

Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation

By Ato Quayson

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Focusing primarily on the work of Samuel Beckett, Toni Morrison, Wole Soyinka, and J. M. Coetzee, Ato Quayson launches a thoroughly cross-cultural, interdisciplinary study of the representation of physical disability. Quayson suggests that the subliminal unease and moral panic invoked by the disabled is refracted within the structures of literature and literary discourse itself, a crisis he terms "aesthetic nervousness." The disabled reminds the able-bodied that the body is provisional and temporary and that normality is wrapped up in certain social frameworks. Quayson expands his argument by turning to Greek and Yoruba writings, African American and postcolonial literature, depictions of deformed characters in early modern England and the plays of Shakespeare, and children's films, among other texts. He considers how disability affects interpersonal relationships and forces the character and the reader to take an ethical standpoint, much like representations of violence, pain, and the sacred. The disabled are also used to represent social suffering, inadvertently obscuring their true hardships.

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Editorial Review

Review

Quayson raises illuminating points... and reveals how disability is perceived in a multifaceted society... Highly recommended.

(*CHOICE*)

Quayson's new work is at once learned, wide-ranging, cosmopolitan, and meticulous.

(Lennard J. Davis *Modern Philology*)

Review

A work of literary criticism in the best sense. Ato Quayson is taking the field forward.

(Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Emory University)

Ato Quayson's acutely global view offers a strong challenge to the narrow, implicitly or explicitly liberal humanist, Western focus of most scholarly work in what is now called disability studies. Broader and deeper than previous literary disability studies—broader in its international focus, deeper in the texture of its calibrated close readings—*Aesthetic Nervousness* is a breakthrough interdisciplinary work by a major theorist.

(Susan Schweik, former Presidential Chair in Undergraduate Education for Disability Studies, the University of California, Berkeley)

About the Author

Ato Quayson is professor of English and inaugural director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. He taught for ten years on the Faculty of English and was also director of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cambridge. He has also published widely on African literature, literary theory, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies.

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Charles Moreno:

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