notion could be a comment of the novel on how ableism disables those with disabilities. Yet the novel itself needs Chaol's inability, passivity, and negativity to enlarge his development. This makes the

narrative the oppressive force that relies on Chaol's inability for its dramatic alteration of attitude towards disability.

At one point Chaol reclaims his identity position of instructor in self-defence. Yrene asks him to train the girls from the Torre, through which she empowers him by raising him from pitiful (32) and "useless" (141) to training others. He gets the opportunity to take back a leadership position which he had occupied for years as captain of the royal guard. However, at this point even Yrene who has thus far been presented as seeing Chaol as independent and capable, suddenly reduces him to nothing more than a disabled body useful for study. When Chaol arrives at the Torre on horseback for the instruction, Yrene offers Chaol up as an object of study for the young acolytes who have never encountered such patients before and the group of them try to haul Chaol of his horse. "Two young healers began unstrapping the brace, some examining the buckles and rods. Still they did not look him in the eye. As if he were some new toy – new lesson. Some oddity"(185). The scene is much longer and contrasts the healers tugging him around and Chaol's feelings about being rendered nothing more than an object of study. He came there for a role that was supposed to both empower him into taking back pieces of his identity and empower the healers so that they could defend themselves. However, the scene turns into Chaol losing any identity until he is nothing more than a disabled body that needs help. This scene creates an insight into the actions of people and the reactions of those who have been cornered in the identity category of disability. This shows that even things that are not necessarily malicious, can be highly intrusive and inconsiderate, and being unaware of it does not make it okay.

The following passage shows Yrene's process from being oblivious, to realising but feeling entitled, to her understanding of what her actions have caused. The scene displays the sought after result of the social effect that Fielder and Thomson point out: "the literary encounter with deviance at first heightens alienation and then ultimately collapses the distance between disability and the inherently social processes that make bodies as falling outside acceptable norms" (qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder 39). In this passage, Chaol's angry reaction is justified and it is Yrene, thoughtful able-bodied Yrene, whose actions are deemed problematic. "Yrene wracked her memory for what she might have said during the lesson – what she might have forgotten" (193) She does not understand why she can feel "the anger simmering off Chaol" (191). Then, when confronted, "she stiffened," then she starts to explain "[t]he Torre is a place of learning,

and people with your injury do not come often" (197). She feels that her intentions are more important than its outcome, "I did not mean that, and you know it" (198). The confrontation with her inconsiderate actions leads to an argument between her and Chaol. Yrene sees herself as the victim of Chaol's anger while she did not mean to hurt him. Instead of apologising, she first blames Chaol for misunderstanding her intentions. When she finally realises that she was wrong, the novel comments on an often forgotten human side of people with disabilities: "She hadn't considered – his feelings. That he might have them" (199). That despite good intentions, the problem lies with her: "No, she had not been in her best form these past few days. Not even close" (199). This is the outcome that a confrontation with transgression aims for: the collapse of distance between two parties. Nondisabled people should realise their ableist assumptions and change their behaviour and speech accordingly. However, as discussed in the previous paragraph, Chaol's identity is diminished to nothing more than a disabled body through such scenes. And although this confrontation with inconsiderate behaviour can be important and eye-opening, Chaol does not get many other instances of becoming more than disabled. The novel only shows Chaol as a complex character to show society's problematic treatment of people with disabilities. The novel's omission of complex representation in other instances undermines the social commentary by presenting a character that is nothing more than disabled.

Another key scene in presenting some of the lived experience of society's transgression towards those who have a disability is when Chaol embraces the identity he already has in name – hand of the king. He takes it upon himself to disrupt the Khagan's meeting with his foreign trade vizier. He doubles the weapon orders that are placed by Aelin and Dorian – his king – and attempts to talk to Khagan about joining their cause. Chaol embodies this identity that extends beyond him having a disability: "[s]tanding or sitting had nothing to do with it – this moment. He could still speak with dignity and command whether he stood on his feet or was laid flat on his back. The chair was no prison, nothing that made him lesser" (440). The novel shows Chaol as expanding his identity – not just disabled, but Hand of the King, no matter his bodily (dis)ability. However, just after this self discovery, the ever-composed Chaol loses his composure in attempting to woo the Khagan. Again the novel has someone take his newfound identity away, and Chaol is again becomes solely disabled. The Khagan orders Chaol to leave the room, and when Chaol does not, a guard wheels him away, but "[h]e

knew – Chaol realized, the guard knew just how it felt to have the chair touched, moved, without being asked" (443). It offers a glimpse into what it can do to a person when you are moved without your consent. Something that possibly happens more often than able-bodied people realise, when they unthinkingly move someone's chair because it is "in the way". However, Chaol tries to stand, while calling out for the Khagan to do something about the war as it has probably already reached his shores. Through this uncharacteristic outburst, the narrative shows how powerless it can make someone feel to have their wheelchair touched and moved without consent. However, Chaol is reduced to behaviour that is unfitting for the Hand of the King and his earlier conviction is reduced through sensationalising Chaol's reaction. Further, the anger and powerlessness that Chaol experiences in this scene is the build up for him being able to stand for the first time. Thus, this scene has the potential of creating awareness of what it is like to have someone touch your wheelchair, or other aid, but it is executed in a sensationalising way. Furthermore, it is the narrative crutch for the story to be launched into the next phase of Chaol's healing.

Society's view of disability as opposite of ability is explored through Chaol's own ableism. The following passage explores how "dis-ability" is often stereotypically mistranslated as "lack of ability" (Smith-Chandler and Swart 424). One of the guards, Shen, often aids Chaol with mounting and dismounting his horse. On one occasion Chaol notices Shen's "metal forearm and hand". After seeing this he "hesitate[s] at the arm and shoulder Shen offered to aid him". When Shen notices his hesitation, he replies: "I helped you just fine before you knew, Lord Westfall" (308). Despite Chaol's own experience of disability and Shen's capability, he adopts the ableist assumption that disability equals lack of ability. Shen's identity is perceived by Chaol as disabled instead of guardsman. Shen's reply redirects Chaol's and the reader's perception to his capability and that disability does not translate as lack of ability. This passage is the only one that has no ulterior narrative motive and is just an acknowledgement of oppressive behaviour against people with disabilities.

Thus, while the novel portrays scenes that have the power to create awareness in its readers, the continuous undermining of identity outside of disability leaves Chaol as a one-dimensional character that exists only in a disabled self. The neglect of *ToD* to provide identity positions that exist outside of disability reinforce stereotypical constructs that are ingrained in our culture. Thus, while the novel displays an awareness

of the social oppression of people with disabilities, the novel itself adds to the oppression of its disabled characters through objectifying them and their social oppression as narrative prosthetics.

2.5 Conclusion

ToD shows both an awareness of the lived experience of having a disability and it fails to depict a non-stereotypical portrayal of disability. The novel mistakenly presents disabilities as "all-consuming affairs that become the sum of one's personality, cancelling out all other attributes of one's multi-faceted humanity" (Murphy qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder 123). Chaol's interactions are all about or influenced by disability discourse. Through mimesis and in particular ableist language, *ToD* upholds an ideology of ability instead of an ideology of body variety. The glorifying of an "able" body is just as disabling and oppressing as negativity towards disability. The idolisation of ablebodiedness especially in disability narrative results in the disability becoming the undesired counterpart.

Chapter 3: A Textual Analysis of Disability Narrative in *Six of Crows*

Six of Crows (*SoC)* revolves around a diverse group of teenage gang members who are tasked to complete an impossible heist and as a result become incredibly rich. They all have unique skills which are needed to complete the heist and return home alive. However, their histories and personalities complicate the group dynamics and cause additional obstacles in their already dangerous mission. The gang consists of people with different traumas, addictions, ethnicities, genders, sexualities and disabilities, which all influence the narrative and characterisation in different ways.

Natasja Razi reviewed *SoC* for disabilityinkidslit.com. This website is an online community "dedicated to discussing the portrayal of disability in middle grade and young adult literature" (*Disability in Kidlit* "About"). The website advocates for more accurate representation of disability in children's literature. Their content aims to help their audience "learn about the realities of disability, which are often different from what we see in popular media" ("About"). Their policy is that "all [their] contributors and editors identify as disabled. *Nothing about us without us,* as the disability rights saying goes!" ("About"). Therefore, even though the website does not provide academic content, the portrayed opinions are significant to the discussion. Mitchell and Snyder examine and problematise narrative prosthesis as "the literary *accomplishment* of a faulty, or at least imperfect, prosthetic function" of disability in fiction (8). Their argument does not exclude a non-problematic prosthetic relationship between disability and narrative. However, their analysis does not include such a reading either. Razi's review alludes to a reading of prosthetic function of disability in narrative as non-problematic. She expressed her opinion that in *SoC,* disability "organically feeds into the character's goals, backstories, and characterization" and without it they "would be entirely different people" ("Review"). Despite disability being a catalyst for characterisation and plot in *SoC*, its portrayal is empowering. Even disabled characters "with little page time" receive "respect and realism" ("Review"). She contrasts the complex portrayal of characters with disabilities in *SoC* against its common portrayal as "the primary point of character" or for the disability "to feel tacked-on and irrelevant" ("Review"). In *SoC,* a generally empowering representation of characters with disabilities is provided, while also employing disability as narrative prosthesis.

The novel is set in Ketterdam, a city in another part of the Grisha Verse, a world Leigh Bardugo created in the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy. The Grisha Verse consists of

multiple countries, one which is Ravkan, home of the Grisha. Unlike other nationalities, the Grisha have magical abilities which can manipulate either body, matter, or elements. In an interview with *Publisher's Weekly*, Bardugo said that for *SoC* she decided to move away from the popular 'chosen one' trope that occurs in most fantasy series', and which she employed in the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy. Instead she decided to "tell a story about kids who were not necessarily ordinary [...] but whose motivations lay in more ordinary places [...] Revenge and sweet, sweet dollar bills" (Amy Brabenec). The plot revolves around six teenagers who live on the fringes of society and are offered the chance to make millions if they manage to break out a hostage from the never breached Ice Court. The six all have different motivations for their participation, both noble and egocentric. Each of the members has a unique skill that is needed for the heist, and a "fatal flaw" that complicates it (Bardugo qtd. in Natasha Razi "Interview"). Although Bardugo does not specify that their disabilities are the fatal flaws she mentions, because of the stigma surrounding disability their disabilities are the first that come to mind when thinking about what their flaws are. Calling disability a flaw is problematic and ties in with what Siebers calls the "ideology of ability" (273). Although the narrative itself does not treat it as such as will be discussed later on.

On her Instagram account, Bardugo addressed the fact that she has osteonecrosis, a degenerative condition that "makes walking pretty painful." In the interview with *Disability in Kidlit*, she said about the main character: "Kaz was always Kaz. He appeared in black gloves, leaning on that cane, and I basically followed him into the story". Readers who know about the author's use of a cane cannot fail to see the resemblance between Kaz's and Bardugo's use of a cane. However, at first, Bardugo herself "didn't give much thought to the fact that his disability mirrored [her] own" (Razi "Interview"). Disability is an identity category and to outsiders Bardugo is a disabled author who writes about a disabled character. However, to Bardugo herself this relation was not as clear at first. One's character consists of multiple facets and for most people with disabilities, being disabled is not their main one. Bardugo acknowledged the similarity and how her relationship with being disabled influenced how she portrayed Kaz. On Instagram, she posted that she has had to deal with her own "(ableist) reluctance to use a cane", and that later, she visualised Kaz this way because she "wanted to write someone disabled and ferocious, because that's how [she] wanted to feel" (Razi "Interview").

Aside from Kaz's limp, the novel portrays multiple forms of disability. The presence of different disabilities – physical, mental and cognitive – shows an awareness of the "spectrum of human variation" (Siebers 284), refusing the labelling of one type as normal, but presenting all differences as equal. The Grisha verse does not provide names or care for non-physical disabilities. For this thesis, I will refer to Kaz's other disability as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or touch aversion. Of the other main characters, the six of crows, Jesper has a gambling addiction and seems to have a form of hyperactive attention disorder. Without it being labelled as such, he is described as being "constantly in motion" (19) and having "restless energy" (306). The novel's ethnicities have different skin colours and cultures which do not necessarily correspond to our ethnic groupings and cultures. Jesper is Zemini from Nova Zem and these people are "dark skinned"(8). He is assigned a different job than the rest at the Ice Court, because his Zemini skin would attract attention. Later he also turns out to also be Grisha from his mother's side. Inej comes from a Suli family of acrobats – a nomadic people. She was kidnapped and sold in to the sex industry, which traumatised her. Then Kaz bought her contract after he realised she had "bells on her ankles" and he "didn't hear" her, "purple silks and spots painted on [her] shoulders" and he "didn't see" her (327). He saw her ability to stay completely undetected – the perfect spy. Nina is Grisha and has magical powers with which she can influence the body, and is therefore in danger of being taken and sold into slavery, or hunted because she is considered unnatural by the Fjerdans – "you weren't meant to exist" (248). Matthias Helvar, a Fjerdan, struggles against the discriminating beliefs that he grew up hearing and believing about the Grisha. Lastly, Wylan has a severe form of dyslexia. He can recognise letters but is unable to read words. Jesper and Wylan have evident sexual chemistry which is further explored in *Crooked Kingdom*. Neither novel presents homosexuality as an issue, the chemistry and flirtation are just there. The six could easily fall into being stereotypes, with their differences being their whole identity. Instead, the characters are "well-drawn" (Max Wallis *Independent*) and "complex" (Razi "Review").

When examining disability representation in *SoC*, the sequel *Crooked Kingdom* (*CK*) should be considered in the analysis. In this novel, the development of the characters and the attitude towards 'difference' are made even more explicit. Also some criticism that the duology has towards society's treatment of people with a disability appears in *CK.* There is little interaction with people outside of the gang in *SoC.* However,

in *CK* the society's reaction to having a disability is further explored. At the end of *SoC*, the six have been duped out of their money and Inej is kidnapped. *CK* follows the crew as they plot to free their crewmember and get their money by manoeuvring the social structures in Ketterdam. The main focus is on *SoC,* but using *CK* provides a more complete analysis.

The narrative shows an awareness of the heterogeneous nature of the individual experience of disability. However, there is a difference between the representation of the disability that mirrors the author's, with which she is obviously closely familiar, and the other disabilities. Those are more sensationalised and are used to create narrative tension. Despite the novel's use of narrative prosthesis for its narrative tension and potential for plot twists, the portrayal of disability is mainly empowering. The novel employs complex characterisation, multiple identities, and complex embodiment to create round empowered characters.

3.1 Ruthless and Disabled: a Matter of Structure

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, Bardugo acknowledges that she created Kaz as disabled, ruthless and unapologetic "because that's how [she] wanted to feel" (Razi "Interview"). On the surface, Kaz is just another stereotypical disabled character. He is described as a monster and demon, cruel and a criminal, and driven by revenge and money. Yet despite the presence of these seemingly stereotypical characteristics, Bardugo has managed to create a character that is a fully realised human being. Different disabilities are not treated as a general disability experience, but even within one person the experiences differ between different disabilities. Further, while his disabilities are an important part of Kaz's identity, they are not conflated with it. In this section, I will analyse Kaz's characterisation to identify what narrative components have accumulated to an complex character that manages to avoid certain stereotypical pitfalls despite its seeming adherence to the stereotype.

The manner in which characterisation takes place is "highly influential on the relation between character and reader" (Jannidis 31). The offered information about a character is obviously not complete after its first introduction. Narratives offer information in instalments for pacing without slowing it down with too many descriptions and narrative tension. Such partial information prompts let "the reader fill in the missing parts based on the appropriate knowledge" (35). However, the term

appropriate knowledge does not imply factual knowledge, and it is "one's assumptions" based on one's knowledge about the presented subject that determines interpretation (Herman David 57). Cognitive narratology studies, among other things, the effect of the reader's world knowledge on the interpretation of a text, and the way that the presentation of information in a text can direct this interpretation (David 2014). The structuring of information can postpone readers' interpretations till certain other aspects are first introduced. This way, the narrative has more control over the reader's perception, as certain important elements have not yet been filled in by the reader's own frame of reference.

The introduction of Kaz does not mention his disabilities yet. "Kaz Brekker didn't need a reason. [...] Those were the words whispered on the streets. [...] Of course they were wrong, [...] every act of violence was deliberate" (*SoC* 16). He is established as a dangerous criminal. Only after this image is established are his gloves and cane mentioned. This sequence keeps readers from making early assumptions based on their own perception about people who have a disability. On the one hand, the separation of introducing the different aspects of Kaz's physique signals that there is a stigma. Yet on the other hand, in a society in which this stigma exists, the separated presentation of image and disability allows for the structure to direct readers' perception. The postponed introduction of Kaz's disability presents it as just one of his characteristics, whereas introducing his disability first could have conflated his disability with his identity – making it a master identity category from which any other character traits originate (Schaller).

The separation between character and disability stays throughout the narrative. They organically influence each other, yet they never conflate. His disabilities and aids influence the plot only when it would make sense for them to complicate or facilitate the next plot point. Couser argues that even if disability "does not generate narrative, it may imply a backstory" (603), which is a method of easy characterisation as such implied backstories often fuel the actions and desires of the now disabled character without actually providing one. In *SoC*, the backstory is given. However, instead of it functioning as a narrative crutch to easy characterisation, the backstory is provided to separate disability as the cause for his thirst for revenge and to downplay the event which made him disabled so that it does not take precedence over the narrative. His disabilities are part of his character but they are not the most important part of him. He robbed a bank,

got away with fifty thousand kruge and landed badly on his leg. After all he'd been through before that, the limp, the cane "became a declaration. There was no part of him that was not broken, that had not healed wrong, and there was no part of him that was not stronger for having been broken" (428-429). The backstory functions as an introduction into the declaration, and is just one story of his past. The backstory is not essential to either plot or character as Kaz's character has been established through his actions and memories by the time the backstory is provided.

In today's world "reductive assumptions and stereotypes about disability are deeply entrenched" (Cachia 249). The scene in which Kaz's limp is introduced acknowledges society's prejudice and shows that people with disabilities are often falsely underestimated. The novel starts with a meeting between two gangs, and they meet on neutral territory without weapons. Jesper asks why Kaz is allowed to bring his walking stick. Kaz replies with, "Who'd deny a poor cripple his cane?" To which Jesper replies, "If the cripple is you, then any man with sense" (*SoC* 19). The passage shows society's perception of being crippled as a weakness. Jesper's reply presents Kaz as not fitting that mold. Kaz's reputation is already fixed, he is known as 'Dirtyhands', willing to do anything. However, without guns or knives the other party thinks he is weak despite his reputation. Later on, when the meeting goes awry, the cane, which is perceived as an outward sign of weakness, becomes the tool through which, alongside his wit, Kaz overpowers his opponents.

Disability is often placed on an "ability-disability binary" (Ware 110) by society. By having the ability-disability ingrained as two sides of the same coin in society, it implies "that so-called impairment limits overall performance and productivity" (Waldschmidt 19). The scene discussed in the previous paragraph, problematises this binary, for having this mobility disability does not prevent ability in every other area. On the contrary, as shown throughout the rest of the duology, as a skilled thief, swindler and card dealer, Kaz's abilities encompass areas where most people's motor skills would fail. While this also ties in with standard disability tropes, where the disabled gains exceptional skills through being disabled, Kaz already had these skills before he becomes disabled. Before the traumatic experience of his brother's passing, he "spent hours practising [sleight of hand] in front of a muddy mirror" (143). In respect to all six members, the novel focuses on the ability of the characters and how that will enable them to reach their goals, while also keeping in mind that their disabilities, ethnicities

and prejudices do limit them in some respects and influence their daily lives, which will be discussed later on. The different abilities, disabilities and other limitations support a mindset that accepts that people "are all differently able-bodied" (Waldschmidt 19).

The novel plays with the concept of disability being perceived as the master identity, while the main characters are more than their differences. Kaz's cane has a crow's head. He switches canes or chooses not to use one if he does not want to be recognised. Playing with the notion that people recognise him mainly through his crow's head cane, while changing that aspect people do not look closely enough to recognise him, "He'd left his crow's head cane aboard the Ferolind and substituted a less conspicuous walking stick" (233). In *CK*, Kaz spends two hours as a card dealer in order to steal Smeet's dog whistle to break into his house. When he, without cane, returns the whistle later on the street by bumping into Smeet. After being apologised to profusely, Smeet "went on his way [...] oblivious to the fact that he'd just run directly into the card dealer who had sat across from him for two hours" (ch3). His cane, or the absence of his cane, enables Kaz to become someone else in the eyes of society. His cane signifies his disability and without it he is largely unrecognised. The narrative constantly plays with the notion that society sees the six of crows as nothing more than teenagers who are disabled and/or female, and thus weak. Even after completing the impossible heist, the other team's boss – who tried and failed at the same heist – calls them "a cripple trailed by a bunch of kids in costumes" (490), while they managed to accomplish what they set out to do and bested those who obstructed them.

However, using society's perception against them is not only exploited in respect to disability. In Kaz's case, his reputation causes people to fear him. However, he does not act on every threat: "when everyone knows you're a monster, you needn't waste time doing every monstrous thing" (42). Even his friends are not sure when he is bluffing or telling the truth. "Kaz smiled. "I buried your son,"[...] "Kaz –" said Inej, her face pale. This she would not forgive him" (*CK* ch37). On the one hand, Ketterdam's society underestimate Kaz and think they can best him, while on the other hand they believe Kaz every time he says he did something horrible to one of their loved ones, while he is only bluffing to get out of a dire situation.

One of the functions of disability narrative that Couser criticises is that "as a trope disability serves to conflate narrative and character"(603). Instead of falling into the common trope that Couser criticises, separation also happens between Kaz's limp and

the narrative, as it did with character and disability. Kaz does many questionable and horrifying things. He steals, he maims, and he does nothing without profitable reason. However, his limp is not the reason for these actions, nor does it fuel his vengeance. Kaz has another disability, a trauma-related mental illness that has a physical side: he has touch aversion. The backstory is gruesome and is sensationalised in the novel, while simultaneously providing an accurate portrayal of trauma through intrusive flashbacks. However, looking at conflating narrative and disability, the story does not conflate Kaz's PTSD with his now vengeful criminal character. Kaz and his brother, Jordie, are naive country boys who end up in the city. They are swindled out of their money. Therefore, when the firepox epidemic starts they cannot afford a doctor. Jordie dies, and both he and the very sick Kaz are taken to the Reaper's Barge – where dead bodies are dumped. There Kaz finally wakes up, and has overcome the pox. However, he is stranded on an island with corpses, and uses his brother's body to float back to the city. He had never been able to "dodge the horror of that night [...] "the memory of his brother's corpse clutched tight [...] as he told himself [...] to stay afloat, stay alive" (CK ch30). After this incident, the boy he was disappeared, and Kaz Brekker, "bastard of the barrel" (429), had taken his place. This traumatic experience left Kaz unable to touch skin. Yet it is not his disability that sparks his endless quest for revenge. He wants revenge on the person who swindled them out of their money and is therefore guilty for Jordie's death. The death of Jordie has two effects: his quest for revenge and PTSD with touch aversion. However, they are not interlinked. Thus, the quest for revenge that underlies the narratives in both *SoC* and *CK* is not fuelled by disability, but is separated from these aspects of Kaz's character.

Thus, the narrative presents a fully realised human being. Disability influences his life, both positively and negatively, but it is not the focal point of his character. His identity as criminal mastermind and relationships with his crew take precedence over his identification as disabled. The conscious refusal to portray disability as the cause for his criminal activities keeps disability and villainy as two separate entities. Complexity of character and the conscious structuring of information make Kaz a person instead of a narrative function.

3.2 Complex Embodiment as Symbiosis between Disability and Narrative

The novel treats disability as a complex part of life. Cachia argues for the importance of complex embodiment in fiction. This entails the knowledge that the body and the environment constantly influence each other (Siebers). In the novel, character, disability and plot constantly influence each other. Instead of an exploitative relationship where the narrative uses disability as a crutch while leaving out accurate complex representation, the novel mainly portrays a symbiosis between disability and narrative. The narrative relies on disability and disability relies on the narrative for its accurate portrayal of its lived experience.

The lived experience of disability mainly focuses on showing the practical side of having a disability and on external factors such as social oppression. However, the unique individual relationship between someone and their disability is just as complex as one's complex identity. As Schaller articulates, "[t]here is no single way to make meaning of dis/ability in one's life" (96). Presenting just one attitude towards disability undermines the complexity of an individual's relationship with disability individually, socially and medically. Most narratives ignore this complexity. In *SoC* and *CK*, the characters deal with their disabilities in different ways. Even Kaz who has more than one disability has a different relationship with his aids and disabilities in different scenarios.

Instead of presenting the limp as just a narrative crutch, the need of a cane is presented that same way as needing glasses would, while also allowing it to be used when it makes sense that it provides an advantage. The cane is an aid, and its use and movements are mentioned. "Kaz [...] snapped up his walking stick" (*SoC* 73). Both its presence and absence is also noted, which shows his need of it even when the story line does not need it as an underestimated weapon. When Inej is attacked and too hurt to fight, Kaz comes back for her and escapes with her in his arms – leaving no room for his cane: "He must be running. Her body bounced painfully against his chest with every lurching step. He needed his cane" (164). However, it is not only a physical need; the cane has become part of his comfort zone, and "he would have given up half his share of the thirty million kruge for the familiar heft of his cane" (303). Kaz's relationship with his cane is complex, the novel does not just focus on one aspect. The cane is his aid, his comfort and his weapon. The novel portrays the different relationships that Kaz has with his cane showing that the relationship is not singular.

However, the cane is only the outward sign of his disability. The "acceptable portrayals" of lived experience according to David Hevey "entail the refusal to disavow or suppress the site of struggle and oppression" (qtd. in Cachia 258). As mentioned earlier, the novel keeps presenting society's prejudices against the accomplishments of 'disabled' Kaz and the misfit rest of his crew. The "site of struggle" is also incorporated in the narrative. The cane is presented as the tool that relieves the pain in his leg. The pain itself is mentioned as a fact, as something that is part of Kaz's life, but not as something that needs healing. On the contrary, when Kaz is assaulted and healed by a Grisha he allows her to only heal some of his bruises. When confronted about his still wounded state, he replies, ""She didn't know when to stop." Nina had a sudden suspicion that Genya had offered to heal Kaz's bad leg" (*CK* ch29). Even though, "the ache was always there" (41), having a disability does not mean being incomplete and therefore it does not need healing.

Kaz's need of his gloves is differently portrayed than his need of his cane. Instead of a sign of strength like his cane, Kaz calls his gloves "his one concession to weakness" (429). Kaz sees the world only in strength and weakness, and the way that touch aversion limits him, is weak in his eyes for it could make him a victim. Even though this notion is ableist, and Kaz is an ableist character, looking at the world in ability. His view lines up with the danger of living in the "barrel" (429). This makes ableism in the novel not an ableist comment on disability, but on what enables you to survive or be duped by the criminal world. Interestingly, the connotation of "bad leg" (*CK* ch29) still offers the ableist view of disability as something negative. The novel portrays characters that are empowered through complex embodiment. However, it still succumbs to ableist language.

As with the cane, the gloves are mentioned throughout the narrative. However, more importantly, the effect of touch is explored. The gloves are the outward signifier of his PTSD – the aid for managing an underlying disability. In different situations throughout the novels, Kaz is touched without a protective layer of fabric in between, and his revulsion is made clear. However, it is not just revulsion as some "bit of theatre", as Pecca Rollins, Kaz's main adversary calls it (490). After escaping the Ice Court through an underground river, Kaz almost drowns. When he surfaces he is not breathing and Nina performs CPR. "She [...] pushed his mouth open as she tried to breathe air into his lungs" (442). His first reaction when regaining consciousness is not *thank you for saving*

my life. “He shoved her off of him, [...] “Get away from me,” he gasped, wiping his gloved hand over his mouth. Kaz’s eyes were unfocused. [...] “Don’t touch me”” (442). Earlier, in the packed prison cart “Kaz Brekker, Dirtyhands, the bastard of the barrel and the deadliest boy in Ketterdam, fainted” (291). The aversion is not something he has control over, the trauma is still so real that in all situations, even when dying, touch must be avoided. Aside from physical repulsion to touch, the trauma is thoroughly explored. He experiences continuous flashbacks of memories of him and Jordie over which he has no control. “Instead, things got so bad he could barely brush up against someone on the street without finding himself once more in the harbour. He was on Reaper’s Barge and death was all around him” (CK ch30). The gloves and touch aversion are not just some kind of affectation in the novel, or just another way to identify Kaz with. They show the real pain and struggles that come with his trauma. The narrative portrays Kaz’s relationship with his gloves and PTSD differently from his relationship with his limp and cane. This offers a look in to the diverse individual experience of disabilities even within one person.

In order to establish the gloves as something that is the outward sign of a disability, the novel religiously mentions the gloves or has characters comment on the gloves. To keep the reader from seeing the gloves as just an affectation, the gloves are mentioned so often that the reader has to wonder what is wrong and why he wears them. In some instances the mention of gloves fits in the narrative. However, often it feels as though the narrative keeps explaining that Kaz walks outside with shoes on his feet. Kaz is continuously described as offering “a gloved hand” (114), having “black-gloved hands” (115), and tapping “his gloved fingers” (130). The backstory is highly sensational, and the snippets readers receive through traumatic flashbacks keeps them interested. The narrative often relies on the gloves and touch aversion for its narrative tension. Most of Kaz’s plotting goes according to plan. To create suspense in these scenes, Kaz having to touch someone creates the tension that is missing from the plot. When they enter the prison, a guard “forced [Kaz’s] mouth open, feeling around with fat fingers. Black spots bloomed in Kaz’s sight” (303). But even when he does not need to touch anyone the rumours about his hands create suspense. His hands were “stained with blood”, “covered in scars”, “claws not fingers”, and his touch “burned like brimstone” (62-63). Even though the narrative tries to accurately present Kaz’s PTSD, the need of the narrative to foreground the gloves fulfils otherwise missing narrative

tension. However, through the exploration of all aspects of his PTSD, the use of complex embodiment balances such instances of narrative prosthesis.

Something similarly happens with Wylan's dyslexia. However, in this case, instead of foregrounding the disability the novel deploys only minor foreshadowing. The plot needs the mystery surrounding Wylan's running away to create the cliff-hanger that is the set up of the sequel. His character is complex and while his actions are influenced by his cognitive disability, it does not primarily define him. When he is tasked to draw the blueprint of the Ice Court, instead of adding the names himself, he says Matthias should do it to get the Fjerdan right (*SoC* 190). He is skilled in "science and math" (*CK* ch23) and he is "a budding demolitions expert who plays a mean flute" (*CK* ch42). He is homosexual: "Wylan leaned forward and kissed [Jesper] (*CK* ch28). He is a loyal friend, his mother's son, and his father's failure. His character consists of multiple identity positions. One of them is his dyslexia, which to his merchant father is the worst possible failure. In the beginning, Wylan gets letters from his father: "If you're reading this, then you know how much I wish to have you home" (*SoC* 213). Only at the end do readers and the other characters realise the mockery when Wylan's dyslexia and his father's deceit are exposed. "Every letter had been a slap in the face to Wylan, a kind of cruel joke" (475). The crew thinks they can use Wylan as leverage to receive their money from his father. Instead one crew member gets kidnapped and they are left with nothing but the desire to rescue Inej and get their money. Wylan is a fully established multi-dimensional character. However, his disability does not add to his character. It foremost serves to change the direction of the narrative. His dyslexia is communicated through a grand reveal, and in hindsight the foreshadowing becomes clear. Where the relationship between Kaz's disabilities and the narrative is largely based on mutual influence, Wylan's dyslexia functions primarily to redirect the story. However, through complexity of character and the subtle influence of dyslexia on the narrative before the reveal Wylan's character has qualities of a fully developed character.

The novel explores all aspects of all of the six main characters, which are not all discussed here due to the focus on disability. The continuous interdependent influence of disability, environment and personality presents the characters as accurate representations of people, in this case with disabilities. Despite ableist motivations and language in the text, the narrative manages to mainly present characters with

disabilities and other differences "as a way of thinking about bodies rather than as something that is wrong with bodies" (Ware 110).

3.3 Conclusion

The role of narrative prosthesis in *SoC* is twofold. First, because having a disability influences one's life practically and socially the narrative and characterisation adept accordingly. Adaptations that incorporate the lived experience of disability create different possibilities for the narrative than a nondisabled character would have. For example, Kaz's cane is a weapon in the first scene, without it the narrative would have needed something else. Therefore, the narrative relies on Kaz's limp for people underestimating him, while disability representation relies on its presence for its accurate portrayal of its lived experience. Second, the narrative relies on disability for its narrative tension and disruptive qualities to surprise the readers and keep them invested. Narrative prosthesis is not necessarily disabling for its characters and readers who are disabled. However, the narrative possibilities of disability are tempting to exploit while the research into the complexity of identity and living with disability are often ignored, resulting in stories about disability instead of about people. *SoC* and *CK* are narratives that are on the empowering side of the quest for accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities.

The difference between the functions of the various disabilities in the narrative could originate in the close familiarity of the author with having a limp – a disability. Although authorial motivation can only be guessed at it is interesting to examine the difference between the portrayals of Kaz's limp and cane and the more sensationalised other disabilities and aid. The difference is mainly in their function. The other disabilities are actively used to create narrative tension. The main characters are all fully explored and their disabilities influence their character, actions and plotlines appropriately, while not taking over as a master identity category. Therefore, the symbiotic relationship between narrative prosthesis and complex embodiment makes narrative prosthesis a tool that does not have to be problematic.

Through the use of complex embodiment and the refusal to present disability as a master identity category, the characters are complex and multi-dimensional people instead of being flat one-dimensional characters. By refusing to present all disabilities as one homogeneous group but allowing for different individual experiences of disability

the novel can be viewed as an empowering step towards accurate representation of people with disabilities in young adult fiction. The influence of fiction on the cultural imagery gives it a position that can implement change and be empowering to those whose influence does not reach as many people as fiction does.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Tower of Dawn and *Six of Crows* both have a disabled main character and use them as narrative prosthesis, albeit with different representational outcome. In *SoC*, the disabled main character is a fully realised human being with a subject position, in which his disability plays a role, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. In *ToD*, the disabled main character is a one-dimensional character, unlike the other main characters who are more rounded and complex, identified and governed only by his disabled body. "The ascribing of collective [stereotypical] fixed identity statuses" contributes to the perpetuation of stigma that excludes people with disabilities (Smith-Chandler and Swart 421). Therefore, representation should be complex, portraying the disabled individual as "a physical, emotional, social, political, and spiritual being" (421). Basically, characters with disabilities should be allowed the same complexity as their nondisabled counterparts.

Narrative structures, language uses, and characterisations can undermine or construct accurate representations. Just the telling of a story is not enough for accurate representation. Textual mechanisms can counteract any body-inclusive exclamations by characters. Disability is a category that has many stereotypical tropes. To avoid these, an author has to be aware of what they are and what their effect is. This gives them the responsibility to not only research the practical aspects of a certain disability, but also the effect of narrative structures, language, identity politics, and social structures.

In *SoC*, character, disability, and narrative are not conflated, even though superficially Kaz seems a stereotypically disabled character. In *ToD*, character, disability and narrative are conflated, resulting in a stereotypical portrayal of disability. In *SoC*, Kaz is in a subject position in the narrative, while in *ToD*, disability takes that place, not Chaol. The difference is in the narrative structures of the texts. Instead of directly introducing a character as disabled, the introduction of traits can be done in instalments. Because of existing societal stigma, introducing someone as disabled right away invites readers to dismiss the character as deficit on the basis of the "frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute (Garland-Thomson 13). To avoid this, characters can be first introduced through their style, personality, interests, and place within a group. When their disability is introduced later on, it becomes one of their traits instead of their defining one.

Schaller's theory of "multiple and shifting identities" establishes that disability is part one's identity, but that it is not a master identity category (95). The portrayal of disability as an all encompassing identity contributes to the perpetuation of disability as inability. Disability influences one's life and identity, but it does not rule out ability in every other area of one's life. Society's perception of disability as the master category does not allow for ability in someone with disability because of a socially ingrained mindset of disability and ability as binary. The literary acknowledgement of the complexity of identity challenges cultural perceptions of disability as "unitary and unchangeable" (Schaller 92). Therefore, literature should incorporate this aspect of identity experience in its characters with disabilities. Literary representations should refuse to have disability mean lack of ability, while also recognising a difference in ability in areas that are influenced by having a disability. However, disability should not be the primary point of character, while acknowledging the continuous presence of disability in someone's life.

Another structural mechanism that is essential and if done wrongly detrimental to accurate disability representation is cause and effect. In *ToD*, Chaol's negative feelings are linked to his disability. His disability causes his negative attitude towards his motionless lower body, with the effect that being disabled is portrayed as undesirable and defective. In *SoC*, Kaz's thirst for revenge is not caused by disability. The traumatic event of losing his brother has two effects: his PTSD with touch aversion and a thirst for revenge on the person he deems responsible for his brother's death. When the narrative refuses to label disability as the cause for flaws, mistakes, motivations and other stereotypical tropes, it refuses the physiognomic mindset that "a physical dis/ability indicates a cognitive or communicative one as well" (Schaller 90). Narratives need to refuse to conflate disability and character, and through this disassociate disability from having a causal relation to deficits in character. The omission of the cause of a deficit of character will automatically be filled in by readers' prior experience of it as cause and effect. To avoid this, the narrative needs to explicitly disassociate disability from flaws. This can contributes to a change in the persistent interpretation of disability as an outward signifier of an inward deficiency in western culture.

Paul de Man identifies that language is unable to have "the actual expression coincide with what has to be expressed" (11). For disability narratives this means that ableist language is used to express an 'ideology of bodily variety'. In *SoC*, it was

sometimes needed to indicate which of Kaz's legs was meant. His disabled leg is indicated as his bad leg. Despite the problematic nature of bad in relation to a disability, language is unable to differentiate between the two states without using language to attributes negative value to the disability. Furthermore, De Man identifies another barrier which is the act of interpretation by the audience (11). Language is filled with ableist imagery, "which assumes the standpoint of the able-bodied and able-minded" (Joshua 307). A narrative is made up of language. Through the inability of language to express exactly what it means to express and the further distortion through interpretation by its audience, it is inevitable that a narrative contains ableist language or language that can be interpreted as such. However, despite its inevitability narratives can try to avoid ableist imagery where possible. Recognition of the problematic nature of such language in the narrative is important as it shows a refusal to accept disability as an inferior position even in language.

Because of the inevitability of ableist language, the mimesis en diegesis of text can convey different messages. Language is able to "hide meaning behind a misleading sign" (De Man 11). A refusal to speak negatively about disability can be undermined by overly positive language about nondisabled bodies. In order to present a narrative about a character with a disability without assigning value to various bodily states, I argue that authors should be aware of the mimesis of a text and align the mimesis with the message that they want to convey about disability.

Misrepresentation is not transformed by just portraying positive images of people with disabilities. Accurate representation entails "the refusal to disavow or suppress the site of struggle and oppression" (Hevey qtd. in Cachia 258). If narratives ignore the real life struggle of social oppression and physical challenges the romanticised product fails to acknowledge the social reality of people with disabilities. In that case, the narrative conforms to the cultural script that dictates that accounts of people with disabilities should "relieve their auditors' discomfort" (Couser 604). Nondisabled people often do not want to know about the sites of struggle, for often they are part of the problem. The refusal to ignore the site of struggle and oppression challenges cultural scripts that solely blame the disabled body. In order to challenge and change false cultural scripts of disability, fiction should incorporate these aspects in their narratives. This should be done without portraying disability as undesirable, but instead that social oppression and stigmatisation is undesirable.

The relationship of someone with disability changes constantly, for "there is no single way to make meaning of dis/ability in one's life" (Schaller 97). There is no homogeneous disability experience, fiction should represent this aspect. Kaz's relationship with his cane is different from his relationship with his gloves. Even further, his relationship with his cane changes depending on the situation, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. Fiction should represent this heterogeneous nature of disability identity, refusing to resort to stereotypical notions of disability as a uniform experience for every person with a disability. By portraying disability experience as complex, notions of deviance and necessity are challenged. The uniform association of disability with deficiency and need will need to change when cultural representations present various forms and experiences of disability.

For a character to represent a fully realised human being Siebers's theory of complex embodiment should be considered during the process of characterisation. Disability is not just an individual identity or medical condition. It is a social identity as well. Despite an individual experience of identity as various and multiple, society perceives disability as homogeneous. The navigation of someone with a disability with one's physical and social environment and the way it constantly influences each other is both a feature that should be portrayed in a text as a way of thinking about disability and narrative. The interaction between people with disabilities and their environment is part of their social reality. In order to positively change their social reality, the current one should be exposed and challenged, also through cultural outlets.

The relationship between disability and narrative should also adhere to this theory of complex embodiment. Narrative prosthesis is often the exploitation of disability by the narrative. However, when disability and narrative influence each other, the relation becomes symbiotic. Disability should influence the narrative instead of being overlooked. However, aside from the portrayal of the lived experience of having a disability, disability can also influence the story by complicating or enabling actions in the narrative. The border between disability influencing the narrative and the narrative using its narrative possibilities that is thin and sometimes even imperceptible. Does Kaz's PTSD influence the story when he cannot visit Inej while she is near death? Or does the narrative want to keep Kaz away because his refusal to visit will hurt Inej and thus complicate their brooding romance. Sometimes the narrative potential of disability is visibly used. In *SoC*, Kaz's gloves enable Inej to climb the prison's hot incinerator shaft in

order to escape. According to the gang's previous knowledge the incinerator should not have been used, in order to create more suspense the narrative adds an unexpected hot incinerator shaft to complicate their escape. Kaz's use of gloves – and thus his disability – enables them to still escape the prison. The alternating influence of disability and narrative enables narrative prosthesis to be a narrative function without being problematic. When disability is just the crutch on which the narrative relies, any use of disability in the narrative becomes problematic. Through complex embodiment the narrative can use narrative potential of disability, without failing to include the people who have disabilities in the narrative.

Despite the seeming long list of things to consider when writing about characters with disabilities, disability should not be the focal point of the narrative but should be considered in the narrative. Analysing narratives by authors who have disabilities can "transform understanding of structure, genre and narrative form" (Hall qtd in Joshua 306). Bardugo is an author who has a disability herself. Even though, the causal relation between her having a disability and her presentation of a disabled main character as a fully realised human being cannot be proven, the implication is there. People who know what it is like to have a disability are able to provide insight that those who have never experienced it cannot. Maas employed sensitivity readers, yet her work is still ableist. Minorities are right in demanding that there is "nothing about us, without us" for others cannot accurately portray their experience. Without blaming those who have disabilities for the lack of accurate portrayals, because for most of history their voices were silenced, their contribution is invaluable to a change in disability discourse.

However, this does not relieve nondisabled writers from their responsibility to research and craft accurate representations of people with disabilities. Writing is a craft, one that should be learned just like one studies to become a teacher or doctor. When putting words into the world, authors have the responsibility to consider their effect and adjust their words accordingly. "Incomplete prototypical characters" still dominate literature (Ware 111). To rebalance the scale and so impact the cultural framework through which people with disabilities are perceived an influx of dynamic and complex characters with disabilities is needed. There is no singular remedy to cure disability narratives from their misrepresentations. However, when all aspects of characters with disabilities are considered with complexity in mind and authors are aware of ableist language, fiction can contribute to the cultural change from disability as "something that

is wrong with bodies" to "a way of thinking about bodies" (Ware 110). Further, literature can contribute to an understanding of people with disabilities as complex individuals, instead of disabled bodies that are consumed by their disabledness. To change disability discourse, complexity and awareness are two key concepts in the creation of a new generation of representations of characters with disabilities.

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