



Disability: Culture Community and Change: Sinners, Saints or Victims

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LANGUAGE – CULTURE AND POWER

Power

- ☛ Foundation of shared meaning
- ☛ Vehicle through which culture is transmitted, maintained, and changed
- ☛ Form and Structure – Vocabulary and Grammar
- ☛ Process of development – Introduction, Usage and Discard

Meaning

- 📖 Common sense
- 📖 Literal
- 📖 Technical/professional

Exploring normality and difference

common meanings

What we believe and value about being a human being/person
Mind, Body, Sensory and Spiritual

Definitions and boundaries of what constitutes the “norm”

Definitions of what is considered to be a salient point of
difference

Where impairment or disability is situated

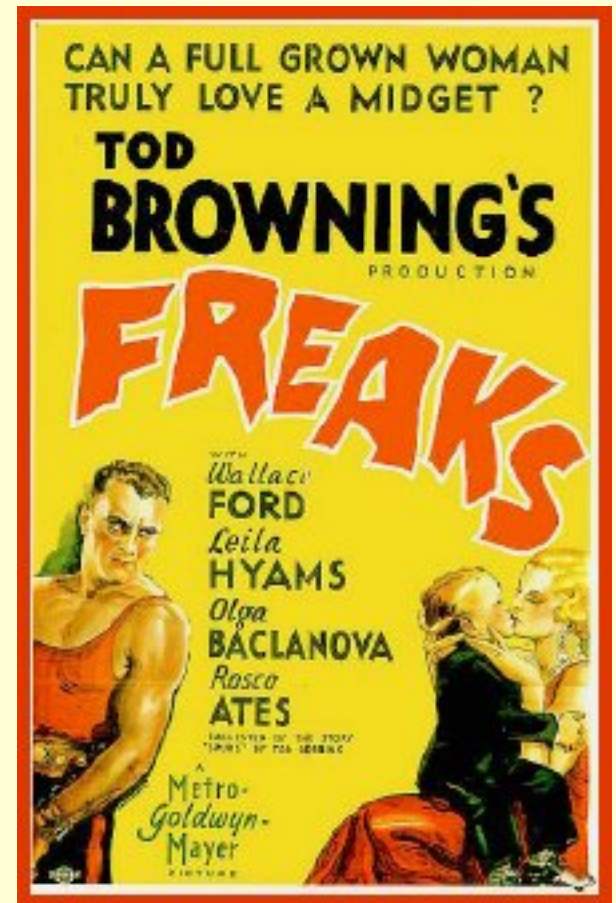
DEFINED IN TERMS OF WHAT IS NORMAL

Culture - not constant in time

Common meanings can be

① “about known meanings to which we are trained (*that is traditional*); as well as “new meanings which are offered and tested” (*that is creative*)

(R Williams, 1989, 4)



common responses

(interactions, behaviours, practices)

👍 What is the acceptable way of behaving towards people who have an impairment?

👍 What are considered normal responses to the existence of physical or behavioural anomaly

👍 What is customary for us to do if we have one or if we see one

👍 What rituals are conducted

That is how do we ritualise and customise our practices

Some Representations



Hapless victim of Divine Intervention



Hapless victim of Evil Intervention



Altered Human Beings



Scary and Monstrous



Perpetual Innocent

Hapless victim of circumstance, divine or evil intervention

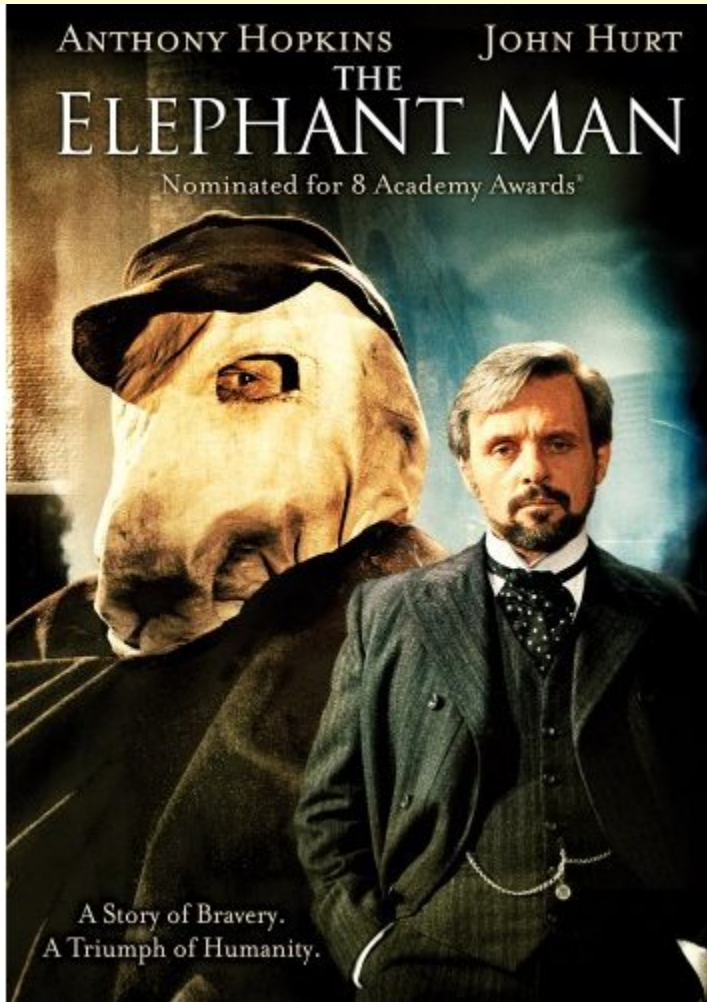
- The impairment is the result of some sin
- It is possible through the intervention of the gods to transform the “evil” child into a saved/innocent person
- We see together the possibility of being both sinful and innocent
- Of being the sinner and the saint

Being a victim implies

a state of not having power to make choices and to control your environment.

some form of violence or violent act be it against the person or property.

Altered human beings



“alterity”, that it how the human or natural is altered.

- It presents an “other” which we do not wish to be like.

A Story of Bravery. A Triumph of Humanity

The search for sameness

- The fundamental force of humankind is to find sameness
- Humans desire the similar, the same, to be like the others
- To be desired
- To have the objects of desire of the other person

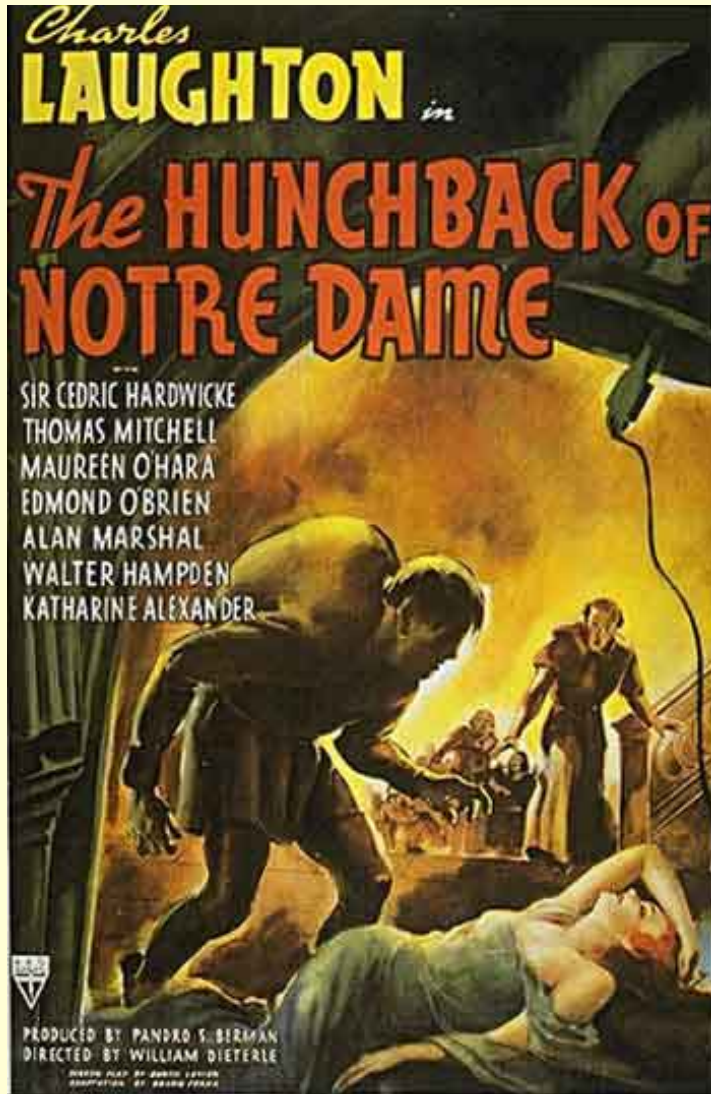
(Stiker, 1999.)

- where this desire is not satisfied
- where this desire cannot be found
- Where the search for sameness is frustrated

Violence results

(Stiker, 1999.)

Scary and monstrous



- Repulsion
- Fear
- Curiosity
- criminal
- only barely human
- powerless and
- pathetic.

They are used to evoke pity or fear or to contribute to an atmosphere of mystery, deprivation or menace. (Barnes, p 192).



- **Perpetually innocent child**
- **Saintly character who rises above all trials and tribulations to achieve the impossible**
...

Interpreting choices

We cannot necessarily infer all the criteria for free choice have been met from the fact that someone has made a particular choice

- 👍 Being comfortable with their/our lives
- 👍 Celebrating difference and rejecting the ideology of normality
- 👍 Having the right to be “insiders”
- 👍 Essential for inclusion



In building our own unique movement, we may not only be making our own history but also making a contribution to the history of humankind

Disabled people not only look towards a society without structural, environmental or attitudinal barriers, but also a society which celebrates difference and values people irrespective of race, sexual preference, gender, age or impairment

Swain and French “Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability”,
Disability and Society, Vol 15 No 4, 2000