

Chapter I

Introduction

“In a word, literature is my utopia”

— Hellen Keller (*The Story of My Life*)

Literature exhibits a perennial quality by serving as an archival repository of written works. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that some literary compositions are primarily designed for oral transmission rather than textual consumption. Literature, as an art form, functions as a mirror of human existence, encapsulating individual and collective experiences, encompassing a spectrum of cultural traditions, behavioural norms, perceptions, ideas, and intellectual contemplations. This nuanced perspective underscores the capacity of literature to serve as a conduit for the voices of individuals who transcend temporal, spatial, and societal confines. The scholarly domain encompasses a diverse array of literary canons, including American Literature, Canadian Literature, Indian Literature, as well as specialised fields such as Disability Studies. These distinctive subfields within literature contribute to the enrichment of the understanding of various aspects of human culture and experience.

Disability is a socially constructed concept, influenced by spatial, temporal, and inclusive factors. As Lennard J. Davis in *The Disability Studies Reader* notes that, “the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities” (197). Perception of disability varies within contextual frameworks, where normalcy is defined by the able-bodied population, leading to the marginalisation of those not meeting this standard. Disability Studies focuses on proactive interventions

and advocacy for disabled individuals' rights, considering cultural and political dimensions. This academic discipline challenges historical portrayals associating disability with malevolence or negative karma. In this context, the significance of Disability Studies lies in reshaping conventional perspectives on disability.

The Disability Rights Movement of the 1950s marked a transformative period, as numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) emerged to reshape the perception of disability positively. These NGOs aimed at presenting individuals with disabilities as a collective group in need of professional support, shifting from marginalisation to inclusion. This era marked a significant transition where disability transformed from a personal to a social issue.

In the 1960s, disability activists, aligned with the broader civil rights movement, advocated for equal rights and opportunities for disabled individuals, fostering unity across various disabilities. As Anne Waldschmidt et al. in *Culture–Theory–Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies* say, "... with its emphasis on emerging disability identities and disability community consolidated the disability movement for the future" (71). During the movement's early stages, disability studies were largely absent from academia. However, the landscape began to change with the publication of Lennard J. Davis's edited volume, *The Disability Studies Reader*, shedding light on the societal status and portrayal of disabled individuals.

Lennard J. Davis, a key figure in Disability Studies, outlines two waves in his approach within *The Disability Studies Reader*. The first wave involves establishing foundational ideas, forming a cohesive identity for various impairments, and advocating for respect and recognition. Davis has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for acknowledging disability in everyday life and literature. In the second

wave, Davis critically examines established truths, introducing contradictions and questions about disabled identity, challenging conventional understanding, and probing the nature of Disability Studies and its complexities.

Mike Oliver, a pioneer in disability studies and the first professor in the field, has made foundational contributions, notably through works like *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice* and *The Politics of Disablement*. In his personal journey, Oliver, who became disabled after an accident, critically examines the able-bodied perspective on disability, exposing prejudiced attitudes. This pivotal moment prompts a reconfiguration of interpretations of disability, as highlighted by Davis in *The Disability Studies Reader*, emphasising the historical oppression and repression faced by individuals with disabilities. Davis aptly states, “For centuries, people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group ...” (xv).

Davis and Oliver shed light on the oppression and isolation faced by the disabled community, emphasising limited opportunities within mainstream society. This perspective influenced Oliver’s creation of two models: the individual model, attributing disability to personal tragedy and impairments, and the social model, attributing disability to societal failures. This neglect of disabled individuals’ experiences has led writers to question a society that doubly disables through an ability-based perspective, as noted by Oliver in *Walking into Darkness: The Experience of Spinal Cord*, “Disability has been redefined by many disabled people ... as the social barriers, restrictions, and/or oppressions they face ...” (10).

These developments paved the way for the emergence of a new discourse on disability. Individuals are subjected to scrutiny from a third-party perspective, categorised on a disability-ability scale, resulting in a challenge to existing notions and a shift in the perspective on disability. New regulations and rules were

introduced, which, paradoxically, presented additional obstacles for disabled individuals.

Numerous disability theorists have prompted diverse perspectives regarding the fundamental source of stigma and disadvantages encountered by individuals with disabilities. As Anne Waldschmidt et al. in *Culture-Theory-Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies* points out, “Our dominant understanding is that disability confers pain, disease, functional limitation, disadvantage, and social stigma; limits opportunities; and reduces quality of life. Eugenic logic tells us that our world would be a better place if disability could be eliminated” (53). The prevailing stereotypical attitudes and stigmatisation directed at disabled individuals can be attributed to a specific group of professionals within the healthcare and service sectors who wield influence within an ableist society. These individuals frequently engage in discriminatory practices and undervalue those requiring their assistance.

This negative outlook towards disability poses a significant barrier for disabled individuals seeking employment, as it perpetuates the notion among the able-bodied population that disabled individuals may continually rely on assistance and could potentially underperform in the workplace. Similarly, a disabled image is cultivated within various forms of artistic expression, including literature and art, reinforcing ideals of physical perfection that permeate all social institutions and contribute to the establishment of an able-bodied environment.

Numerous disability models have been developed to address the concept of disability. From a socio-political perspective, disability is regarded as a complex amalgamation of conditions. Goffman’s examination of stigma and the social construction of ‘normalcy’ underscores that individuals failing to meet certain criteria

are subjected to stigmatisation. This very notion of ‘normalcy’ has become problematic in the context of disability.

Initially, disability distinguishes between impairment (mental or physical limitations) and the socially constructed nature of the term. Impairment refers to physical limitations, while disability emphasises shortcomings in a socially constructed environment for individuals with disabilities. This leads to two models: the ‘medical model’ focusing on physical aspects and the ‘social model’ addressing disability within a socially constructed society.

Many of these disability models have displaced the traditional medical model of disability, as exemplified by Jerome E. Bickenbach’s citation of Boorse in “Models of Disablement, Universalism, and the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps.” Boorse defines disability as “an observable deviation from the biomedical norms of structure or function that directly results from a disease, trauma, or other health condition” (1173). This definition underscores how the social structure itself either creates or engenders a disadvantage for individuals falling below the normalcy threshold.

As Bickenbach cites Harlan Hahn, the disadvantage experienced by disabled individuals “stems from the failure of a structured social environment to adjust to the needs and aspirations of citizens with disabilities rather than from the inability of a disabled individual to adapt to the demands of society” (1174). The expectation of normalcy within society creates a crisis for disabled individuals.

In 1980, the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH) presented a model of disablement that portrayed it as a continuum of health experiences related to various aspects of morbidity, including disease, trauma, mental illness, chronic conditions, and more. According to ICIDH, disability

is defined as any limitation or inability to engage in an activity falling within the range or scale considered normal for a human being. Disability or impairment impacts an individual's physical presence, autonomy, mobility, livelihood, and their social integration into society. Hence, this framework demonstrates that the existence of disability is contingent on the societal expectation of 'normal' performance from individuals. According to the World Health Organisation, "Disadvantage occurs as a result of [the individual] being unable to conform to the norms of his universe. Handicap is thus a social phenomenon, representing the social and environmental consequences for the individual stemming from the presence of impairments and disabilities" (29).

Hence, it conveys the notion that various diseases can potentially result in impairment or disability and, in doing so, delineates an individual's capability and capacities. This perspective highlights that disadvantage emerges when an individual is unable to align with the norms of their environment. Handicap is consequently viewed as a social phenomenon, representing the social and environmental repercussions experienced by the individual due to the presence of impairments and disabilities.

As per the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), the organisation's definition of "impairment" characterises it as a functional limitation experienced by an individual stemming from physical, mental, or sensory impairments. In contrast, 'disability' is described as a restriction in the opportunities available to an individual to engage in regular life activities, often making it challenging to interact with those who are not similarly impaired due to physical and societal hindrances. As articulated by Bickenbach in his work "Models of Disablement, Universalism, and the International Classification of Impairments,

Disabilities, and Handicaps,” “Disability is a loss or limitation of opportunity to participate brought about by social and physical barriers. Society disabled people with impairments; disability is imposed on people. Justice demands the removal of these socially created barriers. Anything less is discriminatory” (1176).

The inception of the social model of disability in Britain has faced criticism from subsequent theorists. One notable critique pertains to the model’s handling of impairment avoidance, a persistent issue. In *The Disability Reader*, Tom Shakespeare raises an important concern regarding the model’s logical extension: “If the social model argument was pushed to its logical extreme, we might not see impairment as something which we should make efforts to avoid” (Davis 13).

This critique doesn’t negate the social model’s significance in initiating a political movement challenging prevailing societal norms within specific contexts. However, it highlights the need to address various dimensions of disability beyond the dichotomy of medical versus social perspectives. Dismissing the body and impairment only serves to suppress individual experiences of impairment while reinforcing the idea that a permanent able body doesn’t exist. In this context Davis in his book quotes Tom Shakespeare, who emphasises this complexity, “While some people with impairment resist identification as disabled, because they want to see themselves as normal, others are more likely to identify in terms of alternative parts of their experience” (21). His stance underscores the limited representation of disability within the social model framework, advocating not for a mere adaptation but a re-evaluation of where the model falls short in aligning with contemporary understandings of disability.

Subsequently, Swain and French introduced the Affirmation Model, aiming to address criticisms directed at the social model. They did not position it as an outright

alternative but rather as an extension founded on social model principles. In “Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability,” they articulate a perspective rooted in a non-tragic view of disability and impairment. They advocate embracing positive social identities for disabled individuals, acknowledging their lifestyle and culture despite being impaired or disabled. This challenges the tendency of temporarily able-bodied individuals to overlook their own impairment or disability, preferring to be seen as different within able-bodied margins.

Swain and French posit that unattended impairment could indeed become problematic and stress that their model emerges not solely from disabled people’s experiences within a disabling society but also from their agency as valid individuals shaping their lifestyles, culture, and identities. Their model diverges by challenging the notion that ‘the problem’ resides within the individual or impairment, directly countering the social model’s focus on societal barriers.

The transitional phase within the disability model raises pertinent questions about the ongoing discrimination faced by those labelled as disabled. Colin Cameron, in *Disability Studies: A Student’s Guide*, sheds light on a crucial disparity, “while problems faced by able-bodied individuals are considered normal and acceptable, they can seek assistance from others without feelings of guilt or inferiority” (18). However, disabled individuals encounter limitations when seeking help, particularly when their needs are directly associated with their disability.

French’s affirmation model emphasises the need to recognise the oppressive contexts embedded in the daily lives of disabled individuals. The issue lies not in the experience of impairment itself but rather in how society, primarily the able-bodied, reacts or responds to these impairments. Cameron, citing Hugh in *Disability Studies: A Student’s Guide*, notes “... how the social and physical world is fashioned to suit

non-disabled individuals, serving as a space tailored to their bodies and structured around their needs” (19). Even the norms governing communication are influenced by the needs and abilities of the non-disabled population.

In “Disability Studies/Not Disability Studies,” Simi Linton emphasises that society tends to shape disabled individuals to fit into existing structures, often neglecting their inclusion in cultural representations. Linton advises the nondisabled writers to engage in disability studies, highlighting the importance of diverse perspectives to avoid insularity. They argue that such engagement can dispel the perpetual oppression narrative of disabled individuals. Linton encourages creating a platform for nondisabled writers to share their views on disability, challenging the notion that everyone experiences disability. The text suggests that disabled people’s cultural expressions through their bodies can introduce new artistic forms and theories. Linton contends that the uniqueness and deviance of disabled bodies can break the monotony of the non-disabled world, aiming to give disabled bodies opportunities for artistic expression.

Various branches of disability studies, including feminist disability studies, emphasise the societal interpretation of disability as a cultural construct rather than an inherent flaw. Garland-Thomson in “Feminist Disability Studies,” sees disability as “a cultural interpretation of human variation rather than an inherent inferiority, a pathology to cure, or an undesirable trait to eliminate” (2). Disability is viewed as a catalyst for marginalising diverse human differences, perpetuating representations that devalue certain bodies. These perspectives emphasise the need for a nuanced understanding of disability beyond traditional binaries.

In literature, disability often conforms to archetypes such as sympathy seekers or antagonists, reflecting implicit political agendas. Canadian literature, historically

invisible until the mid-twentieth century, gained recognition as writers addressed its invisibility. Manorama Trikha in *Canadian Literature: Recent Essays* notes that Canadian literature has a much longer history than is generally assumed, which includes a long phase of ‘invisibility.’ Trikha remarks, “It was only faintly heard even by its own people up to the 1950’s ...” (10).

There are several Canadian writers who have depicted disability. Hugh MacLennan, a novelist and essayist, offers insightful social and psychological critiques of modern Canadian life. He has won the Governor General’s Literary Award three times for fiction, and one notable work of his is *Two Solitudes*. His works portray the violence prevalent in Canadian society, focusing on themes such as World War and the mental state of children with overbearing, insecure parents, as well as young men mutilated by war.

Timothy Irving Frederick Findley, another Canadian novelist and playwright, received numerous accolades including the Governor General’s Award, the Canadian Authors Association Award, an ACTRA award, the Order of Ontario, and the Ontario Trillium Award. His writing style is characterised by Southern Ontario Gothic, and his works often explore themes of mental illness, gender, and sexuality.

Early perceptions of disability were negative, emphasising dependence and evoking sympathy, while contemporary perspectives focus on societal responses to differences influenced by various factors. This shift in understanding, reflected in disability studies moving from the ‘sick role’ to the social model, underscores society’s failure to universally accommodate everyone. Rachna Gilmore, known for her children’s books, challenges misconceptions about disabilities through works like *A Friend Like Zilla* and *A Screaming Kind of Day*, offering multiple perspectives and questioning societal attitudes toward disabled individuals.

Liane Shaw, a young adult fiction writer, received acclaim for *The Stone Rainbow* which shows concern for young people facing challenges. In *The Colour of Silence*, she explores disability through characters coping with trauma and societal attitudes. Susan Glickman, known for her fiction and non-fiction, was a finalist in the Fiction: Young Adult category of the 2019 International Book Awards. Her work *The Discovery of Flight* portrays disability through a sister with cerebral palsy. Victoria Freeman, an author and educator, reflects on her experience as a sibling of a person with an intellectual disability in *A World Without Martha: A Memoir of Sisters, Disability, and Difference*.

Beth Goobie, a poet and fiction writer, explores themes of physical distortion and dismemberment in *Could I Have My Body Back Now, Please?* alongside other works focusing on domestic violence and various genres. Similarly, Jacqueline Guest, a Métis writer and activist, received the Indspire Award in 2012 for her outstanding career achievements. Her award-winning books for both children and adults feature characters grappling with issues such as bullying, blended families, and physical challenges, serving as strong role models for today's youth.

Kathleen McDonnell, known for her diverse body of work in plays, fiction, and non-fiction for both adults and young audiences, tackles issues of inclusion and barriers in her notable work *Emily Included*, which follows the story of a young protagonist with severe Cerebral Palsy fighting for her right to attend mainstream school. Similarly, Christina Minaki, a disability advocate and social justice educator, challenges societal perceptions of disability in her writings, including her master's thesis on oppressive portrayals of disability in fiction. In *Zoe's Extraordinary Holiday Adventures*, Minaki explores themes of diversity and inclusion through the

perspective of a wheelchair user, challenging societal norms and fostering understanding of differences within the community.

Brenda Baker, an award-winning writer, performer, and recording artist, explores themes of disability and acceptance in her work *Camp Outlook*, which depicts the disappointment and eventual acceptance experienced by a young protagonist after her differently-abled brother's birth. Through the title metaphor of *Camp Outlook*, Baker questions the importance of conformity to societal norms. Similarly, Pamela Porter's works focus on childhood experiences in opposition to dominant culture, promoting social justice through nuanced characterisation. In *The Crazy Man*, Porter delves into the acceptance and resilience of protagonist Emaline Bitterman, who faces sudden changes after losing her leg in a farm accident. Through Emaline's interactions with her caregiver, Agnus, Porter challenges societal attitudes towards disability and emphasises human resilience.

Deborah Ellis, a fiction writer and activist, draws inspiration from her travels and interviews, addressing themes of war, immigration, disability, and new perspectives in her works, earning accolades such as the Governor General's Literary Award. Similarly, Alice Kuipers, a young adult novelist, explores trauma in her work *Lost for Words*, emphasising the shock syndrome experienced by protagonist Sophie. Like Beverley Brenna, Kuipers underscores the therapeutic role of writing in healing, portraying Sophie's journey towards resilience and emotional expression through her relationships and writing. Kuipers authentically portrays the diverse ways individuals cope with trauma and its aftermath.

Dorothy Ellen Palmer, a writer with a disability, consultant, and retired high school drama teacher, won the 2020 Helen Henderson Award for disability journalism. Her novel, *Fenelon Falls*, depicts a physically disabled teenager

navigating familial strife during the 1969 Moonwalk-Woodstock era, emphasising unsentimental family dynamics with dark humour. Similarly, Jean Little, a writer with a disability and an expert in Children's Literature, focuses on disability in her work, often reflecting societal attitudes towards the disabled. Her novel *From Anna*, portrays a protagonist initially struggling with clumsiness and academic failure due to her disability but ultimately finding empowerment and education. Little's simple language underscores social barriers and the journey toward inclusivity for individuals with disabilities.

There are other books that offer insightful portrayals of individuals with disabilities, shaping readers' understanding and perception of these experiences. Pamela Porter's *The Crazy Man* (2005) is one such example, exploring visible disability through its protagonist Emaline, whose life takes a dramatic turn after a farm accident distorts her leg. Assigned to assist her is Angus, who faces prejudice due to his mental disability. With support from friends and her teacher, Emaline navigates physical and mental recovery, while Porter delves into themes of prejudice and self-acceptance.

Similarly, Stephen Kuusisto's *Planet of the Blind* (1998) is another noteworthy work in this realm, centring on a protagonist initially in denial of his blindness, striving to blend in as an able-bodied person. However, circumstances compel him to acknowledge his disability, leading to a transformative journey towards self-acceptance and a newfound optimism. The novel challenges societal perceptions of disability, advocating for self-worth and societal inclusivity.

Jen Powley's memoir, *Just Jen: Thriving Through Multiple Sclerosis* (2017), explores her journey with sclerosis, a prevalent condition in Canada. Initially grappling with questions of 'why me,' Powley's perspective shifts after diagnosis as

she embraces her disability as integral of her identity. The memoir candidly addresses her struggles with eating disorders, depression, alienation, and abuse, offering hope to others facing similar challenges. Powley's narrative provides readers with realistic insights and encourages a re-evaluation of societal norms.

Adam Pottle, a writer with hearing disability, released his notable work *Mantis Dreams: The Journal of Dr. Dexter Ripley* (2013), a satire novel. Dr. Ripley, the protagonist, grapples with a rare and debilitating disease, showcasing the confinement of disabled individuals. Despite his challenges, Dr. Ripley focuses on creating a philosophy centred on positivity and imagination.

Terry Galloway's memoir *Mean Little Deaf Queer* (2009) positively portrays disability. Galloway, affected by an experimental drug taken by her mother during pregnancy, becomes deaf in childhood. Despite facing teasing and isolation, Galloway adapts and overcomes barriers, emerging stronger from the experience.

Emily Rapp's memoir *Poster Child* (2006) recounts her life with a congenital bone and tissue disorder, leading to the amputation of her left foot. Despite her challenges, Rapp maintains a positive outlook, viewing her disability as a catalyst for independence and self-awareness.

Susan Nussbaum's novel *Good Kings Bad Kings* (2013) sheds light on the struggles of disabled individuals in society. Drawing from her own experiences as a wheelchair user, Nussbaum explores the fears and misconceptions surrounding disability. The novel centres on the Illinois Learning and Life Skill Centre, where characters like Yessenia Lopez navigate their dreams of independence amidst societal barriers. Through Lopez's storytelling, the novel captures the transformation of anger and despair into empowerment among disabled individuals.

Judy Blume's novel *Deenie* (2015) follows the protagonist, Deenie, who suddenly becomes disabled due to Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis. Prior to her diagnosis, Deenie held mean views towards disability, using derogatory nicknames for disabled individuals. However, her own experience prompts a transformation, leading her to empathise with others' pain and struggles. Blume's work emphasises the importance of understanding and respecting individuals with disabilities, urging readers not to underestimate or mock them. She advocates inclusivity and acceptance within society, emphasising the value of each person's individuality in making the world a better place.

Among these writers, Beverley Brenna finds a special place because of her significant contributions to the exploration of neurodevelopmental disorders, such as Asperger's syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), in her trilogy novels and *Moon Children*. Her narratives provide a nuanced and critical examination of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, moving beyond policy ideals to depict the complex realities at both individual and societal levels. Brenna's adept storytelling and her focus on unsettling prevailing perceptions make her work a compelling and concrete subject of study within the broader discourse on disability in Canada.

Beverley Brenna, born on October 1, 1962, in Saskatoon, Canada, is a multifaceted Canadian literary figure. Renowned as a novelist, short story writer, poet, and playwright, she also stands out as a special educator with a Ph.D. in Children's Literature. Brenna's career has been marked by her commitment to literacy and children's literature, a passion she currently fosters as an Associate Professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

Brenna's literary journey commenced early in life, as she began writing in grade five, delving into poetry by the age of seven. Her inspiration traces back to her mother, who ignited her love for literature. Drawing from her experiences as a special educator, Brenna intricately crafts characters inspired by the students she has nurtured.

Brenna's significant contributions to literature have garnered her numerous accolades, including the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Research Award (1991), the Dr. Stirling McDowell Research Award (2002), and the University of Alberta Provost Doctoral Entrance Award (Honorary) in 2008. Notably, her article "One Literate Life" secured her the Inaugural Dale D. Johnson Outstanding Article Award from the International Reading Association in 2013, while her novel *The White Bicycle* received the Michael L. Printz Children's Literature Honor Book Award in the same year. In recognition of her exceptional contributions to education, Brenna was honoured with the Provost's College Teaching Award from the College of Education in 2016 and the Advising Excellence Award from the U of S Grad Students' Association in 2017. Her nomination for the Governor General's Award in the Children's Literature category for *The White Bicycle* in 2013 further underscores her literary prowess. Beverley Brenna's diverse body of work continues to make a lasting impact on the realms of literature and education.

Beverley Brenna's early works demonstrate her versatility and ability to engage young readers. *Daddy Longlegs at Birch Lane* (1996) is a picture book tailored for children aged four-seven, where Brenna's keen observation skills translate into captivating fictional characters, using bugs to pique young readers' interest. Her subsequent novel, *Spider Summer* (1998), targets children aged nine-twelve and ventures into the realm of realistic fiction. This detective-style narrative follows a

protagonist unravelling mysteries within their apartment complex, while also exploring themes of parental secrets and homesickness. Through relatable characters like Luke, Brenna weaves a compelling tale of friendship and adventure, capturing the imaginations of her young audience.

The third novel, *The Keeper of the Trees* (1999), immerses readers in a fantasy world tailored for children aged between nine and twelve. Set in London, the story follows protagonist Elizabeth as she befriends Maud, a girl with supernatural abilities dedicated to protecting the environment and animals. When Maud falls ill, Elizabeth steps up to safeguard their shared mission from her aunt Julia. Brenna's firsthand experiences in London, where she encountered a character reminiscent of Elizabeth, infuse the narrative with authenticity and depth, resulting in a captivating literary creation.

Her next notable Young Adult novel, *Wild Orchid* (2005), delves into the story of Taylor Jane, who grapples with Asperger's Syndrome while embarking on a journey toward independence. Brenna offers detailed insights into the behavioural patterns associated with Asperger's Syndrome, illustrating how individuals may resist change and engage in repetitive behaviours due to their condition. Drawing inspiration from real-life encounters at a special school, Brenna crafts the character of Jane, portraying the struggles individuals with Asperger's Syndrome face in social interactions and the need for specialised education techniques. Through Taylor's narrative, Brenna sheds light on the challenges and complexities of navigating the world with Asperger's Syndrome, providing readers with a poignant and enlightening exploration of neurodiversity.

Brenna's *The Moon Children* (2007) focuses on the protagonist Billy, who is suffering from fetal Alcoholic Spectrum Disorder (FASD). This novel also explores

the character Natasha, who has been adopted from Romanian and endures selective mutism. FASD, often caused by excessive alcohol consumption during pregnancy, affects Billy's ability to communicate and his hyperactive nature. Natasha, traumatised by her experiences in an orphanage, becomes non-verbal. Brenna draws inspiration from real individuals to craft these characters, providing readers with a poignant portrayal of the challenges faced by those affected by FASD and selective mutism.

Brenna's *Something to Hang on To* (2009) is a collection of Young Adult Short Stories portraying the challenges faced by teens in difficult circumstances. This anthology includes characters grappling with invisible disabilities, Down Syndrome, Muscular Dystrophy, Autism, fear of heights, and family violence. Brenna employs first-person narration in "One of the Guys" and explores absurdity in "Travelling Light," drawing inspiration from the works of Beckett and Pinter. Through these stories, Brenna offers readers a glimpse into the complexities of adolescent life and resilience in the face of adversity.

Brenna's *Waiting for No One* (2010) serves as a sequel to *Wild Orchid*, continuing the journey of protagonist Taylor Jane as she navigates university life and job applications. Brenna portrays Jane's struggle for independence and her efforts to control her temper, depicting Asperger's Syndrome as both a challenge and a gift. Jane's ability to memorise details contrasts with the struggles of others, highlighting the unique perspective her condition provides. Throughout the novel, Jane evolves from waiting for everything to taking charge of her life, emphasising themes of existentialism and humour, often symbolised by her pet gerbil.

Brenna's *Falling of Henry* (2012) is a Young Adult Fiction novel centred around historical events. Through the character Kate Allen, a fifteen-year-old who

travels from the contemporary world to the court of Henry VII at Greenwich Palace, Brenna explores themes of identity and existentialism. Kate assumes the role of Katherin of Aragon, destined to become William's first wife, as she grapples with finding meaning in her life amidst the backdrop of historical intrigue.

Brenna's *The White Bicycle* (2012) continues the narrative from *Wild Orchid*, delving into Taylor Jane's adult life as she asserts her independence and takes charge of her own decisions. Taylor no longer relies on her mother for everything, finding employment and navigating public transportation on her own. This novel delves into Taylor's journey of self-realisation and the freedom that comes with living independently.

Brenna's *The Bug House Family Restaurant* (2014) falls within the poetry genre, focusing on the misadventures of wicked twins Hervis and Eddy. Brenna's verses are characterised by short, regular meter, making them easily understandable for young readers. This poetry collection serves as an educational tool for children to learn about bugs, featuring numerous illustrations to aid in identification.

In Brenna's *Stories for Every Classroom: Canadian Fiction Portraying Characters with Disabilities* (2015), she provides a scholarly guide for the academic study of Children's Literature. Exploring themes of angels and disability representation in Canadian literature, Brenna examines historical patterns, theoretical frameworks, and critical methods used in understanding and teaching Children's Literature. The book serves as a valuable resource for educators, offering insights into how characters with disabilities are portrayed and providing guidance for special educators in their work with children with disabilities.

Brenna's *Fox Magic* (2017) follows the story of Chance Devlin, who grapples with the loss of her two best friends to suicide. Unable to confront her grief, Chance

forms a mysterious connection with a fox, seeking solace and healing. Through Chance's journey, the novel serves as an ideal for teens and adults facing depression or similar challenges, emphasising the importance of confronting one's past to heal and move forward.

Beverley Brenna's literary works exhibit a keen focus on the experiences of young adults and children, intricately weaving characters that spans parents, teachers, peers, and other adults. Through the lens of the protagonist, Brenna introduces a diverse cast, offering a nuanced exploration of their interactions within the confines of small-town Canada. The everyday backdrop encompasses familiar settings such as schools, homes, shops, coffeehouses, and the embrace of nature.

The plot in Brenna's works unfolds as a captivating evolution of characters, primarily centred on the protagonist's journey. While subplots are infrequent, the narrative skilfully portrays the progression of characters, marked by poignant episodes subtly indicating their growth. Themes of acceptance, alienation, disability, and the dynamics of child-parent relationships are thoughtfully interwoven, fostering a deep exploration of human connections and the human experience.

Brenna's language, notably quotable, becomes a powerful instrument that gives voice to protagonists grappling with disabilities. The narrative style is characterised by its ability to articulate the struggles and triumphs of these characters, offering a window into their unique perspectives. The choice of language becomes an empowering force, bringing to life the protagonists' internal worlds and fostering empathy among readers.

The setting, predominantly Canada, serves as a rich backdrop for Brenna's exploration of small-town life. The fabric of everyday experiences unfolds against the canvas of schools, homes, shops, and coffeehouses, providing a vivid backdrop that

enhances the relatability of the narratives. Nature, too, emerges as a recurring setting, adding depth and resonance to the characters' experiences.

Renowned for her adept portrayal of diverse characters and themes, Beverley Brenna is dedicated to addressing gaps in children's literature by representing a broad spectrum of experiences. In novels like *Wild Orchid*, Brenna introduces characters such as Taylor Jane Simon, an eighteen-year-old girl with autism, providing unique perspectives on the experiences of individuals with disabilities. Her literary world is enriched with characters reflecting various backgrounds, interests, and learning needs, contributing to the mosaic of inclusivity she weaves.

Brenna's background in special education profoundly influences her storytelling, as her deep understanding of the school landscape, childhood, and exceptional learning needs informs her narratives. Characters like Taylor Jane Simon become champions for diversity in children's literature, and Brenna's writing style, marked by relatability and engagement, incorporates humour to capture young readers' attention, reflecting her commitment to creating accessible stories.

As a writer and educator, Brenna seamlessly integrates her dual roles. Her experiences as a classroom teacher enhance the authenticity of her characters and themes, making her work relatable for young readers. Simultaneously, her passion for writing informs her academic pursuits in literacy and Canadian Children's Literature. Brenna advocates inclusive teaching practices, drawing on her unique perspective not only as a writer but also an educator to promote effective methods for diverse classrooms.

Brenna's writing style, characterised by vivid imagery and relatability, serves her commitment to inclusivity by giving voice to underrepresented perspectives, fostering connection, and understanding among readers. Her advocacy extends

beyond literature to education, championing diverse representations and effective teaching practices. In the symbiotic relationship between her roles as a writer and an educator, Beverley Brenna stands unique with importance of inclusive storytelling and its positive impact on both literature and education.

Brenna's works, targeting young adults and middle-grade readers, insist on insightfulness. Approachable and appealing to a wide range of readers, Brenna's varied writing styles connects readers to relatable characters facing real-life challenges in an authentic manner. Deep emotional connections are forged as she explores complex themes such as disability, mental health, friendship, and personal growth, fostering empathy and understanding. Clear and accessible language makes her works suitable for readers to connect with the main characters, delving into their inner lives, emotions, and experiences.

In the context of the present study, the scholarly review critically examines Beverley Brenna's literary portrayal of disability, alongside broader discussions on disability in literature. Drawing insights from academic writings and critical analyses, the review seeks to deepen understanding of Brenna's contributions to this thematic realm. Through rigorous analysis, it aims to elucidate the nuanced complexities inherent in Brenna's narratives, while also contributing to the broader discourse on disability representation in literature.

The article "Disability Bias in Children's Literature" (1986) by Ellen Rubin and Emily Strauss highlights the issue of biased portrayals of people with disabilities in children's literature. It discusses stereotypes that limit children's potential and urges writers to reconsider their language and style. Characters with disabilities are often depicted as pitiable and incapable, reinforcing stereotypes. The authors advocate

unbiased portrayals to raise awareness and prevent perpetuation of stereotypes, calling for a reevaluation of how such characters are represented.

Learning Disabilities: Contemporary Viewpoints (Cratty & Goldman 1996) covers a wide range of topics concerning learning disabilities, including parental support, communication strategies, and academic reorientation. Similarly, Julia Kellman's "Making Sense of Seeing: Autism and David Marr" (1996) focuses on the remarkable drawing skills of autistic individuals. Similarly delving into the unique visual processing and perception of autistic individuals, Kellman explores the relationship between autism and artistic abilities, along with implications for art education and broader understanding of perception and image-making.

"Aging with an Intellectual Disability: A Review of Canadian Literature" (Salvatori et al., 1998) examines the impact of changes in social policies on individuals with disabilities, particularly focusing on 'invisible disability'. This paper analyses challenges faced by individuals with such disabilities, advocating awareness, understanding, and support. It highlights intersections with other aspects of identity, like race and socioeconomic status, leading to additional barriers in accessing healthcare and employment. The article emphasises the need for social recognition, policy reform, and research attention to address challenges faced by elderly individuals with intellectual disabilities, particularly within gerontology. In "Language and Social Competence: An Integrated Approach to Intervention" (Ratner, 2005), valuable insights are provided for clinicians working with communicative impairments. The article stresses addressing social consequences of developmental language disorders, focusing on conditions such as selective and elective mutism. Offering practical guidance, it fills a gap in speech-language pathology literature,

supporting clinicians in effectively assisting individuals with communicative impairments.

In “Portrayal of Disabilities in Caldecott Books” (Dyches et al., 2006), teaching tips are provided for using books featuring disabilities, including discussions on vision, multiple perspectives, and first impressions’ influence on relationships. The chapter focuses on Caldecott books to discern disabled characters’ personal traits in children’s literature.

In her thesis “(In) visible Images: Seeing Disability in Canadian Literature, 1823-1974” (2007), Maria Truchan-Tataryn critically analyses how disability is portrayed in Canadian literature over 150 years, influencing societal perceptions. Truchan-Tataryn highlights the marginalisation of disabled individuals in both literature and society, contributing to the neglect of disability in literary studies. Acknowledging the diversity within the disability community, she emphasises the dynamic nature of disability as shaped by societal attitudes and cultural factors. Truchan-Tataryn underscores the importance of addressing social and cultural influences to foster inclusivity and accessibility for individuals with disabilities, irrespective of their conditions.

In “Canada’s Aboriginal People, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome & the Criminal Justice System” (Bracken, 2008), the prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) within Canadian Aboriginal communities is examined. Bracken explores connections between FASD and social and health factors, including historical trauma, colonialism, discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion. Emphasising the need for identification and support programs tailored to Aboriginal populations, the study underscores the importance of inclusivity in addressing FASD.

In “Creating Characters with Diversity in Mind: Two Canadian Authors Discuss Social Constructs of Disability in Literature for Children” (Brenna, 2009), Beverley Brenna and Jean Little critically analyse the representation of characters with disabilities in Children’s Literature. They advocate multi-dimensional characters that authentically reflect real-life experiences, challenging historical patterns of narrow characterisations. The paper underscores the importance of children accessing literature featuring diverse characters, emphasising inclusivity and the portrayal of characters defined by more than just their disabilities. Brenna and Little’s work highlights the significance of diversity in Children’s Literature and its role in promoting inclusivity.

In “Asperger’s Disorder, Criminal Responsibility and Criminal Culpability” (Freckelton & List, 2009), the complexities of Asperger’s disorder within the legal system are thoroughly examined, highlighting its subtle and variable nature and the challenges it poses in legal contexts. Emphasis is placed on distinguishing Asperger’s disorder from other conditions and recognising its potential to affect defendants’ understanding, thinking, and emotional responses, with implications for fitness for interview, standing trial, and diminished responsibility. Similarly, in “Behavioural and Skill-based Early Interventions in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders” (Weinmann et al., 2009), insights into the clinical effectiveness and safety of early interventions are underscored. Through a systematic review, hand-searching, and expert survey, the study reveals considerations including ethical, legal, and social aspects crucial for implementing early interventions for autism. Further, “Farming with a Disability: Literature from a Canadian Perspective” (Friesen et al., 2010) provides insights into the challenges faced by farmers with disabilities in Canada, emphasising the impact on their work and life, as well as the limited information

available on physical and social factors affecting them. The review advocates for assistive technology, community support, safety measures, and injury prevention to facilitate continued engagement in farming activities for this population, stressing the importance of deeper understanding and tailored support strategies.

Tanya Titchkosky reviews Maria Truchan Tataryn's thesis (*In) visible Images: Seeing Disability in Canadian Literature, 1823-1974*, highlighting how it challenges traditional portrayals of disability as merely problematic or troubling. Tataryn's work offers a fresh perspective, presenting disability and bodily differences as opportunities for learning and exploration, drawing from disability studies. The review underscores the significance of resisting oppressive narratives and delving into nuanced and often overlooked stories about disability.

Burgess and Turkstra's (2010) article "Quality of Communication Life in Adolescents with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome: A Feasibility Study" investigates the utilisation of the Quality of Communication Life Scale (QCL) as a self-report tool to evaluate the experiences of individuals with ASD. Stressing the importance of individual perspectives, the study underscores the necessity of customising assessments of communication and quality of life to suit the unique needs of this demographic group. Jones' (2012) article "Journalism and Disability from a Canadian Perspective" delves into the interplay between disability and journalism in Canada, identifying key themes such as attitudes, representation, language, farming, and editorial processes. While pointing out gaps in research, the article advocates strategic funding, support systems, interdisciplinary collaboration, and knowledge exchange platforms to enrich media representation of disability. It also addresses discrepancies in attitudes between journalists and disability activists, and their impact on media portrayal.

In “Mindful Portrayals: Using Fiction to Create Awareness, Understanding, and Support for People with Autism and Developmental Disabilities” (2013), Brenna discusses the power of fiction, especially in Children’s Literature and graphic novels, to raise awareness and support for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. She advocates integrating such narratives into educational settings and homes to promote inclusion and understanding. Meanwhile, “Lifespan Changes in Autism Spectrum Disorder Characteristics in Seven Genetic Syndromes: An Eight Year Follow Up” (2014) by Penhallow et al. reveals fluctuations in behaviour of eight-year-old individuals with autism spectrum disorder and genetic syndromes, emphasising the need for a developmental approach in diagnosis and prognosis.

Including Children with Special Needs – Primary Stage (2014) by Julka et al. provides a comprehensive guidance for creating inclusive learning environments, emphasising adapting teaching materials to meet individual needs. Angela Geddes’ thesis “FASD: Moving Toward Sustainable Assessment and Support Services in Ontario” (2015) identifies challenges in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) services and offers practical recommendations for improvement, aligning with Canadian Guidelines of Diagnosis.

The article of Lilian Del Ciello de Menezes’ et al. “Motor Learning and Virtual Reality in Down Syndrome: A Literature Review” (2015) sheds light on how individuals with Down Syndrome can benefit from virtual reality, showing improvements in sensory motor control and learning new tasks. This research provides valuable insights into the potential of virtual reality interventions for this population. Meanwhile, *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* (2016) by the Canadian Disability Studies Association explores the power dynamics within disability communities and Disability Studies in Canada, highlighting challenges

faced by disability organisations in and outside the country. Prince in *Canadian Journal of Literary Studies* discusses issues such as information suppression, hierarchical knowledge classification, and the impact on individuals with disabilities. Further, Dr. Mario Levesque's article "Searching for Persons with Disabilities in Canadian Provincial Office" (2016) examines the limited political representation of individuals with disabilities in Canadian provincial offices, revealing neglect and lack of proactive inclusion measures. The study underscores the need for promoting inclusivity, accessibility, and representation of disabilities in Canada's political landscape and electoral process.

The article "Worldwide Prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: A Systematic Literature Review Including Meta-Analysis" (2016) by Sylvia Roozen et al. offers an overview of global Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) prevalence, highlighting methodological limitations in the included publications and the lack of consensus on diagnosis methods. Deborah Rutman's article "Becoming FASD Informed: Strengthening Practice and Programs Working with Women with FASD" (2016) provides insight into FASD-informed principles for supporting affected women and families, stressing the need for lifelong support programs and a common evaluation framework for community-based initiatives. The article of Tracey W. Tsang et al. "Prenatal Alcohol Exposure, FASD, and Child Behavior: A Meta-Analysis" (2016), presents a meta-analysis of studies on behavioural outcomes in children with prenatal alcohol exposure and FASD, emphasising the importance of high-quality research to understand these outcomes and address existing literature limitations.

Jaspreet K. Rai et al. in the article "Parent Rating of Executive Function in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: A Review of the Literature and Data on Aboriginal

Canadian Children” (2017) underscore the importance of parent ratings in assessing executive function in FASD, providing valuable insights into everyday functioning and aiding in understanding and treating individuals with FASD. Meanwhile, Hannah Kathryn Merry’s thesis explores the representation of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) in contemporary American fiction, analysing its portrayal across various media and engaging with trauma theory to understand how fictional texts resist normativity. Additionally, Robyn Deanne Williams’ thesis “Understanding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) through the Stories of Nyoongar Families and How Can This Inform Policy and Service Delivery” (2018) delves into the impact of FASD on Nyoongar families, emphasising the need for awareness and engagement within indigenous communities and incorporating indigenous perspectives in addressing FASD.

Gert Helgesson et al. in the article “Ethical Aspects of Diagnosis and Interventions for Children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and their Families” (2018) delve into the ethical considerations surrounding diagnosis and interventions for individuals with FASD, highlighting challenges in healthcare assistance provision. Meanwhile, Jacquelyn Thompson’s thesis “Access to Children’s Books Featuring Characters with Disabilities” (2018) underscores the importance of providing access to such literature to foster empathy and understanding among readers, noting limited representation in school books. Samantha Louise Wiendels’ Master’s Thesis on “Adolescents with FASD: Education-Based Strategies for Social Skills Development” (2019) examines challenges faced by adolescents with FASD in developing social skills, proposing education-based strategies to address their needs including formal learning, specialised support programmes, and emotional regulation.

In “Down Syndrome as a cause of Abnormalities in the Craniofacial Region: A Systematic Literature Review” (2019), Kaczorowska et al. focus on the craniofacial impact of Down Syndrome, highlighting the significance of early intervention. Likewise, in “Carer Stress in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: The Implications of Data from the UK National Specialist FASD Clinic for Training Carers” (2020), Mohamed et al. explore caregiver stress in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), advocating for training programmes to address associated behaviours effectively.

In an interview with Houston (2020), Brenna discusses her transition from childhood writing to young adult literature, emphasising authenticity and research. “Children’s Books, Disability and Reader’s Response: A Critical Analysis” (2021) by Antonio Causarano explores how children respond to diversity and disabilities in books, providing educators with structured methods to assess quality. It suggests new approaches beyond traditional reader response theory, emphasising the construction of meaning by readers. These insights align with Brenna’s focus on authenticity and meaningful storytelling in young adult literature.

In “Intensification of the Concept of Inclusion in Modern Socio-Pedagogical Doctrines and Literary Studies of Disability” (2022) by Anna Kolisnychenko and Svitlana Kharytska, the importance of inclusive education for children with disabilities is discussed alongside evaluations of inclusive methodologies and technologies. The article emphasises societal needs for care, support, and acceptance, while also examining the portrayal of disability in literature. Conversely, Ellie Lee’s “From Self- to Other-Surveillance: A Critical Commentary on the English Policy Framework for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)” (2022) critiques policy shifts towards self-denial advocacy and surveillance in England, addressing

implications for pregnant women, healthcare professionals, and public health. Further, Joseph Lee Betts et al. in “Interventions for Improving Executive Functions in Children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD): A Systematic Review” (2022), present evidence supporting structured psychological interventions to enhance executive functions in children with FASD, crucial for goal-directed behaviour.

Francesco Sessa et al. in “Understanding the Relationship between Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Criminal Justice: A Systematic Review” (2022) underscore the heightened risk of criminal behaviour among individuals with FASD, emphasising the economic burden on families and society. Their study advocates for appropriate interventions to support children with FASD and reduce societal costs. Barbara Carpita et al. in “Autism Spectrum Disorder and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: A Literature Review” (2022), explore the link between ASD and FASD, noting similarities in behavioural traits and emphasising the need for further research. Lori Erbrederis Meyer’s “Including Disability in Early Childhood Curricula: Evaluating and Using Children’s Books” (2021) highlights the importance of incorporating disability representation in early childhood education through the use of children’s books to foster acceptance and understanding. Similarly, Grace Chang’s “Reducing Prenatal Alcohol Exposure and the Incidence of FASD: Is the Past Prologue” (2023) provides an overview of clinical trials aimed at reducing prenatal alcohol exposure and the incidence of FASD, stressing the need for further research to develop effective interventions in public health.

In “Invisible among the Vulnerable: A Nuanced Perspective of Energy Poverty at the Intersection of Gender and Disability in South Africa” (2023) Michael Adu Okyere and Boqiang Lin examine the disproportionate impact of energy poverty on women with disabilities, stressing the need for policies favouring equity. Sylvia

Roozen et al. in “Systematic Literature Review on which Maternal Alcohol Behaviours are Related to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)” (2018) highlights the complexities of measuring maternal alcohol consumption’s link to FASD, emphasising the necessity for further research to guide interventions. Further, Douglas Waite and Larry Burd’s “Common Developmental Trajectories and Clinical Identification of Children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: A Synthesis of the Literature” (2023) underscores the prevalence of FASD and calls for improved diagnosis and support.

Jocelyn Pearce’s review of Beverley Brenna’s novel *Wild Orchid* praises Taylor Jane’s journey toward independence and her desire to find an extinct wild orchid, stating: “Beverley Brenna’s unique novel contains a hint of sadness concerning what Taylor goes through because of her condition and how her life is so different from those of other people when, on the surface, it’s so much like the lives of everyone else.”

Karen Coats, in her review of *Wild Orchid* for the *Bulletin of the Centre for Children’s Books*, focuses on Taylor Jane’s struggles with Asperger Syndrome and her daily challenges, noting that while Taylor’s character may initially pose difficulties for some readers, understanding and identifying with her disability, particularly Asperger Syndrome, they will get more insight into the character, as it is rarely depicted in literature. Similarly, Amy’s review for *Book Reviews Saskatchewan* highlights Brenna’s immersive portrayal of Taylor Jane’s perspective, remarking that the title aptly reflects Taylor’s exceptionalism akin to the orchids she seeks.

Additionally, *Barnes & Noble’s review* observes Taylor’s dynamic character development, especially towards independence facilitated by her mother, Penny. The review acknowledges the novel’s portrayal of Taylor’s search for freedom, identity,

and romance, offering a new perspective on individuals with disabilities, characterised by frankness yet optimism and innocence. In *CM magazine*, Kristin Butcher's review of *Wild Orchid* highlights how the novel, narrated in the first person, deepened her understanding of individuals with Asperger Syndrome, offering insights from both an outsider's and an insider's perspective on the condition.

The *49th Shelf* review of *Waiting for No One* explores the narrative of an eighteen-year-old girl with Asperger Syndrome, offering a unique perspective on the world. It highlights Taylor Jane's struggles with social interaction, particularly in conversing with strangers. While, Deborah Stevenson's review in *the Bulletin of the Centre for Children's Books* highlights Taylor Jane's significant transformation in *Waiting for No One*, particularly in the context of the *Wild Orchid* series. Stevenson notes Jane's encounters with a new acquaintance in her mother's boyfriend's home as pivotal, suggesting that the novel stands out on its own within the trilogy. Additionally, author Brenna reflects on Taylor's journey to find freedom and form connections with strangers in her review.

The White Bicycle has garnered praise from multiple reviewers for its portrayal of Taylor Jane's journey, the concluding book in Brenna's trilogy. Martha V. Parravano, in *Out of the Box*, commends Taylor's extraordinary character and recommends the trilogy to readers. Elizabeth Burns, writing in "A Chair, a Fireplace and a Tea Cozy," highlights the unique narrative perspective provided by Taylor Jane's voice, offering insights into relationships and parental involvement. *Barnes & Noble's review* emphasises Taylor Jane's new adventure in the south of France and her quest for independence despite her challenges with Asperger Syndrome. Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch, in "Autistic and Brilliant – Winnipeg Review Column on Bev Brenna's *The White Bicycle*," praises Taylor's portrayal as a character diagnosed with

Autistic Syndrome, noting her unique perspective on the world and struggles with understanding emotions.

The 49th Shelf review of *The Moon Children* highlights the poignant narrative of an eleven-year-old boy, Billy, who grapples with his alcoholic father's disappearance and befriends Natasha, an adopted Romanian girl with whom he shares a unique bond over their mutual fascination with the moon. Despite Billy's challenges with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and struggles to fit in with other children, he perseveres, becoming an example of resilience for his peers. Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited's review offers a broader overview of the book, focusing on Billy's difficulties in navigating social situations due to his hyperactivity and FASD, contrasted with Natasha's silent communication through her moon journal.

The article "Crippling the Archives: Negotiating Notions of Disability in Appraisal and Arrangement and Description" (Sara White, 2012) discusses the historical oppression and inadequate documentation of the disability community, highlighting the challenges faced by archivists in accurately representing their struggles. It emphasises the need for critical thinking in documenting disability history to confront societal biases and improve communication between able-bodied individuals and persons with disabilities. Conversely, "Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies" (Davis 1999) explores the societal representation of disability, tracing its evolution from negative associations to movements advocating for inclusivity. Leonard Davis examines cultural depictions of disability, including in film, and advocates a more inclusive society that acknowledges the diversity of bodies and minds. Further, "Disability Aesthetics" delves into the representation of disability in art and aesthetics, challenging traditional notions of beauty and highlighting the importance of including disabled figures in cultural representations. It emphasises the

role of disability in shaping aesthetic perceptions and advocates for a broader understanding of inclusion throughout history and in modern art.

The article “Disability and Narrative” explores the portrayal of disability, particularly in sci-fi films, emphasising the dynamic nature of disability and advocating inclusive environments that accommodate diverse human bodies and experiences. Conversely, “Disability and Representation” (Thomson, 2005), delves into societal perceptions of disability, highlighting the importance of recognising abilities rather than limitations and advocating for greater acceptance and integration of disabled individuals into mainstream society. It discusses the impact of medical advancements and societal movements in reshaping perceptions of disability and emphasises the need for visual reimaginings to challenge existing narratives. Further, “Disability Studies, disabled people and the struggle for inclusion” (Oliver & Barnes, 2010) examines the medical and social models of disability, emphasising the societal barriers that limit opportunities for disabled individuals and advocating for greater inclusivity in areas such as education, employment, and independent living.

In “Disclosure and the Double Bind Processes of Students with Disabilities in Institutions for Higher Education: Disability Studies Going from Studying Processes of ‘Disablism’ to the Study of Wider Processes of ‘Ableism’” (Hove, 2014) the focus is on creating an inclusive environment, particularly in higher education, by shifting from viewing disabilities as special needs to embracing Universal Design Learning (UDL). The article emphasises the importance of seeing differences as opportunities for learning and promoting a culture open to alternative options, rather than viewing disability as a barrier. Similarly, “Feminist Disability Studies Pedagogy” raises awareness about the oppression faced by female disabled individuals and advocates Universal Design to eliminate discrimination and provide equal access to

opportunities. Further, “From Impairment to Disability and Beyond: Critical Explorations in Disability Studies” delves into the social construction of disability, highlighting historical stigma and discrimination faced by individuals with impairments. It discusses the evolution of models like the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH) and emphasises the importance of challenging societal norms to promote inclusivity and equality for all individuals, particularly women with disabilities who face double discrimination.

An extensive review of literature concerning Brenna’s work, disability, particularly Asperger’s syndrome, reveals a notable research gap. There is a prevalence of non-literary research compared to literary inquiries. While current studies often present disability in literature through stereotypical viewpoints, there is a marked absence of thorough examination into authentic portrayals. Specifically, there is a deficiency in analysing the intersectionality between disability and ableism. This void emphasises the urgency for future research to explore nuanced representations of disability, transcending stereotypes, and to address the intersection of disability and ableism within literary contexts. Moreover, scholarly discourse concerning Brenna’s works is notably limited, indicating a pressing need for deeper exploration in this realm.

Disability studies highlight how societal norms dictate what constitutes a viable life, often marginalising those with disabilities. Rachel Adams, in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, references Fiona Kumari Campbell to demonstrate Aristotle’s view of ‘monstrous’ bodies as natural aberrations, perpetuating the idea of screening out ‘defective’ fetuses. Dan Goodley, in *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism*, emphasises the politicised nature of prenatal screening, reflecting society’s preference for non-disabled lives and relegating disabled lives to a perceived ‘risk

category of humanity.’ This sets the stage for the social model of disability, which aims to counter medicalisation and individualisation by recognising disability’s multifaceted dimensions. Goodley highlights how societal barriers, not inherent disability, pose significant challenges for individuals, emphasising the need for a more inclusive society.

Ableism’s psychological, economic, social, and cultural character promotes a space fit for normative individuals. The term ‘ableism’, by Campbell and Wolbring, serves as the starting point for any critical ableist study. Dan Goodley in *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* quotes Wolbring’s definition on ableism as, “... the favoritism for certain abilities for example cognition, competitiveness or consumerism and the often-negative sentiment towards the lack of favoured abilities and has a long history ... includes how one is judged by others” (22). Its emphasis on a set of beliefs, practices based on the abilities to exhibit or values; which includes how the human bodies are judged.

Campbell and Wolbring’s ableist concept challenges other notions such as able bodies, normalcy, and the normate. Wolbring further elaborates that ableism has historically been used by various social groups to justify their elevated rights and status over others, citing examples such as women being viewed as biologically fragile and emotional, thus deemed incapable of responsibilities like voting, owning property, and retaining custody of their children. Ableism is depicted as the foundational system from which various forms of disablism, hetero/sexism, and racism stem, with an underlying concept of a “species-typical” human being (22).

Ableism extends beyond discrimination against the disabled, encompassing bias even among able-bodied individuals, often manifesting gender bias towards fragility. In *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism*, Goodley quotes

Weeber, stating that ableism is a form of prejudice and bigotry that “marks us [disabled people] as less than those who are nondisabled” and causes discomfort to nondisabled individuals unprepared to confront their own vulnerability and mortality (26). The ableist system arises from societal constructs that label citizens as ableist. Campbell acknowledges the pervasive presence of disability in society, emphasising that ableism is not only a matter of life but also of death. In contemporary times of austerity, the significance of ableism and the privileges it affords in mainstream society are becoming increasingly apparent.

In the realm of disability studies, pivotal concepts shape the discourse, offering profound insights into the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities and their interactions with society. Fiona Kumari Campbell’s exploration of ability challenges conventional understandings of ability and disability, urging a more inclusive perspective that embraces the diverse range of human experiences and rejects simplistic dichotomies. Susannah B. Mintz delves into the notion of invisibility, shedding light on the historical marginalisation of disabled individuals in societal narratives and activities, underscoring the struggles faced by this oppressed social group.

Tanya Titchkosky’s examination of normalcy unveils the socially constructed nature of normalcy and its role in perpetuating stigmatisation against those who deviate from societal expectations, emphasising the need to dismantle such discriminatory constructs. Rob Imrie’s scrutiny of space elucidates how the built environment can either facilitate or hinder the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, calling for the creation of more accessible and inclusive spaces that accommodate diverse needs. Heather Love’s discussion of stigma underscores the ways in which societal attitudes pathologise disability, underscoring the imperative to

challenge ableist assumptions and foster greater acceptance and inclusion. James Berger's exploration of trauma illuminates the intersection between disability and overwhelming stress, highlighting the political and theoretical dimensions of understanding the impact of trauma on individuals within the context of disability studies. Together, these concepts offer a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in contemporary society.

Thesis statement

In the contemporary world, stark divisions persist, with one particularly conspicuous fault line being ableism—a pervasive social construct wherein individuals deemed 'normal' often wield undue influence over those living with disabilities. This scholarly endeavour embarks on a rigorous evaluation of specific literary works authored by Beverley Brenna, with the overarching aim of shedding a penetrating light on the presence of ableism within these narratives and, in doing so, contributing to the ongoing discourse and rectification of this deeply ingrained societal prejudice

Objectives:

1. Examine the portrayal of the 'normate' concept within Brenna's narratives, shedding light on its influence on individuals with disabilities and societal perceptions
2. Investigate how Beverley Brenna's literary works depict characters with disabilities in the context of stigma, exploring their contribution to challenging or perpetuating stereotypes

3. Explore the representation of inclusion in Brenna's works, highlighting instances of resistance against ableism and their impact on broader awareness and acceptance
4. Analyse the overall influence of Brenna's writings on the discourse surrounding ableism, literature, and societal attitudes towards disability

Research Parameters and Methodology

Primary Texts

This research conducts an exhaustive examination of key primary texts, comprising Beverley Brenna's celebrated trilogy consisting of *Wild Orchid*, *Waiting for No One*, *The White Bicycle*, alongside *The Moon Children*, and selected short stories sourced from *Something to Hang on To*. It meticulously scrutinises these literary works, aiming to elucidate their multifaceted treatment of themes revolving around disability and the complex dynamics of ableism.

Methodology

The key scholarly texts, including *Keywords for Disability* by Adam, Rachael, et al., *The Disability Studies Reader* edited by Lennard J. Davis, and *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies* edited by Anne Waldschmidt, Hanji Berressem, and Moritz Ingwersen, constitute the essential underpinnings of this research. The documentation adheres to the guidelines of the *MLA*, 9th edition.

Structure:

This scholarly study comprises five chapters. The first chapter, "Introduction," serves as the foundational cornerstone of this scholarly endeavour, contextualising disability studies within the Canadian literary landscape and situating Beverley Brenna's contributions therein. This chapter meticulously reviews existing literature,

identifies research gaps, and delineates the conceptual framework surrounding ableism, culminating in a clearly articulated thesis statement, research objectives, methodology, and structural framework guiding subsequent exploration.

The second chapter, “Confronting Normal,” embarks on an in-depth analysis of Brenna’s selected primary texts, interrogating normative perspectives and their profound implications on conceptions of ability and disability. Through close textual analysis, this chapter divulges the intricacies of societal norms and their impact on the portrayal of characters with disabilities, shedding light on the complexities of identity formation and societal expectations.

The third chapter, “Shades of Stigma,” delves into the exploration of stigma within Brenna’s literary works, meticulously dissecting its varied manifestations and repercussions. This chapter probes the layers of societal judgment and prejudice faced by characters with disabilities, offering insights into the intricate dynamics of stigma and its influence on personal narratives and societal perceptions.

The fourth chapter, “Addressing Ableism,” navigates through spatial considerations and accessibility within Brenna’s narratives, laying the groundwork for a nuanced examination of inclusionary practices and their potential to challenge ableist ideologies. By scrutinising the representation of physical spaces and the barriers they pose, this chapter underscores the significance of inclusive design and accessibility in fostering environments that accommodate diverse abilities.

The concluding fifth chapter consolidates the study’s findings and reflections, drawing together the threads of analysis woven throughout the preceding chapters. This concluding chapter offers actionable recommendations derived from the study’s insights, aiming to inform both scholarly discourse and practical interventions in addressing ableism within literary representations. Through its structured and

comprehensive approach, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Beverley Brenna's works within the broader context of disability literature, offering valuable insights into the complexities of representation and societal attitudes towards disability.