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Esme Cleall
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Introduction

Thinking about Disability, Rethinking Difference

In October 1898, Tilly Aston, a young blind woman from colonial Australia, wrote to the press in some distress. Whilst the blind had ‘many difficulties to contend with’, she wrote, the ‘most serious’ was ‘a lack of proper understanding of their powers, knowledge, and abilities in general’. ‘Some people had very queer ideas about the blind’, she continued, and ‘classed them as idiots’.[1] Such a statement, whilst embedding in it the use of intellectual disability as the foil through which to reclaim differently disabled populations, nonetheless attempted to assert the perspectives of disabled people into the public sphere and challenge derogatory attitudes towards disabled people that were widely held.

Tilly Aston was born in Carisbrook, Victoria, in 1873. Her father, a shoemaker, died in October 1881 and her mother, left to support the family, began to accept money as a midwife. Born with impaired vision, Aston lost her sight completely before the age of seven. She was taught Braille by Thomas James, an itinerant missionary who had lost both eyes and an arm in a mining accident, and had since dedicated his life to seeking out other blind people and teaching them to read. At the age of nine, Aston was enrolled at the Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind, opened in 1866. She became the first blind girl to complete her senior school certificate and the first blind Australian to go to university. Unfortunately, however, Aston was unable to complete her degree. The lack of Braille books was a major obstacle, and Aston became ill with the stress of studying. In 1894 and 1895, Aston co-founded the Association of Braille Writers (later the Victorian Braille Library) and the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, respectively. These were key organisations in the history of the Australian blind community, organising the transcription of books into Braille and campaigning politically for the rights of blind people. Aston went on to become an accomplished author, writing poems, articles, short stories and longer fictional works, as well as becoming head of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, a position

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[1] ‘Education and Employment of the Blind’, *The Prahran Telegraph*, 15 October 1898, p. 2.

she got despite hostility to her as a blind teacher (it was felt a sighted person would be better suited to the role). One of Australia's foremost Esperanto speakers, she was a firm advocate of the language, which she found useful when communicating with blind people across Europe. She was also a friend and correspondent of Helen Keller, the famous deaf-blind American. She published *Memoirs of Tilly Aston* in 1946 before dying the following year.[2]

Throughout her life, Aston challenged derogatory attitudes towards blindness that were common in colonial Australia and the wider British Empire. She encountered such attitudes personally and was able to critique and parody them. In her memoir, she describes travelling home from school for vacation by train as a child with other girls from the Institution, when an elderly fellow passenger noticed that she and her companions were blind. 'Some blind children! Dear, dear!' the woman is said to have exclaimed. 'Oh, Ned, they are blind! Poor dears! How terrible! They would be better in their graves!' The girls started laughing. They were still more amused when the lady went on to ask them firstly whether they could 'feed and dress' themselves, and then whether they were 'deaf and dumb as well'![3] Through the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, Aston campaigned, amongst other things, for the right of (white) blind Australians to vote and for the removal of bonds liable to be paid by blind people travelling between the various Australian colonies.

Whilst acutely aware of the discrimination disabled people faced, Aston also articulated racialised ideologies from her position of whiteness. In a poem written later in life, she describes 'Black Wanda', an indigenous child who came to her school (otherwise a white institution). Drawing on contemporary ideas and also those associated with the 'noble savage', Aston wrote that Wanda had been 'torn from his tribal woodland glades' where he had 'chase[d] the wind', by a 'luckless fall' that had 'quenched the lamps of sight'. Blinded, Wanda 'came to live with us / where sightless children learn', but the boy yearned for 'his native bush'. Unlike the white children, he struggled to learn how to read: 'His slender hands were guided oft / along the dotted lines / but never did the meaning break / From Braille's embossed signs'. Eventually the boy died 'of a broken heart'.[4] In a note next to this poem in her memoir, Aston claimed this was typical of blind Aboriginal people: 'Many years later, the manager at

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[2] Most of the story of Aston's life can be found in *Memoirs of Tilly Aston: Australia's Blind Poet, Author and Philanthropist* (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1946). Another useful summary of her life and achievements can be found in O. S. Green, 'Tilly Aston', http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/aston-matilda-ann-5078.

[3] Aston, *Memoirs*, p. 33.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

the Lake Tyers aborigines station told me that he had never known a black to live very long after becoming blind, and Sir Baldwin Spencer said the same of the Central Australian tribes. Like our poor Wanda they always died of a broken heart.'[5] Aston also produced missionary literature for blind children in China through *The Book of Opals*, a missionary magazine published in connection with the Mission to the Blind in Heathen and Bible Lands. This confirmed rather than challenged imperial hierarchies. She envisaged her publication as 'a gift from Australia to the blind of other lands', and the magazines featured hymns, an Old Testament Story, and a 'heart-to-heart' talk on 'some theme that [Aston] hoped would stir the spiritual aspirations of the sightless recipients'.[6] This writing spoke both to the sense of community that allowed Aston to connect imaginatively with blind people across the world and the imperial assumptions that structured such relationships.

Through Aston's life we can observe some of the intersections of disability, race and empire with which *Colonising Disability* is concerned. She encountered and challenged attitudes towards blind people prevalent at the time, explored in Chapter 1, including those that linked blindness with helplessness. She attended one of the institutions that, as I discuss in Chapter 2, sprang up as part of expanding provision throughout the nineteenth century with the idea of educating and 'civilising' disabled people. She forged relationships because of her disability, writing often of the 'blind world' in much the same manner as the deaf colonists in Chapter 5 wrote of a 'deaf world'. She campaigned against the immigration restrictions on disabled people that I analyse in Chapter 6. She remained unmarried, partly because of the way in which she perceived herself as a blind woman, reflecting the discomfort felt towards disabled people and sexuality that I examine in a different way in Chapter 7. Through her life and writings we can start to think about the agency of disabled people, as well as how they were represented by non-disabled people. Needless to say, Aston was only one of tens of thousands (if not more) of disabled people living in Britain and its colonies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Writing in 2001, the historian of American deafness Douglas Baynton argued that 'Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write'.[7] Since then disability has been increasingly explored in a range of national and temporal contexts. The American case remains the most developed, but there

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[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[7] Douglas C. Baynton, 'Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History', in Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 52.

has also been work on other global locations such as in the Ottoman Empire, Continental Europe and Britain, including nineteenth-century Scotland by Iain Hutchison; eighteenth-century England by David Turner and in relation to British coal mining by David Turner and Daniel Blackie.[8] However, as yet, the history of disability has been little incorporated into the history of the British Empire.[9] This is despite the fact that critical colonial history has concerned itself deeply with examining the construction of other embodied conditions such as race and gender, as well as interrogating issues of identity more generally both overseas and 'at home' in the imperial metropole.[10] It is also despite the relatively well-populated fields of the medical historiography of the

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[8] For disability history in the United States, see Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History*. For the Ottoman Empire, see Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For Continental Europe see, for example, Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*, trans. W. Sayers (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1999). In the British Isles, see Iain Hutchison, *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg, eds, *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (London: Routledge, 2006); David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012); David M. Turner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution, Physical Impairment and British Coal-Mining, 1780–1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). For studies of the pre-modern era, see Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[9] Important exceptions are Aparna Nair, '"They Shall See His Face": Blindness in British India 1850–1950', *Medical History*, vol. 61, no. 2 (April 2017), pp. 181 – 199; and Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy's work, *Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2020) which was forthcoming at the time of writing so is not grappled with in as much detail as it would have been otherwise.

[10] Critical colonial history, perhaps more commonly known as the 'New Imperial History', emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s and continues to be an influential area of historical research in the history of the British Empire. Scholars such as Antoinette Burton, Catherine Hall and Kathleen Wilson were prompted by their engagement with feminism and with the postcolonial critiques of Fanon, Said and Spivak (amongst others) to ask 'new' questions of empire, questions about identity, power and representation, which had previously been marginalised from the imperial history canon. Such work has been diverse, but themes emerging from it that particularly relate to my work have been the exploration of gender and race identity, the conceptualisation of metropole and colony as a single analytical field, the insistence on the impact of the empire 'at home' as well as overseas and the elucidation of fluid and relational constructions of difference. See, for example, Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire, a Reader: Colonisers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003) and Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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British Empire, examining acute sickness, and the significant (though less developed) field exploring mental health and empire.[11] Although some studies have come close to analysing disability and empire, such as Felicity Nussbaum's work on 'defect' in the eighteenth century, this has tended to come from literary rather than historical perspectives. This absence is deeply problematic for historians of empire. Firstly, this marginalises the lives of vast number of disabled people who lived in Britain and its colonies. Secondly, this absence warps discussions of other embodied ways of being such as race and gender, something I return to later in this introduction. Thirdly, as scholars of disability have argued, disability is highly formative of the experience of all bodies and our imagination of

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[11] For work on sickness and empire see: Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2002); David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Rod Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Hardiman, *Missionaries and their Medicine: A Christian Modernity for Tribal India* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Mark Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600–1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). For work on mental health and empire see: Debjani Das, *Houses of Madness: Insanity and Asylums of Bengal in Nineteenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); Catharine Coleborne, *Insanity, Identity and Empire: Immigrants and Institutional Confinement in Australia and New Zealand, 1873–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Richard Keller, 'Madness and Colonization: Psychiatry in the British and French Empires, 1800–1962', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (Winter 2001, pp. 295–326.; Harriet Jane Deacon, 'Madness, Race and Moral Treatment: Robben Island Lunatic Asylum, Cape Colony, 1846–1890', *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 7 (1996), pp. 287–297; Sally Swartz, 'Colonising the Insane: Causes of Insanity in the Cape, 1891–1920', *History of Human Sciences*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1995), pp. 39–57; Jonathan Sadowsky, *Imperial Bedlam: Institutions of Madness in Colonial Southwest Nigeria* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1999); Matthew Heaton, *Black Skin, White Coats: Nigerian Psychiatrists, Decolonization, and the Globalization of Psychiatry* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2013); Sloan Mahone and Megan Vaughan, eds, *Psychiatry and Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Leonard Smith, *Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean, 1838–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); James Mills, *Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism: The 'Native Only' Lunatic Asylums of British India, 1857–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: The European Insane in British India, 1800–1858* (London: Routledge, 1991); Jack McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry and the 'African Mind'* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Catharine Coleborne, *Madness in the Family: Insanity and Institutions in the Australasian Colonial World, 1860–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Stephen Garton, *Medicine and Madness: A Social History of Insanity in New South Wales, 1880–1940* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1988) and Erik Linstrum, *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

what the human body *is* (and its limits/fragilities) and *does*.[12] Disability helped to define what was considered to constitute normality and examining disability helps to destabilise otherwise invisible categories such as normality, able-bodiedness and whiteness which have been ideologically powerful. This book argues that looking at disability both in terms of disabled populations and as a category of analysis not only works to fill a gap in the historiography of the British Empire, but also changes the very way in which we approach questions fundamental to critical colonial history, which has aimed at interrogating the constructions of power, difference and identity, issues that I argue here cannot be understood fully without also analysing the construction and experience of disability.

I am not the first to point out that postcolonial studies, which has been very influential upon critical colonial history, has tended to be 'non-disabled' in focus. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray and Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic (amongst others) have examined this absence from literary and sociological perspectives, respectively.[13] But historically grounded critical colonial scholarship has been slow to take up the challenge of interrogating disability as an experience or an analytical category. An argument has further been made of critical race studies (along with gender studies and queer studies) that, worse than neglecting the issue of disability, this work has contributed to its reification as a marker of corporal deviance. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, for example, argue that not only have other areas flourished where disability studies has faltered, but that

> race, feminist and queer studies have all participated to one degree or another in a philosophical lineage that seeks to distance those social categories from more 'real' biological incapacities . . . Thus in order to counteract charges of deviance historically assigned to blackness, femininity, or homosexuality, these political

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[12] Whilst there is a limited, if growing historiography of disability, there is a more developed field in literary studies. Examples that I have found particularly influential are: Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Literature and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). In the field of critical colonial history Felicity Nussbaum's work is of particular importance: Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[13] Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, 'Disabling Postcolonialism: Global Disability Cultures and Democratic Criticism', *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2010); Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic, 'Disability and Colonialism: (Dis)encounters and Anxious Intersectionalities', *Social Identities*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2016). Also see further articles in these special issue journals.

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discourses have tended to reify disability as 'true' insufficiency, thereby extricating their own populations from equations of inferiority.[14]

There is little reason why this critique could not also be extended to historians. In *Colonising Disability*, I aim to tackle such problems by focusing on the making of disability in Britain and its empire, whilst also exploring some of the intersections between race, gender and disability.

At the same time as critical colonial history has been slow to examine questions of disability, disability studies, perhaps particularly disability history, has avoided addressing questions of race, ethnicity and empire. The 'whiteness' of disability studies has come to be seen as an urgent problem within the discipline. As cultural theorist Jasbir Puar puts it, 'the epistemic whiteness of the field is no dirty secret' but something that has been pointed out for some years, not least by Christopher Bell in his ironic suggestion that the discipline should be renamed 'White Disability Studies'.[15] Framed with a strong Euro-American bias, part of the project of disability studies has been reclaiming and celebrating bodily diversity and the disabled body as a rupture to what disability theorist Robert McRuer has termed 'compulsory able-bodiedness'.[16] As Puar argues, this celebratory model is somewhat harder to maintain in the face of the fact that 'most of the world's disability happens through colonial violence, developmentalism, war, occupation and the disparity of resources'.[17] Yet, despite pronouncements as to the whiteness of disability studies dating back to the 1990s, little work has been forthcoming in correcting this. The nature of the problem is threefold. First, 'white' disability studies is unrepresentative of the experience of disabled people of colour, many of whom have, in Anya Werner's words, faced a 'double whammy' of exclusion due to their status as a minority within an already marginalised group.[18] Second, failing to examine questions of race means disability

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[14] Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 17.

[15] Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Lennard J. Davis, 'Foreword', in Christopher M. Bell, ed., *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), p. viii. Other places where this is pointed out include: Shaun Grech, 'Decolonising Eurocentric Disability Studies: Why Colonialism Matters in the Disability and Global South Debate', *Social Identities*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2016).

[16] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), pp. 2–3.

[17] Paur, *The Right to Maim*, p. xix.

[18] Anja Werner, '"Double Whammy?!" Historical Glimpses of Black Deaf Americans' in special issue: 'Dis-eased: Critical Approaches to Disability and Illness in American Studies', *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2017).

studies has often failed to address adequately the intersections between race and disability conceptually. Third, it is a matter of context. The evolution of attitudes to race, gender, class and disability did not occur in a vacuum but did so, in the examples I explore in this book, in conversation with the growing power of the British Empire. As I seek to demonstrate, colonial ties meant that British models of building an asylum for disabled people developed in the white dominions, though of course these were also shaped by the local situations. Colonial patterns of missionary activity meant that particular work towards blind Indian children developed in the late nineteenth century. And the interplay between empire and development of racial ideology led to the development of eugenics, with its profound implications for disabled people. *Colonising Disability* aims to take on some of these issues, first by acknowledging the imperial status of Britain, where this study is grounded, and second, by analysing the relationship between disability and whiteness, reading whiteness as a racial construct that is too often invisible in, if central to, existing scholarship on disability. As discussed earlier, there are historiographical, empirical and theoretical, imperatives to do this work.

Some Definitions: 'Disability', 'Disablism' and 'Ableism'

Disability is not a 'thing' but a process. As literary critic and disability theorist Lennard Davis puts it,

> Disability is not a minor issue that relates to a relatively small number of unfortunate people; it is part of a historically constructed discourse, an ideology of thinking about the body under certain historical circumstances. Disability is not an object – a woman with a cane – but a social process that intimately involves everyone who has a body and lives in the world of the senses.[19]

Despite common misconceptions, disability and non-disability are not self-evident physical dichotomies. Human bodies have a wide array of physical variations and potential attributes, lacking only some is considered 'disabling'. Disability operates on a continuum. The idea that there is a line demarcating a disabled from a non-disabled population is illusionary, as both are social constructions.

Since the 1970s, disability activists and academics, particularly those based in Britain, have used the 'social model' of disability to flag the way in which society disables individuals with certain impairments.[20] It is not,

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[19] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 2.

[20] See, for example, Michael Oliver, *The New Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990).

say, paralysis that prevents the wheelchair user from entering the building, but the lack of a ramp. It is not deafness that prevents sign-language users from communicating with many hearing peers, but the latter's unfamiliarity with sign language. The social model of disability stands in opposition to the so-called 'medical model' of disability, which sees the impairment as the source of difficulties – for example, a person is disabled by their deafness, blindness and so forth. There have been a number of important critiques of this social model of disability including its arguably insufficient engagement with what might be termed the 'realities of impairment', including pain, and its failure to acknowledge and engage with questions of race, gender and othering.[21] Others have also suggested that, in much the same way that the relationship between 'sex' and 'gender' has been made more complex by the repositioning of the former as well as the latter as a social construct, so too the difference between 'impairment' (or the biological 'reality' of disability) and (the social construction of) 'disability' is less obvious than first appears.[22] Nonetheless, the social model offers an analysis of power, structure and relationality. In North America, the development of disability studies has taken a slightly different approach, partly because it has been driven by developments in literary theory and other humanities disciplines, rather than, as in the United Kingdom, sociology and education.[23] Here, the focus has been on taking disability as the starting point from which to understand how processes of inequality, discrimination, identity and community and so forth work.[24] Cultural trajectories in particular have been important in demonstrating how those labelled disabled have vested in them contradictory feelings of fear, charity, pity, disgust, anger and resentment. Scholars of disability such as Margrit Shildrick have argued that this is because the disabled body is 'uncanny' (both like and unlike) and a site onto which to project narratives of loss and infantile dependency.[25] Whilst *Colonising Disability* is certainly inspired by my engagement with the social model of disability, I am also influenced by those taking a 'cultural' approach because the cultural model of disability is better able to unpack and, crucially, historicise the phenomenon of

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[21] Dan Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 8.

[22] See, for example, Susan Wendell quoted in Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, p. 7. See also Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[23] Goodley, *Dis/ability Studies*, pp. 11–14.

[24] See, for example, Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability*; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* and Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*.

[25] See, for example, Margrit Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

disability.[26] As such, much of my analysis engages with trying to unravel the discursive construction of disability as well as with trying to get at the lived experience of those who have been labelled 'disabled'.

Because disability is socially and culturally constructed, different forms of embodiment have been understood as 'disabled' in different periods. In the nineteenth century, the meaning of disability was changing rapidly in Western European thought. The increased confidence of doctors to identify and cure various conditions led to the medicalisation of certain impairments, such as deafness.[27] The period saw a growing association between disabled people and charity, not least following the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, when disabled people were objectified as members of the 'deserving poor'. In this period, disabled people were also institutionalised more systematically and the dichotomous opposition I referred to earlier was increasingly drawn between disabled/non-disabled bodies. Those with physical impairments were no longer imagined on a continuum of the infinitely flawed human body, but, instead, as Sarah Chinn puts it, as 'constitutionally different'.[28] I argue that it is unsurprising that this shift or 'hardening' of attitudes towards disability occurred alongside changes in attitudes towards race and gender, because disability is an intersectional identity.

There are many types of impairments understood as 'disability' and these can be broken down in different ways. The scholar of disability Judy Rohrer, for example, discusses differences between 'physical' and 'intellectual' disability, and the need to discuss factors such as 'impact', 'onset', 'perceptibility', 'variability' and 'prevalence'.[29] In an already limited historiographical field, historians and literary critics have responded in different ways to the challenge of taking up such an enormous and amorphous category as 'disability'. Many have focused on a single impairment, such as blindness or deafness.[30] Some historians of disability have

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[26] My thanks to Dan Goodley for helping me to clarify this point.

[27] Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Health, Medicine and Society in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), p. 115.

[28] Sarah E. Chinn, 'Gender, Sex, and Disability, from Helen Keller to Tiny Tim', *Radical History Review*, vol. 6, no. 94 (2006), p. 242.

[29] Judy Rohrer, 2005, p. 41 quoted in Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability*, p. 3.

[30] For blindness see: Moshe Barasch, *Blindness: The History of Mental Image in Western Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For deafness see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Silent Poetry: Deafness, Sign and Visual Cultures in Modern France* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1995); Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Jennifer Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013) and R. A. R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).