The use of disability as a metaphor is ubiquitous in popular culture. Blindness, in particular, has frequently been used metaphorically to imply a lack of understanding, immorality, closeness to death, insight or second sight. These ‘meanings’ were attached to blindness in antiquity, but they have persisted into the present because readers, receivers and spectators have perpetuated them in spite of widespread knowledge that they are harmful. This book argues for a new way of seeing – and of understanding classical reception – that aims to dismantle these tropes, by offering assemblage-thinking as a means to understand the role that receivers have played in perpetuating them. And the theatre, which has too often been assumed to be a visual medium, is the ideal place to investigate these new ways of looking and looking back. This title is part of the Flip it Open Programme and may also be available Open Access. Check our website Cambridge Core for details.

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Towards New Ways of Looking and Looking Back

MARCHELLA WARD

The Open University
For Mum, Dad and Tom – thank you for the world.

And for my Grandad Jimbo, who probably still doesn’t believe ‘girls’ should go to university.
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Acknowledgements (Situating Knowledges)

I hope that this book is the loneliest thing I ever write. Most of it was written (or revised) during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockowns and restrictions on travel and gathering had eliminated seminars, conferences and other types of academic community almost entirely. But no ideas are ever independent; all research takes place within a structural context, and among a network of interactions that shape and curate it. And the COVID-context of most of the revision work that made this book what it is has made me painfully aware of the structural factors and advantages that enabled me to write it. I was enabled to write this book by the fact that I did not become seriously ill as a result of COVID-19 – a fact that says far more about the society in which I live and the privileges from which I benefit than it does about my body. I was enabled to write this book by the fact that had I become seriously ill as a result of COVID-19, the eugenicist political system under which many of us live would likely have considered my (white, cis-female, economically-advantaged, mostly enabled) life to be worth saving. This privilege of remaining alive, being (relatively) securely housed, being employed, having access to state-funded medical care, living in a part of the world that is contributing to rather than experiencing the worst effects of the climate catastrophe, among other advantages, enabled me to write this book.

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***

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Oxford and Bradford, September 2022
Notes on the Text

Content Note
Please note that this book includes discussions of topics that readers may find distressing, both as represented in literary and theatrical texts and in real life. These include, but are not limited to: violence, ableism, racism, eugenics, assisted dying, colonialism, rape and medical / health inequalities.

Note on Greek
The Greek in the main text of this book has been kept to a minimum and is presented in transliteration, so as to make it readable by screen-reader software. The text is taken from the Oxford Classical Texts, and all transliterations and translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.