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# How progressive was the representation of physical disability within mainstream film in the 1990s, given the increased awareness about disability during the decade?

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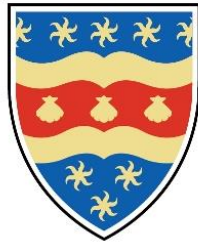
University of Plymouth

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# UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

**How progressive was the representation of physical disability within  
mainstream film in the 1990s, given the increased awareness about disability  
during the decade?**

by

**Connor David Ruse**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**RESEARCH MASTERS**

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### Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Research Masters has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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## Abstract

**Connor David Ruse, 'How progressive was the representation of physical disability within mainstream film in the 1990s, given the increased awareness about disability during the decade?'**

This dissertation will explore the representation of physical disability in mainstream films in the 1990s, determining that this onscreen representation was only slightly progressive in nature. It is based on a qualitative analysis of sixteen characters with disabilities in fifteen mainstream films released between 1987 and 1999. The observations from this analysis were compiled into a database examining: the type of impairment a character had, the character's screen time, the disability terminology used within the film and common tropes used to tell the character's narrative within the film.

Using the database and supportive sources, like interviews with the films' casts and film reviews, this thesis will address three areas where disability representation saw change, although the new methods proved to be problematic. The first area of study focuses on the disability terminology used to describe characters with disabilities within the film, particularly as the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act highlighted acceptable and inclusive disability terminology that should be used to describe people with disabilities. The second area of study focuses on the popular use of the rehabilitation narrative within film in the 1990s. Whilst rehabilitation narratives positioned people with disabilities in protagonist roles, they ultimately present them as 'others' that need to be 'cured'. Finally, this thesis will discuss the popularity of 'disability drag' within the film industry in the 1990s, explaining how able-bodied actors performing 'disability drag' were praised for their performances, preventing actors with disabilities from receiving major roles within the mainstream film industry.

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## Introduction

The representation of people with physical disabilities by mainstream film during the 1990s was slightly progressive. As this paper will explain, filmmakers in this decade attempted to make positive changes when representing people with disabilities, particularly in comparison to earlier decades which relied on negative stereotypes that represented them as burdens or something to be feared or pitied.<sup>1</sup> Progress began to be made within the film industry since the late 1970s, with films like *Coming Home* (1978) presenting disability non-stereotypically as Jon Voight spent time in rehabilitation hospitals to prepare for his role as paraplegic Vietnam veteran Luke Martin.<sup>2</sup> Yet, progress was only made in a few areas of the film industry when it came to representing people with disabilities, with some of the 'positive' changes made by filmmakers in the 1990s creating more issues than they solved. Through an analysis of sixteen characters with physical disabilities in fifteen mainstream films, this dissertation will determine the progressiveness of disability representation in three key areas – terminology, rehabilitation narratives and 'disability drag' – and determine how this representation reflected society's attitudes towards disability at the time.

The 1990s was deemed a predominantly progressive decade for the United States. Identity politics was popular in the decade, where a person's politics was based on what they identified as, especially in terms of gender and race, with identity politics creating 'effective important social change' within America.<sup>3</sup> As such,

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<sup>1</sup> Jack A. Nelson, 'Broken Images: Portrayals of Those with Disabilities in American Media', in *The Disabled Media, and the Information Age*, ed. by Jack A. Nelson (Westport & London: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp.1-24 (pp.4-9).

<sup>2</sup> Jack A. Nelson, 'Broken Images', pp.11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Thompson, 'Calling all fag hags: from identity politics to identification politics', *Social Semiotics*, 14:1 (2004), pp.37-48 (p.38).



marginalised groups were able to have their voices heard to influence positive social change.<sup>4</sup> The curricula at American universities began to be revised to include more readings on marginalised groups - like people with disabilities and women – whilst the institutes attempted to ensure equality between genders and ethnic groups when it came to student admission.<sup>5</sup> Identity politics reached full fruition during Bill Clinton’s tenure as President, positively influencing film companies, like the Walt Disney Company, to actively engage ‘with questions of race, racism, ethnic cleansing and tolerance of cultural difference’ when creating new films.<sup>6</sup> This led to Disney creating films like *Pocahontas* (1995) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), which both featured non-white women as leading characters whilst also addressing Native American genocide and the persecution of religious minorities within Europe, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the introduction of identity politics in the 1990s forced the film industry to change to appear more progressive in their approach to representing minority groups.

As society became more progressive in the 1990s, awareness about disability had increased, particularly after the Vietnam War ended as ‘Vietnam-era veterans represent[ed] an even greater proportion of veterans with disabilities than of all veterans.’<sup>8</sup> Whilst the passing of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act marked the first significant piece of legislation to address discrimination against people with disabilities in the United States, the delayed issuing of section 504 - that exclusively

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<sup>44</sup> Olaf Kaltmeier, Josef Raab and Sebastian Thies, ‘Multiculturalism and Beyond: The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas’, *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 7:2 (2012), pp.103-114 (p.105).

<sup>5</sup> Solveig Granath and Magnus Ullén, “‘The Elevation of Sensitivity over Truth’: *Political Correctness* and Related Phrases in the *Time Magazine* Corpus’, *Applied Linguistics*, 40:2 (2019), pp.265-287 (p.268).

<sup>6</sup> Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), pp.200-201.

<sup>7</sup> Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney*, pp.201.

<sup>8</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1994) pp.264-265; Matthew S. Rutledge, Geoffrey T. Sanzbacher and Caroline V. Crawford, ‘The labor supply of veterans with disabilities, 1995-2014’, *Monthly Labor Review* (October 2016), pp.1-19 (p.9).

gave people with disabilities civil rights – resulted in the 504-sit-ins at the headquarters of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) in San Francisco, leading to the section being distributed throughout the country in 1977.<sup>9</sup> The protest received widespread media attention, highlighting the issues facing people with disabilities within society.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the most important event to create awareness about disability was the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. It was seen as an historical moment for the disability civil rights movement because it exclusively aimed to prohibit the discrimination of people with disabilities.<sup>11</sup> As disability civil rights activists were involved with the creation of the act, they ensured that it would prevent discrimination and impact all areas of society, not just those that received federal funding like the Rehabilitation Act did.<sup>12</sup> With both society adopting identity politics and the larger awareness of disability at the beginning of the decade, it would appear that film would represent disability in a more progressive manner. However, as this paper will explain, the mainstream film industry was only slightly progressive in their approach to representing people with disabilities.

Mainstream film acted as the cultural response to the disability civil rights movement throughout the twentieth century, particularly in the 1990s. Mainstream film influenced the audience's perceptions and attitudes towards people with disabilities, either by educating viewers on disability or by promoting stereotypical

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<sup>9</sup> Julie C. Lellis, 'Silence on the stomping grounds: a case study of public communication about disability in the 1990s', *Disability & Society*, 26:7 (2011), pp.809-823 (p.810); Susan Schweik, 'Lomax's Matrix: Disability, Solidarity, and the Black Power of 504', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 31:1 (2011).

<sup>10</sup> Susan Schweik, 'Lomax's Matrix'.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence O. Gostin, 'The American With Disabilities Act at 25: The Highest Expression of American Values', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2:13 (June 2015), pp.2231-2235 (pp.2231-2232).

<sup>12</sup> Beth Haller, Bruce Dorries and Jessica Rahn, 'Media labelling versus the US disability community identity: a study of shifting cultural language', *Disability & Society*, 21:1 (2006), pp.61-75 (p.67); Lawrence O. Gostin, 'The American With Disabilities Act at 25', p.2232.

views of disability.<sup>13</sup> Since the early twentieth century, disability had been presented in film via negative stereotypes, causing able-bodied audiences to perceive those with disabilities as a burden to society. Films like *The Black Stork* (1917), a film about a boy who was born with a 'hunchback' growing up to become a murderer, were designed to promote the euthanasia of people with disabilities, prompting audiences to see them as either 'uncontrollable villains or helpless victims' that were 'unfit for normal social roles.'<sup>14</sup> Although the horror film *Freaks* (1932) attempted to 'normalise' people with disabilities - by showcasing the film's 'freaks' doing 'normal' activities like laundry and experiencing marriage - the film's climax undid any progress made.<sup>15</sup> After seducing dwarf Hans (Harry Earles) and attempting to kill him to receive his inheritance, trapeze artist Cleopatra (Olga Baclanova) and her partner, the strongman Hercules (Henry Victor) are hunted down by the 'freaks', leading to Cleopatra grotesquely being transformed into the 'human duck' so she could be viewed as a 'freak' too.<sup>16</sup> The monstrous nature of the climax led to critics claiming the film was 'revolting' and 'unhealthy', prompting the film to be pulled from American film circulation and banned in Britain.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the reception and reaction to the film demonstrated that able-bodied audiences were beginning to reject the notion that people with disabilities should only be seen for entertainment purposes, such as the purpose of freakshows in the late nineteenth century, it also emphasised the notion

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<sup>13</sup> Michael T. Hayes and Rhonda S. Black, 'Troubling Signs: Disability, Hollywood Movies and the Construction of a Discourse of Pity', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 23:2 (Spring 2002) pp.114-132 (p.116).

<sup>14</sup> Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, 'The League of Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression: A Case Study in the New Disability History', *The Journal of American History*, 87:3 (December 2008), pp.888-922 (pp.894-895).

<sup>15</sup> Angela M. Smith, *Hideous Progeny: Disability, Eugenics, And Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp.87-88.

<sup>16</sup> *Freaks*, dir.by Tod Browning (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1932).

<sup>17</sup> Angela M. Smith, *Hideous Progeny*, p. 94.

that people with disabilities should stay hidden in society, creating a stigmatisation against disability.<sup>18</sup>

As film gained popularity in the twentieth century, several stereotypes were used to represent people with disabilities, presenting them as: something to be pitied; a burden to society; or simply better-off dead.<sup>19</sup> However, the most common stereotype used was villainous disability, where an antagonist's 'evil and threatening presence is exemplified by a deformity of body'.<sup>20</sup> Films in the 1950s and 60s relied heavily on this stereotype, like Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953), which accentuated Captain Hook's prosthetic in every scene to establish his evilness, or *Treasure Island* (1950) which featured several antagonistic pirates with physical disabilities including the main villain Long John Silver, who was missing a leg.<sup>21</sup> By the late 1970s and the 1980s, the larger awareness about people with disabilities within the US due to the Vietnam War forced Hollywood to create films that depicted a more sympathetic portrayal of disability.<sup>22</sup> According to film scholar Martin Norden, the 1980s saw a general positive direction towards 'a new-found sensitivity to disability issues', with films like *My Left Foot* (1989), whose protagonist had cerebral palsy (a disability previously unacknowledged in mainstream film), marking the clearest indication that there was this new sensitivity.<sup>23</sup> By the 1990s, mainstream film had adjusted to present disability in a more sympathetic and progressive manner. However, as this paper will explain, the positive changes were only slightly progressive as many of

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<sup>18</sup> Angela M. Smith, *Hideous Progeny*, p.94.

<sup>19</sup> Jack A. Nelson, 'Broken Images', pp.5-9.

<sup>20</sup> Jack A. Nelson, 'Broken Images', pp.6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp.213-216.

<sup>22</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation*, p.265.

<sup>23</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation*, p.302.

these changes created new issues with the way people with disabilities were being represented.

Due to the term 'disability' being extremely ambiguous and difficult to define, it is important to establish how this paper will be using the term.<sup>24</sup> The medical model of disability studies focused on studying physical, sensory or intellectual impairments to discover potential ways to rehabilitate people with disabilities in an attempt to 'normalise' and cure them.<sup>25</sup> Due to civil rights activists criticising the medical model for 'restricting disability to the biological dimension', the social model was established in the late twentieth century to focus on how society was disabling people with impairments.<sup>26</sup> This emphasised that social issues faced by people with disabilities, such as accessibility, made them disabled, not their impairments. Whilst the social model was revolutionary in the 1990s for providing a new way of thinking about disability studies and for critiquing capitalist society for excluding people with disabilities, it has recently been critiqued for being an 'all-rounder' that has been watered down 'to reformist aspirations of social inclusion'.<sup>27</sup> More significantly, culture within the social model of disability is not considered crucial, prompting a cultural model of disability studies to form.<sup>28</sup> The cultural model investigates the consequences of cultural knowledge systems on people with and without disabilities, particularly focusing on the notion of deviance between people with disabilities and

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<sup>24</sup> Catherine J. Kudlick, 'Disability History: Why We Need Another "Other"', *The American Historical Review*, 108:3 (June 2003), pp.763-793 (p.767).

<sup>25</sup> Ruthie B. Gomes, Paula H. Lopes, Marivete Gesser and Maria Juracy, 'New Dialogues in Feminist Disability History', *Estudos Feministas*, 27:1 (2019), pp.1-13 (p.1); Daniel L. Preston, 'Finding Difference: Nemo and Friends Opening the Door to Disability Theory', *English Journal*, 100:2 (November 2010), pp.56-60 (p.56).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel L. Preston, 'Finding Difference', pp.56; Ruthie B. Gomes, Paula H. Lopes, Marivete Gesser and Maria Juracy, 'New Dialogues in Feminist Disability History', pp.1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Waldshmidt, 'Disability Goes Cultural: The Cultural Model of Disability as an Analytical Tool', in: *Culture, Theory, Disability*, ed. by Anne Waldshmidt, Hanjo Berressem and Moritz Ingwersen (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017), p.21.

<sup>28</sup> Anne Waldshmidt, 'Disability Goes Cultural', p.21.

the able-bodied 'normal'<sup>29</sup> Thus, this thesis will use both the social and cultural models of disability studies to analyse mainstream films' role in shaping understanding of disability in the 1990s.

This paper will analyse fifteen different mainstream films released between 1987 and 1999 to understand how people with disabilities were represented and explore the strategies of filmic representation in the wider context of the film industry.<sup>30</sup> To be classed as a mainstream film, a film must: have appealed to a broad audience; be produced by a major film studio; feature popular actors; or be 'supported by intensive marketing in all forms of media'.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the films analysed in this paper have all made over \$10 million at the US Box Office and star an established actor in a lead role. Whilst the fifteen films cover several different genres (e.g., the biopic *My Left Foot*, the Sci-Fi film *Gattaca* (1998) etc.), filmmakers continued to use the same tropes and stereotypes when representing disability, so the analysis of various genres provide a broader look at the Hollywood film industry itself. Although this dissertation will mainly analyse mainstream films, through a study of common tropes and changes in how disability was represented, a comparison will be made between these fifteen films and films released prior to the 1990s featuring disability to provide context for any changes made in this representation.

The findings from the analysis of these films were recorded in a database, which can be found in the appendices section of this thesis as Appendix 2 – Disability Film Database. It features both quantitative and qualitative data to easily determine the similarities and differences between the representations of physical disabilities in the

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<sup>29</sup> Anne Waldshmidt, 'Disability Goes Cultural', pp.24-25.

<sup>30</sup> A full summary of the films analysed in this film, including reception to the film, can be found in Appendix 1: List of Films.

<sup>31</sup> Mirosław Przyłipiak, 'The Notion of Mainstream Film in Contemporary Cinema', *Panoptikum*, 19:26 (2018), pp.14-31 (pp.15-18).

films analysed. The first section of the database considers quantitative data including: the type of disability represented; the causation of the disability; the approximate screen time given to the disability; and independent films released in the decade that featured physical disability. The second section of the database focuses on the different disability terminology used within the film to describe the characters with disabilities, which will be used in the first chapter to discuss the film industry's use of negative terminology. The final section of the database concentrates on common tropes used by filmmakers when representing disability, especially as these tropes tend to be used within rehabilitation narratives which will be discussed in the second chapter.

In addition to analysing the content of the films, an analysis of supportive sources (like promotional interviews and reviews) will be used to assess both the marketing and reception of the disabled characters in the film. Production notes will also be used to determine choices the filmmakers made when creating these characters with disabilities. The use of these supportive primary sources within this paper will provide a cultural context of disability in the 1990s, to understand how a primarily able-bodied audience viewed disabilities' role within society when watching these films.

Although film has been discussed within disability history, many academics tend to choose between analysing the disability civil rights movement throughout the twentieth century or the representation of physical disability in film. Before discussing her research on higher education's response to the passing of the ADA in her article 'Silence on the stomping grounds', Lellis provides a detailed overview of the disability civil rights movement in the twentieth century, explaining that the American population understood disability through the medical and social models and that the

ADA attempted 'to illustrate people with disabilities are no less deserving than all citizens'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Haller, Dorries and Rahn's article 'Media labelling *versus* the US disability community identity' on the media's changing attitudes to acceptable disability language explains how the disability civil rights movement used language to establish people with disabilities as a minority group, as well as the movement's involvement with the creation of the ADA.<sup>33</sup> Whilst the disability civil rights movement had been covered in great detail, the intertwining relationship between the representation of disability in film and disability history is not discussed as much. Longmore and Goldberger's 'The League of the Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression' focused on the early disability civil rights movement during the 1930s. A section of the article is devoted to the impact film had in moulding society's views of disability at the time, explaining that film was used to prompt able-bodied audiences to view people with disabilities as 'unfit for social norms'.<sup>34</sup> Whilst that article solely focused on disability in the 1930s, Norden's book *The Cinema of Isolation* (1994) provided a chronological discussion on how film represented disability throughout the twentieth century, arguing that films are made from an able-bodied perspective that views disability as the 'other', 'reducing them to be objectifications of pity, fear, scorn... - in short, objects of spectacle – as a means of pandering to the needs of the able-bodied majority.'<sup>35</sup> He goes on to explain that in the 1950s and 60s, filmmakers revived fears about people with disabilities through the use of the villainous disability stereotype, whilst the USA's concern about

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<sup>32</sup> Julie C. Lellis, 'Silence on the stomping grounds', pp.810-812.

<sup>33</sup> Beth Haller, Bruce Dorries and Jessica Rahn, 'Media labelling *versus* the US disability community identity', pp.61-67.

<sup>34</sup> Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, 'The League of Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression', pp.894-895.

<sup>35</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p.1.



returning Vietnam veterans encouraged filmmakers in the 1970s and 80s to create a more sympathetic portrayal of disability.<sup>36</sup> Although the concluding chapter of the book does begin to indicate the significance of the ADA and address how films like *Hook* (1991) and *The Fugitive* (1993) continued to use the villainous disability stereotype, Norden stated that at the time of writing, it was ‘too early to assess [the ADA’s] impact on the Hollywood community’.<sup>37</sup> Thus, this thesis will contribute to a wider discussion on the role of film within disability history, by historically analysing the way disability was represented in film during the 1990s.

To assess the progressive nature of the film industry in the 1990s, this thesis will be exploring three key areas where change was made in how mainstream film represented people with disabilities. For the first two chapters, this thesis will undertake a critical descriptive survey of film narrative and the role disability plays in these narratives. The first chapter focuses on the use of negative disability terminology, particularly as the ADA established what the accepted terminology was for people with disabilities at the time. The second chapter concentrates on the use of rehabilitation narratives that attempt to portray disability in a positive light, but ultimately portray them as ‘others’ within society that need to be ‘cured’ to the status of the able-bodied ‘normal’. The third chapter will be an exception to the critical survey of film narrative seen in the first two chapters. Instead, this chapter will explore the issues with the problematic technique of ‘disability drag’ used in the film industry, where an able-bodied actor is favoured over an actor with a disability to portray a character with a disability, which began to be increasingly used in the 1990s. Through the exploration of these three areas surrounding the representation

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<sup>36</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation*, pp.213; 265.

<sup>37</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation*, pp.309-311.

of physical disability in mainstream films in the 1990s, it can be determined that the film industry attempted to be progressive with their changes, but these changes were ultimately flawed.

## Disability Terminology

The rapid change of terminology used to describe people with disabilities throughout the twentieth century, in an attempt to be inclusive and avoid negative stereotypes, has led to many terms deemed acceptable when they were first introduced becoming out-dated.<sup>1</sup> Before the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the common term used to describe people with disabilities was 'handicapped', having changed from 'crippled' in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> As part of Section 35.104 of the ADA, most notable for defining the term disability and who could be covered by the act, the terminology used to describe people with disabilities was legally changed from 'handicap' to 'disability'. The act states:

The use of the term "disability" instead of "handicap" and the term "individual with a disability" instead of "individual with handicaps" represents an effort by Congress to make use of up-to-date, currently accepted terminology... Many individuals with disabilities, and organizations representing such individuals, object to the use of such terms as "handicapped person" or "the handicapped."<sup>3</sup>

As the language used to describe people with disabilities plays a pivotal role in how physical disability is represented in mainstream films, this chapter will analyse the terminology used in five different films, *Hook* (1991), *Batman Returns* (1992) *Forrest Gump* (1994), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) and *Gattaca* (1998), to determine the impact the ADA had on changing the film industry's use of disability terminology throughout the 1990s, facilitated by the other mainstream films analysed

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<sup>1</sup> Phil Foreman, 'Language and Disability', *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 30:1 (March 2005), pp.57-59 (pp.57-58).

<sup>2</sup> Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, 'The League of the Physically Handicapped and The Great Depression: A Case Study in the New Disability History', *The Journal of American History*, 87:3 (December 2000), pp.888-922 (p.914).

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, 'Americans with Disabilities Act Title II Regulations', *ADA.gov* (26 July 1991), <<https://www.ada.gov/reg2.htm>> [accessed 16 March 2020].

within my disability film database. The films' fictional narratives are imperative for understanding the mindset of society towards disability in the 1990s, with the filmmakers understanding of disability being reflected in the way film represents disability. This can particularly be seen with the frequent use of negative terminology within mainstream film during the 1990s, despite the ADA providing the alternative and more inclusive term of 'disability'. However, it should be noted that the historical setting of a film does influence the usage of disability terminology within film in the 1990s. Those films set in the 1960s and 70s like *Forrest Gump* use terminology considered appropriate for the time period, making it understandable why the terms 'crippled' and 'freak' are used.

These films have been selected to represent different generic treatments which, as the introductory chapter explained, collectively illustrate how mainstream film regarded and at times effected change in wider cultures of disability representation, despite being different filmic representative strategies. Additionally, the very explicit depiction of disability and terminology usage sparked significant debate within the film-industry as well as in academic and popular media, forming a wider primary source base for investigation to understand the extent and value of the changes to disability terminology throughout the 1990s. Furthermore, these films feature main characters who form discrete identities within the films, as opposed to being subsidiary characters, lending themselves to in-depth discursive filmic analysis. To this end, individual scenes will be extracted to explore how terminology is used within that film and the character's narrative. Finally, as the introductory chapter also explained, developments in film representation are reflective of wider changes in society. Throughout this chapter, wider historical analysis including changes in interest group and activist movements will form a focus, to explore how the film

industry was reflective of positive changes to acceptable disability terminology that emerged during the 1990s.

### **The Uneven History of ‘Handicap’**

The accepted terminology for people with disabilities was constantly changing throughout the twentieth century, similar to how the accepted terminology for African Americans changed in the United States when it became outdated, changing from ‘coloured’ to ‘negro’ at the end of the nineteenth century and then from ‘negro’ to ‘black’ in the late 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Early disability civil rights activists, The League of the Physically Handicapped, defined themselves as ‘handicapped people’ rather than identifying with the stigmatising term ‘cripple’, in an attempt to overcome the social and economic marginalisation of people with disabilities, whilst the ADA confirmed a new change in accepted terminology from ‘handicapped’ to ‘disability’.<sup>5</sup> However, when disability civil rights activists attempted to change acceptable disability terminology, the dominant culture would usually act as a major opposition, claiming that these changes were ‘just political correctness’.<sup>6</sup> Richard Rieser, a disabled scholar who founded the organisation World of Inclusion that aimed to reform the education system for the benefit of people with disabilities, claims that those arguing ‘political correctness’ simply ‘want to be free to damage others by their prejudices’, and thus, use language to feed ‘a “them and us” culture, where it is fine to joke at other’s expense, to bully, to harass, and once those on the receiving end are reduced to derogatory labels, to be violent towards them.’<sup>7</sup> In order to combat this

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<sup>4</sup> Tom W. Smith, ‘Changing Racial Labels: From ‘Colored’ to ‘Negro’ to ‘Black’ to ‘African Americans’’, *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 56:4 (Winter 1992), pp.496-514 (pp.497-499).

<sup>5</sup> Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, ‘The League of the Physically Handicapped and The Great Depression’, p.914.

<sup>6</sup> Beth Haller, Bruce Dorries and Jessica Rahn, ‘Media labelling *versus* the US disability community identity’, p.62.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rieser, ‘Does Language Matter?’, *Inclusion Now*, 2:1 (Summer 2001), pp.16-17 (p.17).

'political correctness' argument with the replacement of the term 'handicapped' to 'disabled', disability civil rights activists were allowed to be involved with the creation of the ADA, prompting an emphasis in the legislation on the accepted people-first terminology of 'people with disabilities'.<sup>8</sup> By being involved with the creation of the ADA, the activists were able to avoid the usual opposition from the dominant culture, by instead working with it to create the legislation, whilst also achieving an official legal change in disability terminology to remove the term 'handicapped'.

This change in disability terminology began to impact the film industry from as early as 1991. Justine Korman's *Hook: The storybook based on the movie* (1992), based on an earlier version of the film *Hook* before it was completed, indicates that there was a change in the film's script between the book being written and the film's release. The film acts as a sequel to James Barrie's 1904 play *Peter Pan*, centring on a now adult Peter (Robin Williams) returning to Neverland to rescue his two children who were kidnapped by Captain Hook (Dustin Hoffman). In one scene, a disguised Peter, and Tinkerbell (Julia Roberts) infiltrate the Jolly Roger to find Peter's children, whilst Hook monologues to his pirate crew about his plan, which includes the following line:

**Hook:** Finally, I'm going to kill Peter Pan. That cocky boy who cut off my hand and fed it to the crocodile.<sup>9</sup>

However, in the storybook based on the earlier version of the film, the following exchange takes place which is noticeably absent from the completed film:

"What's with the Hook?' Peter wondered.

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<sup>8</sup> Beth Haller, Bruce Dorries and Jessica Rahn, 'Media labelling *versus* the US disability community identity: a study of shifting cultural language', *Disability & Society*, 21:1 (2006), pp.61-75 (pp.62-63).

<sup>9</sup> *Hook*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Amblin Entertainment, 1991).

“That handicap is your handiwork. You cut off his hand and threw it to the crocodile, remember?” Tink prompted.<sup>10</sup>

Let us turn to how this scene can be deconstructed. Martin Norden claimed in *The Cinema of Isolation* that it was too early to assess the impact of the ADA on the Hollywood cinema in 1994, but states that *Hook* was a primary example for showing very little had changed in the representation of physical disability in film as *Hook* ‘renew[ed] fears of amputees under the guise of family entertainment.’<sup>11</sup> Yet, as my analysis of the two versions of *Hook* reveals, in fact, the ADA did have an impact on the film’s use of disability terminology. That is not all, since a closer analysis reveals a complication to the story. A key narrative throughout the film focuses on Tinkerbell trying to get Peter to remember his past, with the character ultimately remembering when he learns from Tinkerbell the story of how she rescued him and took him to Neverland. Meanwhile, Hook’s narrative focuses on him trying to get revenge against Peter, who cut off his hand and fed it to a crocodile, at first by fighting him and then by attempting to turn Peter’s children against him. In the final version of the film, then, there are two competing if related narrative threads: Tinkerbell’s narrative of getting Peter to remember his past, but more importantly for us, Hook’s revenge narrative which highlights disability. The removal of the line ‘That *handicap* is your *handiwork*’ prevented Hook’s impairment from being mocked by Tinkerbell as part of her playful relationship with Peter, indicated by the wordplay of ‘*handicap*’ and *handiwork*, ensuring that the audience do not see the impairment as something humorous. Additionally, by allowing Hook to mention the origin story of his hook, this plot point becomes a part of Hook’s revenge narrative instead of Tinkerbell’s

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<sup>10</sup> Justine Korman, *Hook: the storybook based on the movie*, (London: Red Fox, 1992), p.14.

<sup>11</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p.309.

narrative of getting Peter to remember his past, enabling Captain Hook to own his disability, especially with the removal of the term 'handicapped' from the final script.

The term 'handicap' also began to be removed from everyday language in the 1990s. Haller, Dorries and Rahn's investigation into the disability terminology used by the US media in the decade reveals that the New York Times' usage of the term dropped from 38 to 26 uses, whereas the Washington Post's usage of 'handicapped' reduced from 32 to 17.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, the media were beginning to use the term 'handicap' much less, whilst the fifteen mainstream films analysed in this project did not use the term 'handicapped' at all.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the ADA did not completely eradicate the term from everyday society, with golf being a prime example where the term 'handicap' continues to be used. A player who has a low handicap is considered a better golfer than one who has a high handicap, giving the term 'handicap' negative connotations due to golfers wanting a lower handicap to prove they are skilled at the sport.<sup>14</sup> Although, the term 'handicap' continues to be used with negative connotations in a sport setting, the film industry itself no longer uses the term. Therefore, this analysis of *Hook* reveals that, contrary to Norden, positive changes to the use of the term 'handicap' in the film can be detected as a direct impact of the ADA.

### **The continued presence of 'Crippled'**

Although the ADA had begun to impact the film industry through the removal of the term 'handicapped' from mainstream films, it ignored the existence of the

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<sup>12</sup> Beth Haller, Bruce Dorries and Jessica Rahn, 'Media labelling *versus* the US disability community identity', p.69.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 2B- Disability Film Database: Terminology.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory G. Fedorcik, Robin M. Queen, Alicia N. Abbey, Claude T. Moorman III and David S. Ruch, 'Differences in wrist mechanics during the golf swing based on golf handicap', *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 15:3 (May 2012), pp.250-254 (p.251).



problematic term 'crippled', even though disability civil rights activists had rejected the term since the early 1930s. The term 'crippled' was used to describe people with physical disabilities, mainly during the twentieth century, with the term being deemed impolite and stigmatising towards the disabled community.<sup>15</sup> During the 1930s, The League of the Physically Handicapped adopted the new term of 'handicapped' in an attempt to remove the association between disability and poor relief during their efforts to create employment opportunities for people with disabilities during the Great Depression.<sup>16</sup> Despite this initial attempt to remove the term 'crippled', it continued to be used within society. An example of this can be seen in director Elia Kazan's description of James Dean's performance in *East of Eden* (1955), describing Dean as being 'very twisted, almost like a cripple or a spastic of some kind.'<sup>17</sup> Yet, film itself tended to avoid using any collective disability terminology to describe people with disabilities, instead relying on simply describing the character's impairment. *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), about Jane "Baby Jane" Hudson (Bette Davis) unfairly treating her sister Blanche (Joan Crawford), who used a wheelchair, as a direct result of Jane's jealousy of Blanche's fame, demonstrates this in a heated scene between the two sisters. When Blanche informs Jane about her plans to sell the house and confronts Jane about the way she has been treating her, Blanche tells Jane 'You wouldn't be able to do these awful things to me if I weren't still in this chair.'. Jane angrily responds: 'But you are Blanche, you are in that chair! And tell me, what are these awful things I'm supposed to be doing to

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<sup>15</sup> Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, 'The League of the Physically Handicapped and The Great Depression', pp.892-893; Beth Haller, Bruce Dorries and Jessica Rahn, 'Media labelling *versus* the US disability community identity', p.65.

<sup>16</sup> Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, 'The League of the Physically Handicapped and The Great Depression', p.914.

<sup>17</sup> Elia Kazan, *Kazan on Directing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), p.185.

you?’<sup>18</sup> There is no indication throughout the film that Blanche is part of a larger group of people that have disabilities, instead, isolating Blanche’s impairment by the terminology directly referencing her impairment.

In turn, it appeared that the term ‘crippled’ began to be used in film during the 1970s, despite disability activists attempts to remove the term from public use throughout the twentieth century. The biopic *The Other Side of the Mountain* (1975), about Olympic skiing hopeful Jill Kinmont who became paralysed in a skiing accident at the Snow Cup, was one of the first instances where the term ‘crippled’ was used. Jill’s friend Audra (who used crutches after contracting polio) informs Jill, in an attempt to stop her from trying to ski again, that ‘there’s only one thing that kills cripples, and that’s taking themselves too seriously.’<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the opening scene of the war drama *Coming Home* (1978) features Vietnam veterans with disabilities playing billiards and discussing whether or not they would go back to the war if they could, with one veteran saying someone would only say yes if they could not ‘make the reality and say, “What I did was wrong and what all this other shit was wrong, man” – and still be able to live with themselves, because they’re crippled for the rest of their fuckin’ life.’<sup>20</sup> With this new use of the term ‘crippled’ in film, the term showed no sign of being removed from common vocabulary. Instead, the use of the term in film solidified the term’s position in society, explaining why the ADA did not acknowledge the problematic nature of the term.

As the term used to describe people with physical disabilities has changed from ‘crippled’, to ‘handicapped’, to ‘disabled’, it would be expected that film by the 1990s would no longer be using the term ‘crippled’. However, when analysing the

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<sup>18</sup> *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, dir.by Robert Aldrich (Seven Arts Productions, 1962).

<sup>19</sup> *The Other Side of the Mountain*, dir.by Larry Peerce (Filmways Pictures, 1975).

<sup>20</sup> *Coming Home*, dir.by Hal Ashby (Jerome Hellman Production and Jayne Productions, 1978).

terminology used to describe a character's impairment in the fifteen films this thesis focuses on, although not statistically representative, it is indicatively suggested that 'crippled' is the second most common term used in these films after a direct reference to the character's impairment.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the period of 1987 and 1999, 'crippled' is used as commonplace terminology in several films, mainly by minor characters, like the pub customer's line in *My Left Foot* (1989) 'I don't fight cripples' when Christy gets into a fight at his father's wake; or the doctor's line in *Forrest Gump* 'But his back's as crippled as a politician' when explaining why a young Forrest had to wear leg braces.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, this common use of 'crippled' is also present in everyday society, as seen in the production notes for *My Left Foot*, which described disability advisor Gene Lambert as a 'cripple himself in a car accident' and Marianne Gray's review of *The Horse Whisperer* (1998), for the magazine *Film Review*, explaining that the title character 'proves equally skilled at rejuvenating married women and crippled girls.'<sup>23</sup> In fact, the use of 'crippled' as seen in the films under treatment here possibly mirrors a wider lack of change in popular culture. It was not just the film industry that was still using the term 'crippled' in everyday language, as the magazine industry was also still using this term. Considered 'the ultimate in the fashion world', *Vogue* magazine has been commonly 'associated with the luxury-end of fashion', especially as it is read by members of the middle and upper classes, allowing the magazine to be the first to review and set new trends within the fashion world.<sup>24</sup> In the 1992 article about Spike Lee's *Malcom X* (1992), a

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 2B.

<sup>22</sup> *My Left Foot*, dir.by Jim Sheridan (Granada Films, 1989); *Forrest Gump*, dir.by Robert Zemeckis (Wendy Finerman Productions, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, 'Production Notes for Jim Sheridan's 1989 film 'My Left Foot''; Marianne Gray, 'The Horse Whisperer', *Film Review* (September 1998), p.16.

<sup>24</sup> Darina Granik, 'Role of Vogue Magazine in the Transformation of Screen Characters into Style Icons', *ZoneModa Journal*, 7:1 (2017), pp.25-35 (p.29); Helena Kopnina, 'The World According to "Vogue": The Role of Culture(s) in International Fashion Magazines', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 31:4 (2007), pp.363-381 (p.368);

post-civil rights activism can be read in comments like: 'To say nothing of the excruciating struggle black directors must endure to make any movie in Hollywood, then the nerve-racking, metal-testing push against the odds to do *their* movie, *their* way.'<sup>25</sup> However, disability was not within a mainstream civil rights consciousness as seen in Wideman's description of 'armless, legless, handless cripples' on set.<sup>26</sup> Another article for *Vogue*, published in 1996, about nineteenth century painter Cézanne, highlighted that by painting the 'dwarf' Empeiraire, Cézanne was ahead of his time and conveyed 'such respect to for those in the margins'. Yet, the article describes Empeiraire as 'a type of 'cripple' that polite society did not want to see immortalized in painting.'<sup>27</sup> This oblivious use of the term 'crippled' throughout the 1990s, both in film and in everyday society, reveals that the term 'crippled' was still largely inscribed into society and the ADA had made very little effort to reduce the use of the term in the public domain.

As with all terms explored in this chapter, 'cripple' provides an example of how even as these terms might at one level be understood for their negative othering and pejorative reference to disability, analytically, its usage and therefore meanings that emerge from it are far more complex. Whilst *Forrest Gump* focuses on the title character's life through a backdrop of major American historic events, it also uses Lieutenant Dan to comment on disability and the aftermath of the Vietnam War, making it a pivotal text to analyse in this thesis. In one scene, Dan confronts Forrest in the hospital they are sharing after they were both injured during the Vietnam War. As Dan believed Forrest should have left him to die on the battlefield, Dan declares:

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Anonymous, 'Vogue – About', *Condé Nast*, <<https://www.condenast.ru/en/portfolio/magazines/vogue/>> [accessed 12 October 2020].

<sup>25</sup> John Edgar Wideman, 'Monument to Malcolm', *Vogue*, 182:11 (November 1992), pp.284-287; 356 (p.286).

<sup>26</sup> John Edgar Wideman, 'Monument to Malcolm', p.286.

<sup>27</sup> Michael FitzGerald, 'Straight from the Source', *Vogue*, 186:5 (May 1996), pp.294-301 (p.301).

'I should have died out there and with my men but now, I'm nothing but a God damn cripple! A legless freak!'.<sup>28</sup> The term 'crippled' is used here in a negative way to evoke an element of pity from an able-bodied audience towards a disabled character's position in society, whilst also highlighting the negative connotations associated with 'crippled'. Meanwhile, the science fiction film *Gattaca*, discussed further in chapter two, features a scene when Jerome Morrow (Jude Law) reacts with outrage towards a detective referring to him negatively as 'crippled'. By exclaiming 'I'm not crippled. I hurt my leg training, you moron!', Jerome's reaction indicated to the audience the negative connotations associated with the term 'crippled'.<sup>29</sup>

These quotations are highly significant to our exploration of 'cripple', since although it depicts a judgemental use by characters within the film world and its narrative, it has an added layer of impact that calls out the dual role of the audience, which is both to identify and invest in the characters and the film world, while also reminding the audience that they are actors themselves in the real social world. The use of 'crippled' in *Gattaca* is noticeably old-fashioned, something emphasised by the futuristic society featured in the film. As *Gattaca* features a protagonist with a disability being labelled with a negative term, the able-bodied audience are confronted with the negative consequences of using 'crippled', emphasising the outdated nature of the term. This notion of confronting the public with the negative connotations of the term 'crippled' coincided with disability activists reclaiming 'cripple' in an attempt to 'take the image in their identity that scares outsiders and make it a source of militant pride'.<sup>30</sup> As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder explain, this technique of embracing and using derogatory terminology through irony 'forces

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<sup>28</sup> *Forrest Gump*.

<sup>29</sup> *Gattaca*, dir. by Andrew Niccol (Jersey Films, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Beth Haller, Bruce Dorries and Jessica Rahn, 'Media labelling versus the US disability community identity', p.65.

the dominant culture to face its own violence head-on because the authority of devaluation has been claimed openly and ironically', shaming the dominant culture by highlighting the dehumanising terms and removing the power originally associated with this terminology.<sup>31</sup> This strategy of ironic embracing by disability activists was inspired by the similar embracing of the term 'Queer' by the LGBT Civil Rights Movement, with the act of reclaiming derogatory terms evoking pride within minority groups alongside an evoking sense of camaraderie within the community.<sup>32</sup> The ironic embracing of 'crippled' in film towards the end of the 1990s shows that filmmakers were beginning to embrace the methods of disability civil rights activists, marking the start of positive change in the film industry regarding terminology. Although the term 'crippled' was still in common use by the end of the twentieth century, mainstream films began to emphasise the negative connotations associated with the term, particularly because of evolving tactics by disability civil rights activists who were adopting the ironic embracing technique to confront the dominant culture's use of the term 'crippled'.

### **The Weight of History – Freak**

More than any other term, 'freak' is a negative term used to describe people with disabilities that was still being used in mainstream film during the 1990s. Although similar to the use of the term 'crippled' - indeed 'freak' occurs alongside 'cripple' in the earlier quote from *Forrest Gump* to emphasise Lieutenant Dan's cynicism towards his disability – it has a much larger genealogical heritage. The negative connotations of 'freak' can be traced back to the nineteenth century and the creation

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<sup>31</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis* (The University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp.35-36.

<sup>32</sup> Robin Jeshion, 'Pride and Prejudiced: On The Reclamation of Slurs', *Research Gate* (December 2019), pp.1-20 (p.4-11).

of freak shows. During the late nineteenth century, there were two types of 'human exhibit': the first showcasing the culture and people of the non-Western world, where many showmen would promote Americans with 'physical anomalies' as new species of human; the second exhibiting 'monsters' and 'freaks of nature' (*lusus naturae*) who 'were born with a demonstratable difference.'<sup>33</sup> The debate between scientists and laypersons as to whether a person should be classed as a new species or *lusus naturae* led to all human exhibits being labelled with the generic term 'freak'.<sup>34</sup> The uses of 'freak' when discussing a person with a physical disability was often associated with the wonder and mystery of the 'otherness' of disabled people compared to the 'normality' of able-bodied people, with the disabled 'freak' being seen as a fantastical spectacle for able-bodied audiences who want to validate their own identities as 'normal'.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to being associated with 'the other', 'freaks' were associated with fear and horror, as a result of able-bodied audiences seeing them as existing on the boundaries of humanity, with these disabled 'freaks' threatening the integrity of the boundary. The 'otherness' and the fear of the 'freaks' led to the term being adopted by Robert Shaye when he created New Line Cinema, that distributed 'arty and freak films' in the 1970s at midnight screenings, with the 'freak' genre of films being created 'to tap those markets which would be ignored by the majors, and to maximise the difference of New Line's product from more traditional commercial

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show*, p.7.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Cussato, 'Freak', in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin (New York and London: NYU Press, 2015), pp.85-88 (p.85; 87).

film.<sup>36</sup> The use of the term 'freak' indicated that these films were not the usual films viewed at major cinemas, instead they were independent films aimed at breaking the mould and creating new types of film genres. Notably, the New Line Cinema slasher horror film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) featured the character of Franklin, who, despite being in a wheelchair, was the last male character to survive the attack from the main antagonist Leatherface. Ultimately, though, his disability made him vulnerable to attack as he was reliant on his sister Sally, the main protagonist, to get around.<sup>37</sup> These 'freak films' provided representation for minority groups who tended to be underrepresented in mainstream movies, allowing Shaye to create a new market for films that targeted audiences who identified with 'the other' being shown in his films. This association with 'freaks' and 'the other' proved profitable for the film and entertainment industry and would continue to in the final decade of the twentieth century.

The use of 'freak' and 'monster' in mainstream films during the 1990s certainly drew on the negative connotations of fear and 'otherness'. Let us consider tactics of 'othering' in two major hit films of the 1990s, *Batman Returns* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Crucially, it will be important to think about genre, and in the process, we can begin to understand how 'otherness' cannot be complete in terms of abjection in this representation of disability because it also involves emotional investment on the part of the audience. At this juncture, let us explore these two films. *Batman Returns* is a fantasy superhero sequel to Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), featuring Batman (Michael Keaton) battling The Penguin (Danny DeVito) who is

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<sup>36</sup> Justin Wyatt, 'The formation of the 'major independent': Miramax, New Line and the New Hollywood', in. *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. by Steve Neale and Murray Smith (Oxon: Routledge, 1998), pp.74-90 (p.76).

<sup>37</sup> *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, dir.by Tobe Hooper (Vortex, 1974).



trying to become the Mayor of Gotham City, whilst Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer) acts as an anti-hero who teams up with both The Penguin and Batman to get her revenge against business tycoon Max Shreck (Christopher Walken). Meanwhile, Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is an animated adaptation of Victor Hugo's original novel *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831), focusing on telling the simple story of Quasimodo (Tom Hulce) trying to overcome his own insecurities regarding his disability and being accepted by society for his impairment.<sup>38</sup> In both cases, the filmmakers use fantastical genre elements, such as extravagant superheroes and villains in *Batman Returns* and the talking gargoyles in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, to establish a fictional world for audiences to 'escape' into. Yet, these fictional elements are combined with elements from everyday life that the audience can familiarise with, like 'methods of transportation, weapons, and even physical laws and principles', allowing audiences to identify with the new world they are experiencing whilst also understanding some of the realistic concepts established in the film.<sup>39</sup>

Turning to the films, let us focus on *Batman Returns*. According to writer and producer of *Batman: The Animated Series* Paul Dini, The Penguin being abandoned by his parents is enough to warrant him a 'freak', despite the character actually being raised in a freak show, known as the 'quiet bird boy'.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, The Penguin proudly declares at the end of the film: 'I am not a human being! I am an animal!', whilst later mocking Batman that he doesn't have to wear a mask because he is a 'genuine freak'.<sup>41</sup> At this point of the film, The Penguin has been cast out by society

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen Rebello, *The Art of The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), p.9.

<sup>39</sup> Matthias Stephan, 'Do You Believe in Magic? The Potency of the Fantasy Genre', *Coolabah*, 18:18 (2016), pp.3-15 (pp.6-7).

<sup>40</sup> Homer Thompson, 'Making of Batman Returns – The Penguin's Origins', *YouTube*, (2 June 2013), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5oVcixE3V4>> [accessed 6 March 2020].

<sup>41</sup> *Batman Returns*, dir.by Tim Burton (Warner Bros., 1992).

and is treated like an 'other', prompting the character to fully embrace and take pride in the role of the 'freak'. The Penguin's line parodies *The Elephant Man* (1980) where John Merrick – who had a facial deformity – confronts an angry mob and declares 'I am not an animal! I am a human being!'<sup>42</sup> Whereas Merrick embraced his human status, The Penguin is shown embracing his 'animal' status, causing disability to be viewed as inhumane by able-bodied audiences. Moreover, the following exchange between The Penguin and Max Shreck about who counts as a respectable 'monster', the 'penguin man' living in the sewers or the power-hungry businessman, reveals that being considered a 'monster' or a 'freak' is dependent on the situation and culture of society:

**The Penguin:** You and I have something in common. We're both perceived as monsters. But somehow, you're a well-respected monster, and I am to date, not.

**Max Shreck:** Frankly, I think that's a bum rap. I'm a businessman. Tough? Yes. Shrewd? Ok, but that does not make me a monster.<sup>43</sup>

At this point, it is germane to turn to Robert Bogdan, who claims that "Freak" is a way of thinking, of presenting, a set of practices, an institution – not a characteristic of an individual.<sup>44</sup> It is the way that people with disabilities are presented to society that decides if they should be classed as a 'freak' and a 'monster' or if they should be considered 'normal', with The Penguin's story in the film revolving around him trying to be accepted as a 'monster' by society. As being able-bodied was considered 'normative' by society, The Penguin's impairment led to him being considered as 'abnormal' by society, since his birth.<sup>45</sup> In an interview with *Flicks* magazine, DeVito explained that the character 'is actually a very intelligent man... who has always

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<sup>42</sup> *The Elephant Man*, dir.by David Lynch (Brooksfilms, 1980).

<sup>43</sup> *Batman Returns*.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show*, p.10.

<sup>45</sup> Kristin Marie Bone, 'Trapped behind the glass: crip theory and disability identity', *Disability & Society*, 32:9 (2017), pp.1297-1314 (pp.1299-1300).

wanted acceptance', suggesting that if The Penguin's parents had 'tried to understand that there was a human being inside that hideous 'penguin boy', he might have become another Einstein.'<sup>46</sup> Although Dan DiDio, Vice President-Editorial of DC Comics, claims that 'there's an empathy to the character' and 'a need for [The Penguin] to be wanted', the film's audience tends to feel this empathy when The Penguin assumes the role of Oswald Cobblepot and appeals to what Gotham's population wants to hear, so that they will vote him for Mayor.<sup>47</sup> When trying to gain sympathy from Gotham's population, The Penguin tells them that he hoped to find his parents so he could attempt to understand 'why they did what... they felt that they had to do to a child who was born - a little *different*', whilst also emphasising that 'it's human nature to fear the – *unusual*' and that he had forgave his parents for their reaction.<sup>48</sup> Social attitudes towards disability can greatly impact how the audience perceives disability within narrative, causing them to experience several contradictory emotions when witnessing tensions between characters with disabilities and able-bodied characters.<sup>49</sup> The Penguin's interaction with Gotham's population through these speeches allows the film's audience to feel pity towards the villain, contradicting an earlier feeling of fear from the opening sequence which explains that his parents abandoned him after he killed the family cat. As a result, the audience are thrust into a conflicted position between pitying The Penguin, who wants to be accepted by society, or fearing The Penguin, the villain of the film who has been shown as an 'abnormal' 'monster' since his birth. Consequently, the film attempts to use the negative connotations associated with 'freak' and 'monster' to

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<sup>46</sup> Quentin Falk, 'Trio of Evils for the Caped Crusader', *Flicks* (July 1992), pp.12-13 (p.12).

<sup>47</sup> Homer Thompson, 'Making of Batman Returns (1992) – The Penguin Origins'; Susan M. Bernardo, 'Recycling Victims and Villains in "Batman Returns"', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 22:1 (1994), pp.16-20 (p.19).

<sup>48</sup> *Batman Returns*.

<sup>49</sup> Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp.15-18.

position The Penguin as the main antagonist of the film, but it is ambiguous if the film supports the use of the terms or if they are used ironically to create a sympathetic representation of disability.

Although Quasimodo is described ‘as a shy, unsure young man ashamed of his own face, rather than a monster’ by *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*’s directors Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, the film’s dialogue refers to Quasimodo as a ‘monster’.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the film, the character of Clopin asks the question of “Who is the monster and who is the man?” to the audience, with villain Claude Frollo told Quasimodo that that the public would “revile [him] as a monster”, whereas Esmerelda questioned why Quasimodo considered himself a monster, informing him that she did not consider him one.<sup>51</sup> By the end of the film, it is implied that the monster referred to in Clopin’s question was actually the villain Frollo and that the man was Quasimodo, who had now been accepted by society, with writer Bob Tzudiker explaining in an interview about the film’s story that it focused on ‘someone who must overcome his perceptions of his own deformity.’<sup>52</sup> In bringing in the views of Trousdale, Wise, and Tzudiker, the film attempts to create a narrative about self-validation through the use of Disney’s sanitisation strategies in the name of family entertainment. ‘Monster’ flags a teleology of overcoming and becoming, but this doesn’t just work within the film. Whilst Quasimodo was considered a member of Hollywood’s monsters during the 1930s and 40s because he was known as ‘The Hunchback of Notre Dame’, Peter Millar criticised Disney’s use of the title, especially during the 1990s that was dominated by a ‘politically correct’ culture, claiming that the use of the title was ‘a deep embarrassment for Disney’, though the studio could

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<sup>50</sup> Stephen Rebello, *The Art of The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, p.19.

<sup>51</sup> *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, dir.by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise (Walt Disney Pictures, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Rebello, *The Art of The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, p.53.

not resist 'capitalising on the "sexier" (and more famous) title'.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, a report by the British Film Institute revealed that, as a result of the marketing of the film, the term 'hunchbacked' was being used in common language again, whilst the British Scoliosis Society claimed: 'that people with scoliosis had been the targets of more than one hundred assaults in the months following the release of the Disney film, whereas none had occurred in the six months prior.'<sup>54</sup>

In 2002, a British theatre group made global news after altering the name of their production from 'The Hunchback' to 'The Bellringer of Notre Dame', because the group did not want to 'reinforce any stereotypes about Quasimodo's disability', something the British Scoliosis Society praised due to their experience of people using 'it as a derogatory term'.<sup>55</sup> However, Wash Gjebre, who had scoliosis but was not diagnosed with the condition until after he was rejected from the US Army as it had never affected him prior to then, claimed that the theatre company's change in name was another example of 'political correctness extremists... at it again', explaining that he had never been offended by the term 'hunchbacked'.<sup>56</sup> The two different opinions within the articles show the power associated with terminology, with those who experienced the negative use seeking change, whereas those who had not witnessed the negative impact of certain disability terminology claiming this change was just 'political correctness'. Although the film attempted to tell a moral message that you should not judge anybody by their physical attributes, the

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Millar, 'Plunder: Disney Tears up our heritage', *The European*, issue 381 (28 August – 3 September 1997), pp.8-12 (p.9).

<sup>54</sup> Martin F. Norden, "'You're a Surprise From Every Angle": Disability, Identity and Otherness in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*', in *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, ed. by Johnson Cheu (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company Inc., 2013), pp.163-178 (pp.173-174).

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, 'Quasimodo: Hunchback No More', *CBS News* (28 June 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Wash Gjebre, 'First Person: The PC Bellringer of Notre Dame', *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (28 September 2002), p.13.

confusing use of the term 'monster' and 'hunchbacked' backfired and people with disabilities were still being treated as 'abnormal' by able-bodied audiences.

Meanwhile, the terminology used to describe The Penguin in *Batman Returns*, was slightly more successful at highlighting the important role society plays in determining who should be considered a 'freak' or a 'monster' and who should be accepted by society as 'normal' instead of an 'other'.

## **Conclusion**

The way terminology was used to represent physical disabilities in the 1990s certainly began to evolve as a result of disability civil rights activists and their involvement in the creation of the ADA. The term 'handicapped' was removed from mainstream films from as early as *Hook* in 1991 due to disability activists emphasising the distaste towards the term 'handicapped' by the disabled community, stating that the preferred term was 'people with disabilities'. Thus, 'handicap' was beginning to be used less in the 1990s, but it continued to have a presence within sport, such as golf. Whilst the removal of the term 'handicapped' was an early success for the ADA, the terms 'crippled', 'freak' and 'monster' were still being used in mainstreams films, mainly with negative connotations. 'Freak' and 'monster' were used by filmmakers to stress the way these terms were used to isolate people with disabilities who were treated as an 'other' by the dominant able-bodied audiences, drawing on the negative connotations that these terms had been associated with since the existence of late nineteenth century freak shows. However, this message of 'otherness' was not always understood clearly by audiences, as shown by the increase in the number of attacks against people with scoliosis after the release of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* due to the use of the term 'hunchbacked'. Meanwhile, the term 'crippled' was still being used as everyday terminology in the

1990s, over sixty years after disability civil rights activists had first campaigned for the removal of the term from society, back when 'handicapped' was the preferred terminology. The lack of acknowledgement of the term 'crippled' by the ADA did not help to reduce the use of the term, and it was beginning to become more common in film by the end of the twentieth century. Towards the end of the decade, filmmakers began to adopt the tactics of disability civil rights activists who were starting to ironically embrace the term 'crippled' to confront able-bodied audiences by shaming them about their use of dehumanising terminology whilst also removing the power associated with this terminology. Subsequently, the ADA did bring about progressive change within the film industry from as early as 1991 through the removal of the term 'handicapped' from film. However, the lack of acknowledgment of the other negative terminology by the ADA led to disability civil rights activists having to continue to challenge the common use of other negative terminology, particularly as they were beginning to be used more in their degressive use. Thus, film represented disability through terminology in the 1990s in a slightly more progressive manner, but it had not improved entirely by the end of the decade.

## Rehabilitation Narratives

In the 1980s and 1990s, film began to sympathetically represent people with disabilities more, particularly due to an increased awareness of disability after the Vietnam War as 'Vietnam-era veterans represent an even greater proportion of veterans with disabilities than of all veterans.'<sup>1</sup> In response to this new awareness, mainstream films began portraying disability in a more sympathetic light, whilst also incorporating a more realistic version of disability. In this instance, 'realistic' refers to film being transparent in their representation of disability, where what is onscreen recalls elements of the real world that the audience can identify with.<sup>2</sup> An example of this realistic approach can be seen in *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) where, upon returning from hospital paralysed after fighting in the Vietnam War, Ron Kovic's (Tom Cruise) father explains that he 'fixed up a bathroom... put a wider doorway in... built a shower... and [he] put some handles on the toilet', addressing the issue of accessibility for people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> As part of this more sympathetic and progressive approach to representing disability, filmmakers began to use what I am calling rehabilitation narratives.

Stereotypes and conventions tend to be used within film narrative to form a plot for a character within a film's overarching story narrative, helping audiences to

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<sup>1</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1994) pp.264-265; Matthew S. Rutledge, Geoffrey T. Sanzbacher and Caroline V. Crawford, 'The labor supply of veterans with disabilities, 1995-2014', *Monthly Labor Review* (October 2016), pp.1-19 (p.9).

<sup>2</sup> Jiri Benovsky, 'Realism in Film: Less is More', *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, 56:1 (March 2017), pp.131-141 (p.137); Martin Seel, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Film Theory', *Critical Horizons*, 9:2 (2008), pp.157-175 (pp.159-160).

<sup>3</sup> *Born on the Fourth of July*, dir.by Oliver Stone (Ixtlan Pictures, 1989); Jack A. Nelson, 'Broken Images: Portrayals of Those with Disabilities in American Media', in *The Disabled Media, and the Information Age*, ed.by Jack A. Nelson (Westport & London: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp.1-24 (pp.12-13).



understand the film's events through these common conventions.<sup>4</sup> Thus, rehabilitation narratives feature: a character adjusting to having a new impairment; the character overcoming their impairment to do something considered 'normal' by society; and the character being treated as 'cured' by society. This is reminiscent of the medical model of disability studies that scholars began to reject in the late 1980s in favour of the social model, with the medical model suggesting people with disabilities should 'take charge of his or her self-improvement' to overcome their impairment that disabled them, whilst the social model claimed disability was 'primarily the product of social circumstance'.<sup>5</sup> The use of these rehabilitation narratives reinforces a major issue of society's perception of disability that 'crip theory' attempted to challenge at the start of the twenty-first century. Crip theory criticised the 'normative' status of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' within society, challenging the notion that able-bodiedness equated 'normality', forcing disability to exist as 'abnormal'.<sup>6</sup> Rather than give disability the same 'normative' status as able-bodiedness, rehabilitation narratives instead suggest that characters with disabilities need to be 'cured' or 'restored' to a status of 'normal', that increases their esteem, repute and desirability.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter aims to analyse the three types of rehabilitation narrative - the supercrip, the 'cured' and the better-off-dead - by examining eight mainstream films that all use at least one of these types of rehabilitation narratives: *My Left Foot* (1989), *Batman Returns* (1992), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *The Hunchback of Notre*

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Wuss, *Cinematic Narration and its Psychological Impact: Functions of Cognition, Emotion and Play* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp.81-83.

<sup>5</sup> Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp.2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), pp.2; 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory*, p.111.

*Dame* (1996), *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996), *Gattaca* (1997), *The Horse Whisper* (1998) and *The Bone Collector* (1999). These eight films cover several different film genres, from biographical drama to science fiction, highlighting how widespread the use of rehabilitation narratives was within the film industry during the 1990s. The chapter will address the major flaw of rehabilitation narratives: that these types of narratives ultimately represent people with disabilities as 'others' that need to be 'cured' to the 'normal' status that able-bodied people already possess.

### **Supercrip Narratives**

The supercrip narrative was one of the most common types of rehabilitation narrative used in the mainstream film industry in the 1990s, with these narratives being split into two prominent categories: the regular and the glorified. The term 'supercrip' is used to describe an inspirational person with a disability who earns the respect of society by overcoming their impairment and completing an extraordinary act deemed impossible by able-bodied audiences.<sup>8</sup> The exact origin of the term is unknown but it began to be used more commonly by disability scholars in the 1980s, likely inspired by Superman, the comic book and film character with extraordinary abilities, allowing the comparison between people with disabilities performing inspirational acts to superheroes.<sup>9</sup> An early example of a supercrip narrative can be seen in the biopic *The Stratton Story* (1949), about baseball player Monty Stratton (James Stewart), whose leg gets amputated after he accidentally shot himself whilst hunting. Through the use of a wooden leg and the support of his family, Stratton

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<sup>8</sup> Michael T. Hayes and Rhonda S. Black, 'Troubling Signs: Disability, Hollywood Movies and the Construction of a Discourse of Pity', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 23:2 (Spring 2003), pp.114-132 (p.118); Jack A. Nelson, 'Broken Images', p.6; P. David Howe, 'Cyborg and Supercrip: The Paralympics technology and the (dis)empowerment of disabled athletes', *Sociology*, 45:5 (2011), pp.868-882 (p.867).

<sup>9</sup> Sami Schalk, 'Reevaluating the Supercrip', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 10:1 (2016), pp.71-86 (p.74)

learns to walk again, eventually returning to pitching in professional baseball games again.<sup>10</sup> The film was described in the *New York Times* as ‘a touching, human story of triumph over crushing odds’, indicating the use of an inspirational supercrip narrative in the film.<sup>11</sup> More recently, the film *Skyscraper* (2018) features amputee Will Sawyer (Dwayne Johnson) who climbs a burning skyscraper to rescue his family, with one scene showing Sawyer using his prosthetic leg to prevent him from falling off the building.<sup>12</sup> Although crip theory aimed to use the term ‘crip’ to reclaim a negative term and challenge dominant power structures, ‘supercrip’ relies on the negative connotations of the term ‘crippled’ to locate a text as ‘being unproductive from a disability studies perspective’.<sup>13</sup> One of the earliest uses of ‘supercrip’ is used in Paul Longmore’s 1986 article ‘Talking Back to the Media’, where he explained that the notion of presenting disability as being something to overcome suggests an obliviousness to issues facing people with disabilities, suggesting that the media did not consider people with disabilities as being ‘a socially oppressed minority’.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the use of the ‘supercrip’ narrative created issues with the way disability was represented in films during the 1990s.

The first prominent type of supercrip narrative used in mainstream films to represent people with disabilities as ‘others’ is the regular supercrip narrative. This focused on people with disabilities performing ‘normal’ activities according to able-bodied people, normalising people with disabilities who can achieve these everyday

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<sup>10</sup> *The Stratton Story*, dir.by Sam Wood (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1949).

<sup>11</sup> T.M.P ‘At the Music Hall’, *The New York Times* (13 May 1949) p.0.

<sup>12</sup> *Skyscraper*, dir.by Rawson Marshall Thurber (Legendary Pictures, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Kirstin Marie Bone, ‘Trapped behind the glass: crip theory and disability identity’, *Disability & Society*, 32:9 (2017), pp.1297-1314 (pp.1301-1303); Sami Schalk, ‘Reevaluating the Supercrip’, p.71; Ria Cheyne, *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2019), pp.62-63.

<sup>14</sup> Paul K. Longmore, ‘Talking Back to the Media’, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 6:3 (Summer 1986), pp.1-2.

acts, whilst also treating people with disabilities as ‘the other’ by assuming that they would not be able to complete these ‘normal’ activities in the first place.<sup>15</sup> The biopic *My Left Foot* tells the story of Christy Brown (Daniel Day-Lewis) who was born with cerebral palsy and could only control his left foot, who would grow up to become an established writer and artist. Whilst the film is a British-Irish co-production, the success of the film in America, which will be addressed in the next chapter, warrant it the status of a mainstream film. The film was praised by film critic Roger Ebert for not being an inspirational movie due to Jim Sheridan presenting ‘a complete picture of [Christy Brown]’s life’, with the film’s narrative being described as ‘the story of a stubborn, difficult, blessed and gifted man who was dealt a bad hand, who played it brilliantly.’<sup>16</sup> Despite this, the supercrip narrative used in the film did end up portraying Christy as an inspiration. In an early pivotal scene of the film, Christy is shown overcoming his cerebral palsy and writing the word ‘Mother’ with his foot whilst his family watches, leading to Brown using his foot in his career as a painter.<sup>17</sup> After writing ‘Mother’, Christy’s father, Patrick, proudly declares to the local pub “He’s a Brown!”, implying that Patrick only accepted Christy into his family after he had witnessed Christy do something considered ‘normal’ by able-bodied standards.

The regular supercrip narrative is not just confined to the biopic genre, as exemplified by the science-fiction film *Gattaca* and its presentation of the character Jerome Morrow. The film focuses on a society where people are discriminated against based on their genetic makeup, leading to Vincent Freeman (Ethan Hawke), who was conceived naturally, impersonating ‘valid’ Jerome (Jude Law), conceived

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<sup>15</sup> Sami Schalk, ‘Reevaluating the Supercrip’, p.79.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Ebert, ‘My Left Foot’, *RogerEbert.com* (2 February 1990), <<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/my-left-foot-1990>> [accessed 2 June 2020].

<sup>17</sup> *My Left Foot* (1989), dir.by Jim Sheridan (Granada Films, 1989).

with the aid of genetic selection but who also uses a wheelchair after being involved in a car accident, to intercept the Gattaca space programme and achieve Vincent's dream of space travel. Those who were not genetically born are classed as 'invalid' by society, a term used to disparage against those who have the potential of getting a genetic disease, prompting Vincent to claim society had 'discrimination down to a science'.<sup>18</sup> The use of 'invalid' is reminiscent of the negative terminology used to describe people with disabilities that the disability civil rights movement tried to challenge with the ADA, as mentioned in chapter one. Towards the end of the film, in order to maintain the charade that Vincent was actually Jerome, the real Jerome is forced to abandon his wheelchair and climb a spiral staircase to answer the door to the police so he could pretend to be an able-bodied version of himself.<sup>19</sup> Despite usually relying on his wheelchair, Jerome manages to climb up the staircase and prevent the detectives from discovering his and Vincent's secret, marking this 'normal' activity of going up a staircase as an extraordinary act of heroism. Similarly, Christy's act of writing 'Mother' saved his relationship with his father, who finally accepted him for who he was and was proud to have Christy be a part of his family. Through the use of the regular supercrip narrative, Jerome and Christy are only considered rehabilitated back into society through an inspirational act, depriving them of receiving a 'normal' status by society. Because of the characters' impairments, the able-bodied audience instead consider these 'normal' acts as inspirational, rather than 'normal', despite identifying with the acts as part of their own lives. Therefore, the regular supercrip narrative treats disability as something that is 'abnormal' that should be overcome. However, when the impairment is

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<sup>18</sup> *Gattaca*, dir. by Andrew Niccol (Jersey Films, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> *Gattaca*.

overcome, people with disabilities are treated as inspirational rather 'normal', allowing regular supercrip narratives to treat disability as 'abnormal' in all stages of the narrative.

The glorified supercrip narrative focuses on people with disabilities performing an extraordinary physical feat that is seen as exceptional for everybody, especially people with disabilities, like mountain climbing or competing in the Paralympics, creating the false assumption amongst able-bodied audiences that anyone can overcome a disability if they work hard enough.<sup>20</sup> Whilst *The Bone Collector* does not present an obvious glorified supercrip narrative for Lincoln Rhyme, he is still a good example of this type of supercrip narrative. The film centres on Rhyme (Denzil Washington), a former detective who became paralysed from the neck down, aside from one finger, after being involved in a work-related accident. He returns to solve the case of the serial killer 'the Bone Collector', with Rhyme using police officer Amelia Donaghy (Angelina Jolie) as his eyes and legs at the crime scenes to find evidence pointing towards the next murder and eventually identifying the serial killer. The film's plot is based on Jeffrey Deaver's 1997 novel of the same name, with the film retaining the majority of the novel's narrative, aside from a few changes to the characters like their names. It should be noted that the character is black in the film, rather than white like in the original novel, likely because Washington had the star potential to attract audiences, with his acting ability being the main highlight for many critics of the film.<sup>21</sup> Yet, Rhyme is stigmatised as black and disabled in the film, forcing the character into representing several minority groups at once, something of

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<sup>20</sup> Sami Schalk, 'Reevaluating the Supercrip', p.80.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Holden, 'Film Review; A Taxi Ride To Torture Provokes A Chase', *The New York Times* (5 November 1999).

a rarity for the decade.<sup>22</sup> Whilst the majority of the characters analysed in this thesis are white heterosexual men with disabilities, providing enough characteristics for a white able-bodied audience to identify with, Rhyme is both black and disabled, representing two minority groups within mainstream film.

Whilst Ria Cheyne notes that disabled detectives in crime fiction do succeed in challenging 'the assumption that disability and achievement are incompatible', she argues that *The Bone Collector* novel did not present Rhyme through a supercrip narrative as it implied that Rhyme's impairment did not impact his detective skills.<sup>23</sup> In fact, as I will argue here, a major intervention is made in the adaptation of the novel into film. The film provides very little backstory for Rhyme's character outside of his accident - where he was recovering a body and debris fell on him - so it is unclear to the audience what Rhyme was like before he was paralysed and if his detective skills had been impacted by his impairment. However, it is in the final fight scene between Lincoln Rhyme and the killer, Marcus Andrews, that revealed the film's glorified supercrip narrative. At the film's climax, it was revealed that Andrews had been posing as Rhyme's medical technician, Richard Thompson, in order to enact revenge against Rhyme, who had apparently destroyed his career whilst Rhyme investigated a previous unmentioned crime. During the fight scene, Rhyme uses his medical bed, which had previously been shown being raised and lowered by Rhyme through breathing into a tube, to crush Andrews' hand. Whilst incapacitated, Rhyme is given the opportunity to bite Andrews' neck, stalling him until Amelia arrives, where she shoots Andrews dead.<sup>24</sup> Rhyme is presented as

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Jakubowicz, 'Detecting Disability: Moving beyond metaphor in the crime fiction of Jeffrey Deaver', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 24:2 (Spring 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Ria Cheyne, *Disability, Literature, Genre*, pp.64-65.

<sup>24</sup> *The Bone Collector*, dir.by Phillip Noyce (Universal Pictures and Columbia Pictures, 1999).

being able to defend himself from his attacker solely because of his impairment, rather than in spite of, as Rhyme would not have been able to use his medical bed to defend himself if he was not impaired. Consequently, Rhyme's victory over Andrews is presented through a glorified supercrip narrative, as he was able to overcome his disability and use it to his advantage to extraordinarily defeat 'the Bone Collector' serial killer.

Thus, the stereotypical supercrip narratives used to present these three characters represented people with disabilities as inspirational 'others' who could only be extraordinary and inspirational if they complete either 'normal' acts for able-bodied people or something deemed challenging for everybody. Instead of restoring these characters to a status of 'normality', these supercrip narratives represent people with disabilities as being 'inspirational' if they manage to overcome their impairment, preventing people with disabilities from being considered 'normal' by audiences. Consequently, the supercrip narrative causes issues for people with disabilities as it refuses to treat disability as 'normal', whilst also treating those with disabilities as 'others'. Although this problematic supercrip narrative has been used to represent disability from as early as the 1940s with *The Stratton Story*, it continued to be a popular technique used to represent people with disabilities without any indication of it going away.

### **The 'Cured' Narrative**

When re-evaluating the supercrip narrative, Sami Schalk suggests a third type of supercrip narrative, the superpowered supercrip. This narrative revolves around people with disabilities that either have superpowers (like Daredevil whose senses became enhanced after becoming blind when he was exposed to radiation) or a



prosthetic (such as Iron Man whose superhero suit's arc reactor provided his superpowers whilst also acting as an artificial heart) that overcompensate for their disability and effectively erase that person's difference.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis theory, particularly textual prosthesis, highlights that words within literature act like prosthetics in narrative, being used to provide compensation for a disability by creating an illusion of a complete body and erasing difference, creating a 'need to restore a disabled body to some semblance of an ordinary wholeness'.<sup>26</sup> This plays on the social issue that people with disabilities were ostracised for being too different from the acceptable 'norm', implying that someone with an impairment was faulty and should be 'fixed'.<sup>27</sup> Similar to how biracial Americans tried to 'pass' as white during the Jim Crow era so they could be identified as part of the dominant white culture, people with disabilities used prosthetics to 'pass' as the 'norm' of able-bodiedness, avoiding social stigma associated with having an impairment.<sup>28</sup> Yet, people with disabilities also had the opportunity to 'masquerade', rather than disguise, their impairment, exaggerating their disability in an attempt to 'be repressed from public view and forgotten' so society could ignore their disability whilst also fully understanding a person's impairment.<sup>29</sup> Both the superpowered supercrip narrative and the theory of narrative prosthesis complement another rehabilitation narrative that I am calling the 'cured narrative'. The 'cured narrative' focuses on characters that either have a prosthetic

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<sup>25</sup> Sami Schalk, 'Reevaluating the Supercrip', pp.81-82; Stan Lee, 'The Origins of Daredevil', *Daredevil*, 1:1 (1964), pp.1-25 (pp.9-10); *Iron Man*, dir.by Jon Favreau (Marvel Studios, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (The University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp.6-8.

<sup>27</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p.6.

<sup>28</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (University of Michigan Press, 2008), p.97; Nikki Khanna and Cathryn Johnson, 'Passing as Black: Racial Identity Work among Biracial Americans', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 73:4 (December 2010), pp.380-397 (p.382).

<sup>29</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, pp.100-103.

that 'cures' them so they can be treated like an able-bodied person, or a character whose impairment miraculously gets completely 'fixed'.

In *The Horse Whisperer*, after Grace McLean (Scarlett Johansson) loses her leg in a horse-riding accident, her mother, Annie (Kristin Scott Thomas), believed that Tom "The Horse Whisperer" Booker (Robert Redford) could help Grace's rehabilitation process by getting Grace to ride her injured horse Pilgrim again. In a heated scene between the mother and daughter, after Annie discovered Grace had begun riding again, the following exchange takes place:

**Annie:** Did you try riding again?

**Grace:** (*sarcastically*) Yeah. Does that mean I'm cured?

**Annie:** Nobody's trying to cure you. Look, I just want to say that I think it's great that you're riding again.<sup>30</sup>

Despite claiming that Grace being able to ride her horse again will not 'cure' her impairment, the film constructs Grace's story as a 'cured narrative'. Whilst the film originally focuses on Grace and her accident, it becomes a romantic film about the growing relationship between Tom and Annie. As a result of this romantic story that begins to develop, Grace's rehabilitation narrative is put on the backburner, with the character only appearing in approximately 25 minutes of the 170-minute film, the majority of the time with a cane to remind the audience that she is the character who is supposed to be rehabilitated. The lack of focus on Grace's rehabilitation narrative deprives the audience of experiencing issues experienced by people with disabilities, with Grace's impairment instead being used to evoke an emotional response of pity from the audience. For example, in one scene, Grace and Tom sit down and discuss Grace's accident, leading to Tom explaining how he knew a boy whose spirit

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<sup>30</sup> *The Horse Whisperer*, dir. by Robert Redford (Touchstone Pictures, 1998).

'disappeared' after becoming paralysed and him pleading with Grace to not disappear in the same way.<sup>31</sup> It is through scenes like this that draws on Hayes and Black's notion of a 'discourse of pity', where mainstream films like *Mask* (1985) tend to present disability as an issue of confinement that has the potential to be rehabilitated, but ultimately this rehabilitation is presented as impossible and the confinement is simply reconciled.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar way to how the medical model of disability studies evokes pity from the audience by implying that people with disabilities have to overcome their impairment through the help of able-bodied people who are trying to 'cure' them, Grace's narrative creates an element of pity through her Mother's desire for Grace to be rehabilitated.<sup>33</sup> Whilst Grace's rehabilitation narrative onscreen primarily focuses on her overcoming the trauma of her accident, in order to purposefully promote pity from the audience, her physical rehabilitation process took place offscreen, likely so the romance plot between Annie and Tom could be featured more. Yet, by the end of the film, Grace is seen successfully riding Pilgrim whilst wearing an extremely realistic prosthetic leg. The scene of Grace riding Pilgrim once again was used to demonstrate to the viewers that Grace was now 'cured' and rehabilitated back to a sense of 'normality', both physically and emotionally. Consequently, *The Horse Whisperer* used a 'cured narrative' to present Grace's disability as something to be pitied, whilst promoting a message that disability should be 'cured'.

Returning to *Forrest Gump*, discussed in the first chapter, the film also deploys the trope of a 'cured narrative' which – in contrast to *The Horse Whisperer* –

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<sup>31</sup> *The Horse Whisperer*.

<sup>32</sup> Michael T. Hayes and Rhonda S. Black, 'Troubling Signs', p.118.

<sup>33</sup> Michael T. Hayes and Rhonda S. Black, 'Troubling Signs', p.118; 121.

develops its representation of disability in much closer detail, especially regarding its physical and emotional affects. After he lost his legs during the Vietnam War, Lieutenant Dan denounces God and becomes a drunken and bitter version of himself, unhappy with his current living situation and impairment. He eventually accepts Forrest's offer to be his business partner on a shrimp boat where, whilst working on the boat, 'God showed up' in the form of Hurricane Carmen, leading to their successful shrimp business and Forrest stating that he believed Dan had 'made his peace with God.'<sup>34</sup> At this, point, Dan was content with living with a physical impairment, and had a successful business, presenting a positive narrative that living with a disability was not a terrible thing. However, this progressive narrative is undone in the scene featuring Forrest and Jenny's wedding. Dan arrives wearing prosthetic legs, something described by Forrest as 'magic legs', and engaged to an Asian woman, implying that Dan had completely overcome his impairment and was finally able to take on 'expected social roles again'.<sup>35</sup> Thomas Byers suggests that 'the film redeems the technological know-how' that failed Americans during the Vietnam War through Dan's 'magic legs' in an attempt to address the 'historical trauma that the Vietnam War caused for American masculinity.'<sup>36</sup> Whilst the character does address the problems of the Vietnam War, Dan's 'magic legs' are also used to 'cure' him and disguise his impairment, suggesting that prosthetics can be used to easily 'fix' a person with disabilities so they could be treated as 'normal' again by society.

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<sup>34</sup> *Forrest Gump*, dir.by Robert Zemeckis (Wendy Finerman Pictures, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Nancy G. Kutner, 'Spirituality and Religiosity: Thoughts from a Rehabilitation Perspective', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 15:3 (Sumer 1995), pp.52-53 (p.52).

<sup>36</sup> Thomas B. Byers, 'History Re-Membered: *Forrest Gump*, Postfeminist Masculinity, And The Burial Of The Counterculture', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 42:2 (Summer 1996), pp.419-444 (pp.436-437).

Gary Sinise, who became involved with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) after playing Dan, claimed that when he visited veterans, they believed that he could relate to their experiences because of the character's narrative in the film and they would prefer to discuss Dan over their own story.<sup>37</sup> Although the film did help with the rehabilitation of many disabled veterans who could relate to the character of Dan, it is troubling that the character's narrative does not end with him accepting his disability on the shrimp boat but instead ends with him being 'cured' with 'magic legs'. The use of the term 'magic' to describe Dan's new prosthetics, a call back to Forrest's 'magic shoes' prosthetic that he used as a child to 'cure' his kyphosis, plays on the fantastical elements of the film that are interwoven between the historical sections. By referring to the prosthetics as 'magic', it is indicated that prosthetics have a mythic status, allowing it to be believable that they have the ability to 'cure' somebody of their impairment. However, in a similar way to a magic trick, the prosthetic acts as an illusion for Dan, allowing him to appear 'cured' although he was still impaired. The audience were able to buy into this illusion of 'curing' by Sinise undergoing 'disability drag', a concept discussed further in chapter three, to transform himself into a disabled veteran. One of the first soldiers Sinise met in Iraq, when he began to visit troops to boost morale, exclaimed 'Hey, Lieutenant Dan, you got legs', emphasising that Sinise was perceived to be Dan, the character that became an inspiration for many veterans.<sup>38</sup> Through the use of 'disability drag' it

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<sup>37</sup> CNN, 'Gary Sinise: "Lt. Dan" is a part of my life', *YouTube* (27 May 2013), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXqEcuG1T7Y>> [accessed 16 October 2019].

<sup>38</sup> Reed Tucker, 'Gary Sinise isn't just Lt. Dan – he's a real-life inspiration to veterans', *New York Post* (18 February 2019).

appeared to the audience that Sinise had been 'cured' of his impairment, although he never had an impairment in the first place.<sup>39</sup>

Zemeckis' use of genre mixing, through the telling of historical events from the fictional perspective of Forrest, allows the audience to process traumatic events, like the Vietnam War, 'into texts of cultural memory.'<sup>40</sup> *Forrest Gump* presents a fantastical and family friendly version of the Vietnam War compared to other Vietnam War films, like *Born on the Fourth of July*, with *Forrest Gump* presenting Vietnam as a beautiful jungle and creating a friendly environment in the hospital whilst *Born on the Fourth of July* showed Vietnam as being a vast wasteland and the hospital was presented as understaffed and unhygienic.<sup>41</sup> According to Sabine Moller, many audience members 'viewed [*Forrest Gump*]'s fictional oral history as reality' and, due to its PG-13 rating, the film was used in schools during the teaching of the Vietnam War, leading to many students associating what they saw in *Forrest Gump* to the reality of the Vietnam War.<sup>42</sup> With the mixing of the fantasy and historical genres, it is difficult for the audience to distinguish what they are seeing onscreen between fact and fiction. Therefore, the use of *Forrest Gump* to educate the public about the aftermath of war has the potential to treat the illusion of Dan's cure through prosthetics as the only way for somebody with an impairment to be rehabilitated, implying that disability should be 'cured'. As a result, the fictional 'cured' narrative established through Dan's prosthetics established disability as being a major issue

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<sup>39</sup> Krystal Cleary, 'One Of Us?: Disability Drag and the Gaga Enfreakment of Fandom', in *Disability Media Studies*, ed. by Elizabeth Ellcessor and Bill Kirkpatrick (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp.177-196 (p.186).

<sup>40</sup> Ib Bondebjerg, 'Film: Genres and Genre Theory', *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2:9 (2015), pp.160-164 (p.163); Stuart Murray, 'Disability and Memory in Posthuman(ist) Narrative: Reading Prosthesis and Amnesia in Hollywood's Re-membering of the 'War on Terror'', *Parallax*, 23:4 (2017), pp.439-452 (p.441).

<sup>41</sup> *Forrest Gump; Born on the Fourth of July*.

<sup>42</sup> Sabine Moller, 'Blockbusting history: *Forrest Gump* as a powerful medium of American cultural memory', *International Social Science Journal*, 62:203-204 (March-June 2011), pp.67-77 (pp.72-73).

that needed to be 'cured' so people with disabilities could be completely rehabilitated back into society.

Whilst Grace McLean in *The Horse Whisperer* and Lieutenant Dan are both examples of when prosthetics are used to make a character appear 'cured' by disguising their impairments, the title character in *Forrest Gump* is presented through a 'cured narrative' about a person whose impairment was miraculously 'cured'. As a young boy, Forrest wore leg braces (which he referred to as his 'magic shoes') to help his kyphosis, with his doctor informing him that 'his legs are strong... but his back's as crippled as a politician.' However, whilst running away from bullies, Forrest's leg braces break apart and he discovers that he is actually an exceptional runner, with his running skills eventually getting him an American Football scholarship. After his leg braces were destroyed, there is little reference to Forrest using leg braces or his kyphosis, except for a line during Lieutenant Dan's rant where Dan asks: 'Do you know what it's like not be able to use your legs?' and Forrest replies: "Y-y-yes sir, I do."<sup>43</sup> Whereas Dan's impairment appeared to be 'cured' by his technological 'magic' leg prosthetics, Forrest's kyphosis ends up being completely 'cured' when his old-fashioned leg braces fell apart. Similar to how the film mixes the fantasy and historical genres, Forrest's rehabilitation process conflates an old-fashioned prosthetic with a magical 'cure', preventing the audience from understanding the reality of having an impairment, especially those who do not know much about disability. Forrest's miraculous 'cure' indicated to the audience the belief that people with disabilities could simply 'cure' their impairment if they put their mind to it, which is extremely unrealistic, even for a fantastical film. As part of the 2013 Superfest International Disability Film Festival (the longest running disability film

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<sup>43</sup> *Forrest Gump*.

festival in the world), *Forrest Gump* was nominated for a 'Dissie', an award presented to 'the worst of the worst in the film representation of disability' for The Most Amazing Miracle.<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Carter-Long, host of 'The Dissies', mocked the film's unbelievability by saying that when Forrest was 'cured', he 'becomes Carl Lewis all of a sudden, Oscar Pistorius is booking down the road', making the scene 'super inspirational'.<sup>45</sup> The film's nomination for a 'Dissie' highlights distaste towards Forrest's 'cured narrative', resulting in people with disabilities calling out the film for its insensitivities. Therefore, the cured narrative suggests to able-bodied audiences that people with disabilities are something that should be 'cured' by society as they have the potential to overcome their impairment. Thus, the 'cured narrative' ultimately contributes to the ideology that people with disabilities are 'abnormal'.

### **Better-Off-Dead**

The final form of rehabilitation narrative used within mainstream film during the 1990s was a narrative that focused on the 'better-off-dead' trope, with twelve of the fifteen films analysed in this thesis referencing the potential death of a character with a disability.<sup>46</sup> The 'better-off dead' stereotype emphasises the attitude that those living with a disability are unable to fulfil their life, with death being viewed as better than living with an impairment, ultimately relieving 'society of the problem dealing with the long-term needs and rights of those with such disabilities.'<sup>47</sup> Although this trope was presented in film in several ways during the 1990s, such as infanticide and

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<sup>44</sup> Anonymous, 'Superfest Disability Film Festival Presents "The Dissies"', *Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability* (12 October 2013), <<https://longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu/events/2013/10/12/1141-superfest-disability-film-festival-presents-dissies>> [accessed 2 September 2020].

<sup>45</sup> San Francisco State University, 'Superfest 2013: The Dissies', *YouTube* (25 October 2013), <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epE67x5Ns\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epE67x5Ns_w)> [accessed 2 September 2020].

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix 2C- Disability Film Database: Themes.

<sup>47</sup> Jack A. Nelson, 'Broken Images', p.7.



attempted suicide, it was largely used to present the view that people with disabilities were actually 'better-off-alive'.

Whilst infanticide rates in the 1990s were considered low, approximately 9 per 100,000 live births in the United States, infanticide was featured in two of that decades most famous fantasy films, *Batman Returns* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.<sup>48</sup> Eugenics laws were introduced at the start of the twentieth century with the aim to avert the existence of people with disabilities by preventing the reproduction of the 'unfit'.<sup>49</sup> When Dr Harry Haiselden made the news for allowing the deaths of six babies he had diagnosed as 'defectives', between 1915 and 1918, the 'majority of those quoted in the press *opposed* preserving the lives of "defectives"', showcasing a desire by society to remove disability from view by any means necessary.<sup>50</sup> However, Haiselden was criticised by other eugenic advocates for using the media to create a public discussion about eugenics and the euthanasia of 'defectives', resulting in Haiselden's propaganda film *The Black Stork* (1916) getting censored for being too 'aesthetically unacceptable', although it was praised for its 'educational and social value'.<sup>51</sup> *Batman Returns'* depiction of the attempted infanticide of The Penguin by his parents plays on early twentieth century society's view on eugenics, with the parents throwing their baby, who had a deformity, into a river so they could disassociate themselves from the 'abnormal'.<sup>52</sup> By having The Penguin survive his

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<sup>48</sup> Lawrence S. Wissow, 'Infanticide', *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 339:17 (1998), pp.1239-1241 (p.1239).

<sup>49</sup> Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, 'The League of Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression: A Case Study in The New Disability History', *The Journal of American History*, 87:3 (December 2000) pp.888-922 (p.894).

<sup>50</sup> Martin S. Pernick, 'Defining the Defective: Eugenics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century America', in. *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed.by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (The University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp.89-110 (pp.89).

<sup>51</sup> Martin S. Pernick, 'Defining the Defective', pp.89; 97; 100.

<sup>52</sup> Susan M. Bernardo, 'Recycling Victims and Villains in "Batman Returns"', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 22:1 (1994), pp.16-20 (pp.16-17).

parents' attempt to become the main antagonist in *Batman Returns*, it is suggested that the parents did the right thing by trying to rid the world of the 'abnormal', re-establishing the notion that those born with impairments would become evil.

However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, The Penguin's ostracization by society since his birth provoked him to embrace villainy, not his impairment.

Whereas *Batman Returns* used eugenics to explain The Penguin's antagonism, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* used it to present Quasimodo as a hero. In the film, villain Claude Frollo attempted to commit infanticide when he first saw Quasimodo's face, by drowning him in a well and claiming: "This is an unholy demon. I'm sending it back to Hell, where it belongs", but he is persuaded to raise the child instead by the Notre Dame's archdeacon.<sup>53</sup> Frollo's infanticide attempt begins Quasimodo's rehabilitation narrative, where he eventually becomes the film's protagonist and gets accepted as a member of society by the end of the film. As *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* was produced by Walt Disney Pictures, a company usually associated with representing a 'clean, decent, industrious' America, a rehabilitation narrative *had* to be used to present Quasimodo's story of 'someone who must overcome his perception of his own deformity'.<sup>54</sup> By having Quasimodo become the film's protagonist and defeat Frollo, the man who tried to kill him as a child, Quasimodo represents a society standing up against the discrimination of, showcasing the outdated nature of infanticide. Consequently, both films demonstrated the role society plays in influencing the morality of people with disabilities through their accommodation of disability.

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<sup>53</sup> *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, dir. by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise (Walt Disney Pictures, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells, 'Introduction: Walt's in the Movies', in *From Mouse to Mermaid*, ed. by Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.1-17 (p.3); Stephen Rebello, *The Art of The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), p.53.

Whilst the 'better-off-dead' trope was presented via infanticide plots in *Batman Returns* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, this trope was primarily presented through the use of the attempted suicide of a character with a disability. By the 1990s, debates concerning the criminal nature of assistive suicide led to the Assisted Suicide Funding Restriction Act of 1997 being passed with the purpose to:

continue current Federal policy by providing explicitly that Federal Funds may not be used to pay for items and services (including assistance) the purpose of which is to cause (or assist in causing) the suicide, euthanasia, or mercy killing of any individual.<sup>55</sup>

The same year, the Washington state vs. Glucksberg case recognised the 'right to die', but reinforced the notion that 'it is a crime to assist a suicide' and that assistive-suicide bans are 'longstanding expressions of the States' commitment to the protection and preservation of all human life.'<sup>56</sup> Arguments for allowing assisted dying included the compassionate argument, where it is seen as a way to end the suffering of people, and the consequentialist argument, which argues that euthanasia is the 'greatest good for the greatest', particularly in society's 'where the dominant knowledge is that it is "better to be dead than disabled"'.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, Christopher Newell argues that distress and suffering cannot be the only grounds for assisted dying as it is usually an initial cry of despair in response to a new situation, whilst also stating that euthanasia laws could 'bring about direct or indirect harm to people with disabilities' especially in societies that subliminally continued to oppress people with disabilities.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, 'Assisted Suicide Funding Restriction Act of 1997', *Congress.gov* (11 March 1997), <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/1003>> [accessed 8 June 2020].

<sup>56</sup> Supreme Court of The Unites States, 'U.S. Reports: Washington v. Glucksberg, 521 U.S. 702', *Library of Congress* (1997), pp.702-792 (pp.708-710).

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Newell, 'Critical Reflections on Euthanasia and People with Disabilities', *The Australian Quarterly*, 68:3 (Spring 1996), pp.48-58 (pp.48-49).

<sup>58</sup> Christopher Newell, 'Critical Reflections on Euthanasia and People with Disabilities', pp.52; 55.

So, if assisted dying was not an accepted practice in 1990s America, why was suicide a plot point in so many mainstream films depicting disability in the same period? Biographical dramas likely included scenes discussing suicide to present a realistic depiction of the of the real people featured in these films. For example, in *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, after Larry Flynt becomes paralysed from an assassination attempt, he states: “I wish he’d have killed me. I do. I can’t ever walk again. I can’t make love to my wife. I can’t... I can’t... have a child with her”.<sup>59</sup> Although the shock of being paralysed caused Flynt to request death, he is shown to eventually overcome this initial outcry of despair and return to an active role in the publication of his porn magazine *Hustler*, supporting Newell’s argument that an initial outcry is not enough grounds to warrant the assisted dying of somebody. Furthermore, several fictional films reference a desire for suicide to indicate to the audience when a character is at their weakest, marking the start of their rehabilitation narrative. In *The Horse Whisperer*, it was Grace’s declaration of “Maybe they should put me down too” that led to her mother seeking out Tom Booker in the hope that he could help with Grace’s rehabilitation.<sup>60</sup> Similarly in *Forrest Gump*, it was Lieutenant Dan’s initial outburst to Forrest in the veteran hospital that marked the start of his rehabilitation narrative. Whilst Dan initially believed that ‘he should have died out there and with [his] men’ as part of his destiny, he ends up adjusting to his impairment before receiving a ‘cure’ through his leg prosthetics towards the end of the film.<sup>61</sup> In both instances, the characters end up rehabilitated after their initial outcry of despair, demonstrating the possibility of rehabilitation and a ‘normal’ life for people with disabilities, supporting Newell’s argument.

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<sup>59</sup> *My Left Foot; Born on the Fourth of July; The People vs. Larry Flynt*, dir. by Milos Forman (Phoenix Pictures, 1996).

<sup>60</sup> *The Horse Whisperer*.

<sup>61</sup> *Forrest Gump*.

Moreover, the novel *The Bone Collector* created suspense through Lincoln Rhyme's desire for suicide, making it uncertain if he would live until the end of the case until he made a deal with Amelia to live until they found the killer, marking the case's closure the cause of Rhyme's death and forcing the audience to feel some desire for the case to remain unsolved.<sup>62</sup> Whilst the novel challenges the notion that a life with disability is not worth living by making the readership feel that Rhyme should continue to live, the film adaptation fails to recreate that same feeling.<sup>63</sup> Although the film does mention Rhyme's desire for assisted suicide, the focus is more on Rhyme's increasing seizures and his fear that he would end up in a 'vegetative state', which ultimately gets neglected as Rhyme and Amelia are successful in rapidly discovering new evidence in the case.<sup>64</sup> The abandoned plot point of Rhyme's assisted suicide is particularly evident in the final scene of the film which shows Rhyme no longer experiencing seizures and now sitting upright in a wheelchair with Amelia dating him, without any explanation how this is possible. Again, suicide is used in film simply as a plot point to compare the character's final rehabilitated state to their weakest point, implying that the initial outcry for death can be overcome by people with disabilities.

By the end of the 1990s, the debate regarding genetic testing began to gain popularity, leading to the introduction of the Genetics and Public Health Services Act to the US Senate in 1999 that aimed to provide state funds for genetic testing programs and services.<sup>65</sup> Genetic testing was viewed as the successor to the eugenics movement, especially as both researched 'the "problem" of hereditary

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<sup>62</sup> Ria Cheyne, *Disability, Literature, Genre*, pp.58-59.

<sup>63</sup> Ria Cheyne, *Disability, Literature, Genre*, p.59.

<sup>64</sup> *The Bone Collector*.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous, 'Genetics and Public Health Services Act', *Congress.gov* (19 November 1999), <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/senate-bill/1981/text>> [accessed 9 June 2020].

transmission' and tried to discover a solution.<sup>66</sup> With the genetics debate forming a backdrop to its release, the film *Gattaca* presented a dystopian future where discrimination took place in the form of 'genelism', demonstrating a society where the 'better-off-dead' trope was practiced.<sup>67</sup> The film was praised by Valerie Kalfrin, a film and culture critic whose own son had spina bifida, due to Vincent's determination in undermining the system that discriminated against people with imperfections to live out his dream of visiting space, as well as showcasing the effects of the burden of perfection placed on 'valids' through Jerome, whose paraplegia was a result of him believing he was not living up to his potential as a 'valid'.<sup>68</sup> The film implied the danger of the genetic testing debate by emphasising the potential for discrimination against anything considered different and the belief that those with a genetic disorder should be 'fixed'. Thus, the debates on genetic testing in the 1990s indicated the continued presence of the ideology that people born with disabilities were a burden to society that should not exist.

Despite showcasing the potential for discrimination through genetic testing, *Gattaca* is also the only film of the fifteen mainstream films analysed in this thesis to actually show a character's successful attempt at suicide. At the end of the film, as Vincent is achieving his dream of travelling into space, Jerome can be seen incinerating himself, with the scene jumping between Vincent's happy ending and Jerome's death.<sup>69</sup> It is implied that Jerome had fulfilled his role in helping Vincent achieve his dream, so his life was no longer worth living as a person with a disability, with his death acting as his own happy ending. This supports the argument that a life

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<sup>66</sup> Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, 'Out of the ashes of eugenics: diagnostic regimes in the United States and the making of a disability minority', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 36:1 (2002), pp.79-103 (pp.101-103).

<sup>67</sup> *Gattaca*.

<sup>68</sup> Valerie Kalfrin, 'Revisiting Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* in the Age of CRISPR', *RogerEbert.com* (2 October 2019), < <https://www.rogerebert.com/features/revisiting-gattaca-in-the-age-of-crispr> > [accessed 9 Jun 2020].

<sup>69</sup> *Gattaca*.

with a disability was not worth living, demonstrating that this belief still existed towards the end of the twentieth century. However, *Gattaca* proved to be an exception as the majority of the films analysed in this thesis use the 'better-off-dead' trope within film narrative to signify the beginning of the character's rehabilitation process and the potential for disability to be overcome.

## **Conclusion**

Though rehabilitation narratives intended to present a positive portrayal of people with disabilities, these narratives were ultimately flawed. Both the regular and glorified supercrip narrative represented people with disabilities as 'abnormal', presenting them as inspirational for doing either 'normal' acts by able-bodied standards or something deemed impossible for everyone, rather than treating disability in the same way as the able-bodied 'norm'. Meanwhile, the 'cured narrative' represented people with disabilities as being something that needed to be 'fixed', implying that people with disabilities were 'abnormal' unless their impairment was either 'cured' or disguised by a prosthetic to resemble the 'normal' status of 'able-bodiedness' established by society. Both the supercrip and 'cured narratives' represented people with disabilities in a completely unrealistic manner, suggesting an unlikely reality for people with disabilities that an impairment can simply be overcome and 'fixed'.

Although early twentieth century films represented people with disabilities as being morally wrong in order to promote infanticide, films like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Gattaca* in the 1990s demonstrated the issues of both infanticide and genetic testing by challenging the 'better-off-dead' trope. Similarly, the commonly used plot point of suicide was used in rehabilitation narratives to support the argument against assisted dying, showcasing the potential for rehabilitation after

the initial outcry for death by people with disabilities. These narratives explained that people with disabilities could overcome their initial despair at their impairments, embrace their disability and eventually rehabilitate themselves. However, the one example of a successful suicide attempt in *Gattaca* still reinforced the 'Better-off Dead' trope by claiming Jerome had fulfilled his role in getting Vincent into space so he no longer had a role within society. As a result, rehabilitation narratives tend to promote the notion that people with disabilities should overcome their impairment, and by doing so, they could be 'cured' of their 'abnormal' label and contribute back to society. However, by doing this, the narrative itself treats people with disabilities as 'abnormal' by stating that able-bodiedness is society's 'norm' and this should be the status that people with disabilities should be aiming for.



## Disability Drag

Coined by scholar Tobin Siebers, 'disability drag' is used to describe the act of an able-bodied person attempting to pass as having a disability, something particularly seen in mainstream film.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, actor Bryan Cranston faced criticism after it was announced that he had played a quadriplegic in the film *The Upside* (2019), with Cranston defending his decision to play the character by saying that 'as actors, we are asked to play other people', comparing this role to a straight, wealthy, white man playing somebody 'who is not wealthy' or 'a homosexual'.<sup>2</sup> Many disability activists and actors argue that able-bodied actors playing characters with disabilities deny actors with disabilities the opportunity to play these roles, especially as they are unable to play able-bodied characters.<sup>3</sup> However, it should be noted that 'disability drag' likely has to be used for films where the character acquires their disability on-screen, where the actor portraying the character has to be able-bodied for scenes before the character acquires their impairment, for example *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996). The film tells the life story of Larry Flynt (Woody Harrelson), focussing on the title character creating *Hustler* magazine; Flynt getting shot and his response to being paralysed; and his legal battle against pastor Jerry Falwell. As Flynt is able-bodied at the start of the film but acquires a physical disability, it was necessary for able-bodied Harrelson to be cast in the role rather than an actor with a disability.<sup>4</sup> However, those characters who were either born with a disability (e.g. The Penguin in *Batman Returns*) or acquired their impairment off-camera (e.g. "the one-armed man" in *The Fugitive*) do not require an able-bodied actor to portray them and could

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<sup>1</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (University of Michigan Press, 2008), pp.114-115.

<sup>2</sup> Elyse Wanshel, 'Bryan Cranston Defends Playing A Man With Disabilities In New Film 'The Upside'', *Huffington Post* (8 January 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Elyse Wanshel, 'Bryan Cranston Defends Playing A Man With Disabilities In New Film 'The Upside''.

<sup>4</sup> *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, dir.by Milos Forman (Phoenix Pictures, 1996).

have been played by an actor with a disability. Although 'disability drag' became an established practice within film during the twenty-first century, it was certainly not a new phenomenon. Half of the Best Actor winners between the 1989 and 2018 Academy Awards won for portraying a character with either a physical or intellectual disability, with Dustin Hoffman's win for his portrayal of autism in *Rain Man* (1988) setting a precedent 'in which non-disabled actors' feats of performative disability became Oscar gold'.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will explore the problematic concept of 'disability drag' in the 1990s, particularly as this was the era when it began to become popular. This will be done by examining: the role of authenticity and censorship in 'disability drag', the critical acclaim able-bodied actors received through the use of 'disability drag', and the role of prosthetics in 'disability drag' for transforming an able-bodied actor into a character with a disability. Consequently, the films featuring disability produced at the end of the twentieth century demonstrate the success of 'disability drag' as a film practice within the film industry, explaining why it continues to be used today, despite preventing actors with disabilities from representing their own minority group.

Before exploring the use of 'disability drag' in mainstream films in the 1990s, it is important to establish the major points of this theory. When creating the term 'disability drag' Siebers makes reference to gendered drag because able-bodied actors' performances as people with disabilities are 'as bombastic as drag performances'.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly because both able-bodied actors and gendered drag performers rely heavily on exaggerating their performance of disability and gender respectively, rather than creating an authentic and empathetic portrayal of

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<sup>5</sup> Sophia Stewart, 'The Oscars Love Movies About Disability, Not Disabled Actors', *Film School Rejects* (30 January 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, p.115.

disability. The exaggeration of disability through the use of disability stereotypes within 'disability drag' demonstrate the difference between people with disabilities and those without, allowing the audience to distance themselves from the reality of disability.<sup>7</sup> Siebers claims that the use of 'disability drag' in the film industry 'renders disability invisible', comparing disability drag 'to white performers who put on blackface at minstrel shows... to bad comedic effect'.<sup>8</sup> Whilst it is considered acceptable for white actors portraying a character of another nationality, like American Meryl Streep playing British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in *The Iron Lady* (2018) who are both 'white', it is considered inappropriate for an actor to portray a different race in the same way that 'blackface' was used in film in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> Although a person could choose their nationality by migrating to another country, a person does not choose their race, just as they do not choose their disability. Both 'disability drag' and 'blackface' rely on prosthetic makeup techniques to transform an actor into exaggerated version of something they are not instead of casting actors from the same minority backgrounds the characters are from.<sup>10</sup> Thus, 'disability drag' as a practice is very similar to the problematic practice of 'blackface'.

Whilst Siebers' explanation of the link between disability and gendered drag focuses on exaggerating stereotypes, an alternative link focuses on the origins of the term drag. Angela Smith explains that the term gendered 'drag', originated from the 'unfamiliar sensation of men wearing long skirts dragging on the ground', thus disability drag 'requires able-bodied actors to carry out unfamiliar motions in ways

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Gill, *Already Doing It: Intellectual Disability and Sexual Agency* (Minneapolis and London: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p.149.

<sup>8</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, p.116.

<sup>9</sup> Lennard J. Davis, 'The Ghettoization of Disability: Paradoxes of Visibility and Invisibility Cinema', in. *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo Berresum and Moritz Ingwersen (Bielefeld: Disability Studies, 2017), pp.39-49(45-46).

<sup>10</sup> Lennard J. Davis, 'The Ghettoization of Disability', pp.45-47.

that caricature and confirm disability embodiment as a drag and only a drag'.<sup>11</sup> Whilst there is a clear link between gendered and 'disability drag', Siebers notes that 'disability drag' can exhibit the stigma of disability 'not to insiders by insiders', but instead to the general public who do not fully understand the topic and solely witness it through film.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, by having able-bodied actors portraying people with disabilities, there is a sense that an impairment can be cured 'as easily as one can disrobe from a costume', whilst the audience is reassured that once the movie ends, the actors will return to their able-bodied status that they temporarily lost when portraying disability.<sup>13</sup> This is especially true with characters that acquire their disability as part of the film's narrative, as the audience are aware that the actor is able to become able-bodied again. A good example of this is Scarlett Johansson who played a teenage amputee in *The Horse Whisperer* (1998), as discussed in chapter two, who would end up playing the able-bodied superhero Black Widow in *The Avengers* franchise. After a series of casting controversies concerning Scarlett Johansson 'yellowing up' to play a Japanese woman in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), based on the Manga comic of the same name, and for originally being cast as a trans man in the film *Rub & Tug*, the actress declared that 'as an actor I should be able to play any person, or any tree, or any animal, because that's my job and the requirements of my job.'<sup>14</sup> Thus, 'disability drag' reveals a wider lack of understanding of 'normativity' that creates a sense of entitlement that dominates

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<sup>11</sup> Angela M. Smith, 'Dis-affection: Disability Effects and Disabled Moves at the Movies', in *The Matter of Disability: Materiality, Biopolitics, Crip Affect*, ed. by David T. Mitchell, Susan Antebi, and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), pp.118-140 (p.122).

<sup>12</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, p.115.

<sup>13</sup> Krystal Cleary, 'One Of Us?: Disability Drag and the Gaga Enfreakment of Fandom', in *Disability Media Studies*, ed. by Elizabeth Ellcessor and Bill Kirkpatrick (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp.177-196 (p.186).

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Fitzpatrick, "'I Should Be Able to Play Any Person, Tree, or Animal,'" Scarlett Johansson Says of Casting Controversies', *Vanity Fair* (July 14, 2019).

able-bodied privileged actors. Through the constant use of 'disability drag' in the 1990s, audiences were allowed to view an exaggerated version of disability in film, resulting in the continued presences of 'disability drag' in film today.

### **Questioning Authenticity and Censorship**

'Disability drag' calls into question the level of authentic representation of disability in film. The film industry tends to favour able-bodied actors for disabled roles as it allows them to 'prove the "mastery" of their craft by "acting disabled"'.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, disabled actors are denied these same roles because it is deemed that their impairment makes them too 'authentic' to actually demonstrate any performance skills, although able-bodied actors are not judged in the same way when playing an able-bodied character.<sup>16</sup> In the early 1990s, dance critic Arlene Croce refused to review Bill Jones' dance show *Still/Here* because it featured people with deformities and she believed the show was just 'victim art', particularly as 'in theatre, one chooses what one will be... [but] the sick people who Jones has signed up – have no choice but to be sick.'<sup>17</sup> Croce's statement fixates on the assumption that people with disabilities are defined by their bodies and, although the attributes of being white, heterosexual or male are often ignored in visual media, disability as an attribute is seen as being too visible to allow an actor with a disability to portray different roles.<sup>18</sup> More recently, actor Adam Pearson, who has type 1 neurofibromatosis, was never considered for the role of John Merrick in the BBC's remake of *The Elephant Man*. This was despite Pearson being both an established actor, having previously made a documentary for the BBC about the freak show

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<sup>15</sup> Petra Kuppens, *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edges* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p.54.

<sup>16</sup> Krystal Cleary, 'One Of Us', p.185.

<sup>17</sup> Petra Kuppens, *Disability and Contemporary Performance*, p.52.

<sup>18</sup> Petra Kuppens, *Disability and Contemporary Performance*, p.53-54.

industry, and possessing the same kind of impairment as John Merrick, prompting Pearson to declare that ‘the job ultimately should go to the best actor, however, actors with the condition you’re trying to portray should absolutely be the first port of call’.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that ‘disability drag’ is a major international issue, highlighting the pivotal role film studios have in casting actors with disabilities, regardless of how ‘authentic’ their portrayal of a character can be.

If filmmakers had denied actors with disabilities roles for being too ‘authentic’, it would contradict Section 102 of the ADA which states:

No covered entity shall discriminate against a qualified individual with a disability because of the disability of such individual in regard to job application procedures, the hiring, advancement, or discharge of employees, employee compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment<sup>20</sup>

Whilst denying disabled actors’ roles for being too ‘authentic’ would suggest that the film industry was discriminating against people with disabilities, there is little to suggest that the film industry intentionally denied disabled actors these roles.

However, the response to the ‘authentic’ representation of disability in Tod Browning’s horror film *Freaks* (1932) does demonstrate an initial distaste towards actors with disabilities portraying characters with disabilities. Unlike previous horror films, like *Frankenstein* (1931), where audiences were reassured that the fictional monsters on screen were a product of special effects, the marketing for *Freaks* emphasised that the characters’ impairments in the film were ‘authentic’, making the ‘horrors’ featured in the film something audiences could encounter outside of the

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<sup>19</sup> Shelagh Fogarty, ‘Actor Adam Pearson Criticises BBC Over Elephant Man Drama Casting’, *LBC* (30 August 2018), <<https://www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/shelagh-fogarty/actor-adam-pearson-criticises-bbc-elephant-man/>> [accessed 19 August 2020].

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, ‘Americans with Disabilities Act 1990’, *Congress.gov* (9 May 1989), <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/933/text>> [accessed 21 July 2020].

movie theatre.<sup>21</sup> One such 'horror' can be seen at the climax of the film, where trapeze artist Cleopatra is chased by the 'freaks' after they discovered she was attempting to kill dwarf Hans, with them transforming Cleopatra into the 'human duck,' who was missing her legs, one eye and had her torso covered in feathers.<sup>22</sup> However, the film's marketing campaign backfired, causing it to become a box office disaster after it was pulled from US circulation and ultimately banned in the United Kingdom, especially after many civic groups ended up requesting movie censorship to be introduced as a result of the graphic nature of the film.<sup>23</sup> The film contributed to the popular belief in the 1930s that 'people with disabilities should not be seen and did not belong in public', particularly as *Freaks* presented a more unsettling and realistic form of horror compared to previous horror films.<sup>24</sup> The 'authentic' portrayal of characters with disabilities by actors with disabilities allowed filmmakers to question how much these actors were actually performing, leading to able-bodied actors getting these roles so they can show off their performative abilities.

Whilst *Freaks* was released in the early period of film when there were few established rules, the introduction of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) marked the beginning of film's content being censored for audiences. The MPAA originated as the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) in 1922, which was introduced to self-regulate the film industry, with the Hays Code being introduced in the 1930s to act as a 'moral policing mechanism'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Martin F. Norden and Madeleine A. Cahill, 'Violence, Women, and Disability in Tod Browning's *Freaks* and *The Devil Doll*', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (1998), pp.86-94 (p.87).

<sup>22</sup> *Freaks*, dir. by Tod Browning (Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1932).

<sup>23</sup> Martin F. Norden and Madeleine A. Cahill, 'Violence, Women, and Disability in Tod Browning's *Freaks* and *The Devil Doll*', p.88; Angela M. Smith, *Hideous Progeny: Disability, Eugenics, And Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.94; *Freaks*.

<sup>24</sup> Angela M. Smith, *Hideous Progeny*, pp.94-95.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous, *G Is For Golden: The MPAA Film Ratings At 50* (Motion Picture Association of America, 2018), p.7.

In 1965, the MPPDA became the MPAA before it was reformed in the 1960s by Jack Valenti after the Supreme Court recognized that the movie industry should be protected by the First Amendment Act regarding free speech.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the MPAA never explicitly stated disability should be censored in film. By the 1990s, the PG-13 rating had been introduced as well as descriptors for the film ratings so parents could know why a film had been given a specific rating.<sup>27</sup> Of the mainstream films analysed in the thesis, the closest descriptor to exclusively make reference to a disability was *The Horse Whisperer* whose descriptor says: 'Rated PG-13 for a disturbing accident scene'.<sup>28</sup> This is likely a reference to the zoomed in shot to one of the horses' ankle twisting whilst a snapping sound could be heard rather than any shots of the two girls getting injured or the impact of the accident, especially as Grace is never shown missing a leg in the film, only having a prosthetic leg covered by trousers.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, by the 1990s, the moralistic approach to censorship had been replaced with a system to allow free speech, meaning the 'authentic' portrayal of disability in *Freaks* would likely not have been censored in the same way it had done in the 1930s. Consequently, it is filmmakers themselves that censor 'authentic' disability when they use the practice of 'disability drag' instead of hiring actors with disabilities, with American legislation never preventing the hiring of disabled actors.

### **Critical Acclaim of 'Disability Drag'**

A major factor contributing to the film industry's constant reliance on 'disability drag' is the critical acclaim films featuring disability received, particularly in the

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<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, *G Is For Golden: The MPAA Film Ratings At 50* (Motion Picture Association of America, 2018), pp.8; 10; Jenifer Peterson, 'Regulating film, regulating emotion: the emotional history of public opinion', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 33:4 (2016), pp.324-336 (p.324).

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, *G Is For Golden*, pp.12-13.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous, 'Horse Whisperer', *FilmRatings.com*, <<https://www.filmratings.com/Search?filmTitle=the+horse+whisperer&x=0&y=0>> [accessed 22 July 2020].

<sup>29</sup> *The Horse Whisperer*, dir.by Robert Redford (Touchstone Pictures, 1998).



1990s. The skill required by able-bodied actors to transform their body and portray a character whose life experiences were very different to their own was admired by the film industry, often leading to portrayals of ‘disability drag’, with one of the earliest examples being Jon Voight winning the award of Best Actor at the 1979 Oscars for his role of paralysed veteran Luke Martin in *Coming Home* (1978).<sup>30</sup> In the comedy series *Extras* (2005-2007), about two extras working on the sets of various fictional movies starring established celebrities, Kate Winslet, playing an exaggerated version of herself, informs Ricky Gervais’ character that ‘You are guaranteed an Oscar if you play a “Mental”’, indicating that at least a section of the entertainment industry was aware that ‘disability drag’ was a way to receive critical acclaim.<sup>31</sup> Whilst the joke suggests that able-bodied actors only portray characters with disabilities to ensure they received critical acclaim, these actors could also act as allies to people with disabilities in their winning speeches, by providing a public voice for them. In his Oscar speech for *My Left Foot* (1989), Daniel Day-Lewis claimed that the award was ‘encouraging Christy to carry on making his mark’ after his death, whilst Tom Cruise’s Golden Globe speech for *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) thanked the Vietnam veterans ‘who were there and really gave their souls to [him] so [he] could play this role’.<sup>32</sup> By mentioning the people with disabilities that they portrayed when receiving their awards, both Day Lewis and Cruise claim to be able to spread more awareness about disability to the audience. Whilst these speeches created

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<sup>30</sup> Petra Koppers, ‘The Wheelchair’s Rhetoric: The Performance of Disability’, *The Drama Review*, 51:4 (Winter 2007), pp.80-88 (p.81); Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, p.115; Anonymous, ‘The 51<sup>st</sup> Academy Awards | 1979’, *Oscars.org* (9 April 1979), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1979>> [accessed 30 July 2020].

<sup>31</sup> ‘Kate Winslet’, *Extras*, BBC, 4 August 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Oscars, ‘Daniel Day-Lewis Wins Best Actor: 1990 Oscars’, *YouTube* (28 September 2009), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Z1E75hTtCA>> [accessed 20 August 2020]; AwardsShowNetwork, ‘Tom Cruise Wins Best Actor Motion Picture – Golden Globes 1990’, *YouTube* (11 January 2011), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHBt5lbt4OA>> [accessed 20 August 2020].

awareness about disabilities, the casting of actors with disabilities in these award-winning films would have given greater visibility to them as a minority group.

There are several reasons that able-bodied actors may get cast in an Oscar-worthy role rather than actors with disabilities. One reason is the fear of triggering a traumatic experience for an actor with an intellectual disability, particularly in the case of addiction or mental illnesses that an actor may have overcome.<sup>33</sup> Yet, years after overcoming an eating disorder, Lilly Collins played Ellen in *To the Bone* (2017), who had anorexia, as the actress 'wanted to be able to best exert [her] experiences on [Ellen] by going to the lengths [she] felt comfortable going to as an actor.'<sup>34</sup> Thus, Collins was able to use her experiences to create a more authentic portrayal of somebody with anorexia, whilst staying vigilant enough not to trigger any traumatic experiences about her own eating disorder. Another reason used to justify the hiring of able-bodied actors is the insensitivity of speeding up somebody's condition by getting them to play a deteriorated version of their own impairment.<sup>35</sup> However, the biggest reason that established actors, like Tom Hanks who won an Oscar for his role for portraying the title character in *Forrest Gump* (1994) who had an intellectual disability, are cast in these roles is due to their recognisability that will bring in audiences, thus creating profit for the film at the box office. A major factor contributing to an audience member deciding what film to watch is the use of "bankable stars" who are so familiar to the audience that they attend without regard to the film's content', generating revenue for the film.<sup>36</sup> As these 'bankable stars' tend

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<sup>33</sup> Aaliya Gilbert, 'Oscars So Able?: The Overwhelming Frequency Of Non-Disabled Actors Portraying Disabled Characters', *The Oxford Student* (12 May 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Carly Mallenbaum, "'To the Bone': Why Lily Collins plays a woman with anorexia after her own eating disorder', *USA Today* (July 2017)

<sup>35</sup> Aaliya Gilbert, 'Oscars So Abled'.

<sup>36</sup> Barry R. Litman, 'Predicting Success of Theatrical Movies: An Empirical Study', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 16:4 (Spring 1983), pp.159-175 (p.168).

to be able-bodied, it is likely that actors with disabilities are not selected as they do not ensure box office revenue for the film. This creates a 'moral paradox' as actors with disabilities need to be cast as the lead role in a high budget film to become established but are not because they are not established enough.<sup>37</sup>

The critical acclaim 'disability drag' received could be clearly seen during the 1990 awards season. During the Oscars ceremony, Daniel Day-Lewis's portrayal of Christy Brown in *My Left Foot* defeated Tom Cruise's portrayal of Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July* for the award of Best Actor, with both films being nominated for Best Picture.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Cruise was awarded the Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Drama, beating Day Lewis, and *Born on the Fourth of July* won the Golden Globe for Best Picture- Drama.<sup>39</sup> Although the use of 'disability drag' had previously earned Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman awards, the 1990 awards season saw those using 'disability drag' receive several nominations at the Oscars, leading to many filmmakers adopting this practice. Whilst *My Left Foot* is claimed to mark a 'new-found sensitivity to disability issues' from filmmakers and for being 'at the forefront of creating representations of the disabled that transcend pity', it could be argued that Day Lewis' portrayal of cerebral palsy was more cringeworthy than sensitive towards people with cerebral palsy, and did not deserve the Oscar.<sup>40</sup> The combination of Day Lewis exaggerating the disability and the audience's awareness that Day Lewis was not actually disabled makes his imperfect performance of

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<sup>37</sup> Aaliya Gilbert, 'Oscars So Abled?'

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, 'The 62<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards|1990', *Oscars.org* (26 March 1990), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1990>> [accessed 23 July 2020].

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, 'Winners & Nominees 1990', *GoldenGlobes.com* (20 January 1990), <<https://www.goldenglobes.com/winners-nominees/1990>> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>40</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994) pp.302-303; Michael T. Hayes and Rhonda S. Black, 'Troubling Signs: Disability, Hollywood Movies and the Construction of a Discourse of Pity', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 23:2 (2003), pp.114-132 (p.127); *My Left Foot*, dir.by Jim Sheridan (Granada Films, 1989).

cerebral palsy almost mocking of the impairment instead of respectful of it. In his review of *My Left Foot* for *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Paul Longmore praised Day Lewis' dedication to the film, explaining that the actor stayed in character off-set and was perceived by society as having a real impairment, allowing him to fully 'understand the mind and heart of Christy Brown.'<sup>41</sup> However, in a later issue of the journal, Joseph Baird argues that the character is presented in an undignified way, especially in his treatment of women, making the claim that the character is not 'a hero of our struggle' but instead an offensive character.<sup>42</sup> This leads us to Gary Kiger's review of the *My Left Foot* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, where he believed that actors with disabilities 'could bring a performance threaded with realism and passion' that able-bodied actors could not.<sup>43</sup> As 'film making exists in a less than perfect political and economic world', a more realistic portrayal of disability would likely diminish box office revenue, particularly as Day Lewis and Cruise were more well-known and could allow audiences to suspend disbelief through a sanitised version of disability.<sup>44</sup> The critical acclaim 'disability drag' received in the 1990s only encouraged more able-bodied actors to adopt this practice, despite it preventing actors with disabilities the opportunity to play these roles, because able-bodied actors were able to create a more unrealistic and sanitised version of disability.

In the history of the Academy Awards, only two actors with disabilities have won an Oscar. The first was Harold Russell who won Best Actor in a Supporting Role for his role in the film *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) for playing war veteran Homer

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<sup>41</sup> Paul K. Longmore, 'The Glorious Rage of Christy Brown', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 10:4 (Fall 1990), pp.23-25 (p.24).

<sup>42</sup> Joseph L. Baird, 'My Left Foot: The Movie, the Reviews', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 11:2 (Spring 1991), pp.24-26 (pp.24-25).

<sup>43</sup> Gary Kiger, 'Disability in Film: Honest Portrayals', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 10:4 (Fall 1990), pp.28-29 (p.28).

<sup>44</sup> Gary Kiger, 'Disability in Film', pp.28-29.

Parrish whose hands were amputated and replaced with hook prosthetics, which was Russell's first and only acting role after he lost his hands in World War Two.<sup>45</sup> At the 1947 Oscars ceremony, Russell made history for being the first and only actor to win two awards for the same role, having received a special award for 'bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans' as it was believed that Russell would not win the other award, with Russell telling the Los Angeles Times that 'no one was more surprised than me... well maybe those guys who voted me the special award.'<sup>46</sup> The second winner was deaf actress Marlee Matlin who won Best Actress at the 1987 Oscars for the film *Children of a Lesser God* (1986).<sup>47</sup> In 2012, twenty five years after her win, Matlin explained that that day was one of the best days of her life, although some critics said she was undeserving of the win because she was 'essentially a deaf person playing a deaf role'.<sup>48</sup> In response to this criticism, Matlin claimed that 'there are so many people, deaf or otherwise abled, who are so talented but overlooked or not given a chance to even get their foot in the door.'<sup>49</sup> The lack of actors with disabilities who had won an Oscar since Matlin's win and the large amount of able-bodied actors winning for playing disabled roles, shows that the critics' belief that Matlin was undeserving for playing a character with the same impairment as herself, continues to prevail since 1987.

Due to able-bodied actors earning more mainstream disability roles, many actors with disabilities have been forced to rely on independent films and film festivals to

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<sup>45</sup> Anonymous, 'The 19<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards | 1947', *Oscars.org* (13 March 1947), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1947>> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Richard Severo, 'Harold Russell Dies at 88: Veteran and Oscar Winner', *The New York Times* (1 February 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Jon Thurber, 'Harold Russell, 88; Disabled Actor Won 2 Oscars for 'The Best Years of Our Lives'', *LA Times* (1 February 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Anonymous, 'The 59<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards | 1987', *Oscars.org* (30 March 1987), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1987>> [accessed 23 July 2020].

<sup>48</sup> Marlee Matlin, 'Oscars: Marlee Matlin on her Best Actress win', *Entertainment Weekly* (21 February 2012)

<sup>49</sup> Marlee Matlin, 'Oscars'.

demonstrate their acting skills. The most significant film festival to showcase films about disability was the Superfest Disability Film Festival. Superfest was founded in Los Angeles in 1970 as a small film showcase designed 'to encourage greater participation of disabled people in the telecommunication industry.'<sup>50</sup> It would eventually become the longest running disability film festival in the world that was designed to celebrate 'cutting-edge cinema that portrays disability through a diverse, complex... and engaging lens'.<sup>51</sup> With its move to San Francisco in 1995 – the city where the 1977 504 Sit-ins took place that prompted the passing of antidiscrimination laws in America - Superfest would become associated with the disability civil rights movement, particularly as it provided a voice for people with disabilities in the film industry.<sup>52</sup> By 1998, the festival began to present awards for excellence to the films featured at the event, as well as the Spirit of Superfest award for films made by people with disabilities and one award for the Best of Festival.<sup>53</sup> Independent films and film festivals, like Superfest, would become one of the few places where actors and filmmakers with disabilities were celebrated. As long as mainstream award ceremonies, like the Oscars, continue to give awards to able-bodied actors undergoing 'disability drag' to play characters with disabilities, actors with disabilities are denied the opportunity to receive critical acclaim for their work, leading to them not being established enough to be hired in as the lead in a mainstream film.

### **Prosthetics' Role in 'Disability Drag'**

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, 'A Synopsis of Superfest', *Culture!, Disability!, Talent!*,

<<http://www.culturedisabilitytalent.org/superfest/synopsis.html>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous, 'About' *Superfest Disability Film Festival* (2019), <<http://www.superfestfilm.com/about>> [accessed 2 September 2020].

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, 'A Synopsis of Superfest'; Susan Schweik, 'Lomax's Matrix: Disability, Solidarity, and the Black Power of 504', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 31:1 (2011).

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous, 'Superfest XVIII Winners', *Culture! Disability! Talent!* (1998),

<<http://www.culturedisabilitytalent.org/superfest/sf1998.html>>, [accessed 2 September 2020].

Dustin Hoffman is made an example of by many scholars when discussing 'disability drag' due to his 'drag' performance of autism in *Rain Man* and the 'gendered drag' his character experiences in the film *Tootsie* (1982).<sup>54</sup> Yet, his 'drag' performance of physical disability in *Hook* (1991) is rarely mentioned, although Hoffman had to physically alter his appearance by covering one of his hands with a hook prosthetic in order to portray Captain Hook. The importance of the prosthetic process in 'disability drag' for transforming an able-bodied actor into a character with a disability is under appreciated, prompting Angela Smith to extend Siebers' observation that 'the more disabled the character, the greater the ability of the actor' by adding 'and of the special-effects technician'.<sup>55</sup>

The prosthetics process had evolved by the 1990s compared to earlier techniques used in the film industry in the first half of the twentieth century. For one scene in the film *Kings Row* (1942) starring Ronald Reagan as amputee Drake McHugh, the character shockingly asked, after discovering his legs had been amputated, 'Where's the rest of me?'.<sup>56</sup> In order to achieve this scene, the filmmakers 'cut a hole in the mattress for [his] legs' whilst he laid down under a bed cover to make it appear that his body ended at his hips.<sup>57</sup> Reagan suggested that the immediate shock of horror at seeing his body in an amputated state motivated him to complete the scene in one-take without any rehearsals, leading him to believe *Kings Row* was 'the finest picture [he] ever appeared in and it elevated [him] to the degree of stardom [he] had dreamed of'.<sup>58</sup> Similar to how Daniel Day-Lewis prepared for the

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<sup>54</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, p.115; Petra Kuppers, 'The Wheelchair's Rhetoric', p.81; Michael Gill, *Already Doing It*, p.149.

<sup>55</sup> Angela M. Smith, 'Dis-affection', p.123.

<sup>56</sup> *Kings Row*, dir.by Sam Wood (Warner Bros., 1942)

<sup>57</sup> Ronald Reagan, *Ronald Reagan: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), Chap.12.

<sup>58</sup> Ronald Reagan, *Ronald Reagan*, Chap.12.

role of Christy Brown in *My Left Foot* by remaining in character off-set to understand Christy's perspective of disability in society, the use of prosthetics temporarily convinced Reagan himself that he had actually lost his legs.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the use of prosthetics challenged Siebers' notion that able-bodied actors are simply exaggerating disability when performing 'disability drag' as they can be used to help actors create a genuine reaction.<sup>60</sup> Reagan named his first biography "Where's the rest of me?", believing the scene was one of the best scenes he had ever done in his acting career because he had put himself 'in the body of another fellow', demonstrating the significant role of special effects in transforming able-bodied actors performing 'disability drag' into characters with disabilities.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst Gary Sinise's 'disability drag' performance of Lieutenant Dan in *Forrest Gump* (1994) also used the 'hole in the bed' technique from the 1940s, special effects expert Marc Wielage claimed the film also used 'digital computer removal', as in the scene when Dan finally 'made his peace with God' and jumps in the ocean, and a technique designed by magician Ricky Jay that used a mirror attached to Dan's wheelchair to disguise Sinise's legs.<sup>62</sup> The film would end up winning an Oscar for Best Visual Effects, demonstrating that it was not just actors who received critical acclaim for performing as characters with disabilities, but also the special effects required to create the desired 'disabled drag'.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Ve Neil was nominated for an Oscar for Best Makeup at the 1993 Academy Awards for her work on the

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<sup>59</sup> Paul K. Longmore, 'The Glorious Rage of Christy Brown', p.24.

<sup>60</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, p.115.

<sup>61</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables For The Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp.52-53.

<sup>62</sup> Roger Ebert, 'Movie Answer Man (08/01/1994)', *RogerEbert.com* (1 August 1994), <<https://www.rogerebert.com/answer-man/movie-answer-man-08011994>> [accessed 27 July 2020].

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous, 'The 67<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards | 1995', *Oscars.org* (27 March 1995), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1995>> [accessed 27 July 2020].



character of The Penguin for *Batman Returns* (1992), creating ‘glove[s] without a thumb’ to create the character’s flippers, whilst DeVito admitted that he put a lift in his shoe to give himself a limp, allowing him to feel ‘comfortable in “the skin” of the character.’<sup>64</sup> The physical transformation DeVito underwent for the role allowed him to create a more empathetic approach to portraying The Penguin who had a disability, explaining DeVito’s emphasis in press interviews on the villain’s desire to be accepted by society.<sup>65</sup> Tommy Lee Jones detailed that the prosthetic procedure he had to go through for *Batman Forever* (1995) took between two and four hours, allowing him to claim he ‘never ha[d] the sensation of being a normal human being one minute and Harvey Two-Face the next’ but the process happened by degrees, again demonstrating the role of the prosthetic process in aiding an actors ‘disability drag’ performance.<sup>66</sup> Yet, Lee Jones’ statement that he was being transformed from a ‘normal human’ into somebody with a facial disfigurement does promote the view that disability was ‘abnormal’ and should be kept hidden, something ‘disability drag’ allows to happen through the hiring of able-bodied actors.<sup>67</sup> Sami Schalk’s re-evaluation of the supercrip stereotype, explained fully in chapter two, introduced the new type of a superpowered supercrip, where the powers gained through the use of prosthetics overcompensate for and eventually erase a person’s disabilities.<sup>68</sup> In contrast to the negative stereotype of the superpowered supercrip, the prosthetics

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<sup>64</sup> Anonymous, ‘The 65<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards | 1993’, *Oscars.org* (29 March 1993), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1993>> [accessed 28 July 2020], Dmitry Zakharenkoy, ‘Batman Returns: 10 Making-Up The Penguin’, *YouTube* (17 February 2013), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziDRmlOB4Zo>> [accessed 20 March 2020]; Fox 5 DC, ‘DUMBO Interviews – Burton, Keaton, De Vito, Farrell, Eva Green- Batman, Beetlejuice’, *YouTube* (11 March 2019), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HpsKNEZubk>> [accessed 20 March 2020].

<sup>65</sup> Quentin Falk, ‘Trio of Evils for the Caped Crusader’, *Flicks* (July 1992), pp.12-13 (p.12).

<sup>66</sup> ScreenSlam, ‘Batman Forever: Tommy Lee Jones Exclusive Interview’.

<sup>67</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, p.116.

<sup>68</sup> Sami Schalk, ‘Reevaluating the Supercrip’, *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 10:1 (2016), pp.71-86 (pp.79; 81).

procedure does not erase a character's disability but instead enhances it, acting as a constant visual reminder to the audience that these characters have physical impairments. This helps with the 'disability drag' performance by reminding the audience that able-bodied actors only have a temporary disability and will be 'cured' once the film has finished. Consequently, the use of the prosthetics process is a key requirement for able-bodied actors performing physical 'disability drag' to transform themselves, both physically and mentally, into a character with a disability, with the more realistic prosthetics allowing audiences to forget the actors they are watching are not actually disabled outside of the movie theatre.

Whilst the prosthetics makeup process contributed to the 'disability drag' performance of able-bodied actors, the prosthetics belonging to characters with disabilities in film could educate the audience about the current prosthetics available to people with disabilities. When creating the prosthetic for Fredrick 'the one-armed man' Sykes in *The Fugitive*, the filmmakers worked with consultants from the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago who 'lent their expertise in the field of myoelectric prosthetics (electrically powered artificial limbs)' to create 'a realistic model'.<sup>69</sup> Prosthetic and orthotic specialist Jack Uellendahl was hired for the film to work closely with Andreas Katsulas, who played Sykes, to fit, create and 'replicate a functional appendage'.<sup>70</sup> In one scene in the film, protagonist Richard Kimball infiltrates a hospital's prosthetic department to use their computer system to discover the potential identity of the mysterious 'one-armed man' who had killed his wife.<sup>71</sup> As the scene represents different types of prosthetics, and experts in the field were hired to work on the film, the film provided a 'documentary-styled representation of

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<sup>69</sup> Anonymous, 'Film Publicity Press Released: The Fugitive', p.6.

<sup>70</sup> Anonymous, 'Film Publicity Press Released', p.6.

<sup>71</sup> *The Fugitive*, dir. by Andrew Davis (Kopelson Entertainment, 1993).

modern prosthetic and orthotic technologies', subliminally educating the audience on prosthetics whilst they were still being entertained by the suspenseful crime story.<sup>72</sup> Clearly, the filmmakers attempted to realistically represent prosthetic devices to subtly increase awareness on how prosthetics are used. Whilst *The Fugitive* sought expert advice when creating their prosthetic, according to production designer Norman Garwood, the filmmakers of *Hook* wanted to make Captain Hook's hook 'a little more lethal, almost like a surgeon's tool, much more of a refined thing' with Spielberg wanting 'to be able to click stuff in and take it back out.'<sup>73</sup> By being able to 'click stuff in', like a teacher's cane and a baseball glove, the film is able to demonstrate different uses for prosthetics, with these different objects representing the less lethal side to Captain Hook's personality than the villainous side indicated by the iconic hook. Although prosthesis is used in narrative to create a 'quick fix' and remove disability and deviance from view, both villains' nicknames are based on their prosthetics, preventing them from being able to 'fit in' because of the constant reminder of their disability in their names.<sup>74</sup> As film is a visual medium, their prosthetics are also continuously visible onscreen, acting as an additional reminder to the audience about these characters' impairments, making it impossible for their prosthetics to erase their disability in the same way as textual prosthesis describes.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, the use of prosthetics by characters in film demonstrate the uses of prosthetics for people with disabilities, whilst also constantly reminding audiences that these characters have an impairment, effectively making their disability more visible rather than invisible.

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<sup>72</sup> Martin Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation*, p.311.

<sup>73</sup> Fred Schruers, 'Hooked!', *Empire* (May 1992), p.64.

<sup>74</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disabilities and the Dependencies of Discourse* (The University of Michigan Press, 2000), p.8.

<sup>75</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p.8.

## Conclusion

'Disability drag' continues to be a major issue facing the representation of physical disability in the film industry as it favours able-bodied actors over actors with disabilities. Although the 'authentic' representation of disability in *Freaks* led to campaigners against the film requesting the censorship of the film, movie censorship had improved by the 1990s to become more inclusive compared to the initial Hays Code. These new rules never excluded actors with disabilities from being cast, but it did make the hiring of actors with disabilities the sole responsibility of filmmakers. The critical acclaim that both actors and special effects artists received for contributing to 'disability drag' only encouraged the use of the practice in the 1990s, leading to its continued presence in films. As well-known actors were selected to play major characters with disabilities in film to create box office revenue, filmmakers chose to cast established able-bodied actors instead of little-known actors with disabilities. As a result, actors with disabilities could only be chosen for a disabled role instead an able-bodied actor doing 'disability drag' when filmmakers gave actors with disabilities a chance in a lead role that could achieve critical acclaim. Furthermore, the prosthetic process able-bodied actors underwent when being transformed into their characters with disabilities allowed them to be more empathetic in their approach, and fully understand what it was like to be a person with a disability. Whilst the prosthetic process allowed able-bodied actors to be transformed into characters with disabilities, actors with disabilities do not require prosthetics as they already had impairments, making prosthetics a key component of 'disability drag'. As long as the film industry continues to hire able-bodied actors performing 'disability drag', actors with disabilities have very few opportunities to achieve success within the mainstream film industry.

## Conclusion

Although the 1990s was considered a progressive period in American history due to identity politics thriving in this decade, it was not as progressive for people with disabilities, particularly the representation of physical disability within mainstream. The film industry in the 1990s did move towards representing people with disabilities more sympathetically, particularly when it came to the language used in film, in an attempt to become more inclusive. However, the introduction of rehabilitation narratives and 'disability drag' at the end of the twentieth century created more issues for people with disabilities, which effectively presented them as 'others'. Thus, under the guise of a more inclusive approach to representing disability, film in the 1990s was not as progressive as first expected.

The 1990s did see positive changes in how disability was being represented in mainstream film through the terminology used. After the passing of the ADA in 1990, the term 'handicap' was now considered problematic, resulting in its removal from the film *Hook* (1991), with a direct reference to a character's impairment being the more preferable term to use. However, the ADA unacknowledged the negative terms 'crippled', 'freak' and 'monster', allowing their continued use during the decade. Some of these uses were within the context of a film's historical setting, like in *Forrest Gump* (1994) when Lieutenant Dan refers to himself as a 'cripple' and a 'freak', to authentically reflect the language used at the time. Conversely, the use of these negative terms in modern settings, like the way 'crippled' was used in *The Bone Collector* (1999) by Howard Cheyney when condemning disabled protagonist Lincoln Rhyme's involvement in his case, confronted able-bodied audiences with the negative connotations associated with 'crippled', highlighting how out-dated the term actually was. Thus, the ADA signalled a change in disability terminology through the

removal of 'handicap', but the continued presence of other negative disability terminology, like 'crippled' and 'freak', indicates that this change did not encompass all disability terminology as a direct result of new awareness of disability. Instead, change to disability terminology in film throughout the 1990s was limited to the contents of the ADA, limiting this change to being slightly progressive.

The use of rehabilitation narratives allowed filmmakers to create a more sympathetic representation of disability in the 1990s. When compared to the use of the villainous disability stereotype, rehabilitation narratives appear to be progressive for featuring characters with disabilities in central and protagonist roles. Throughout the twentieth century, the 'better-off-dead' trope was used in film to imply that people with disabilities were a burden to society, unable to fulfil their life. However, as a result of the increasing presence of identity politics and new awareness about disability after the Vietnam War, film in the 1990s used the trope to suggest the opposite. Whilst a character's initial outcry for death suggested the 'better-off-dead' trope was in use, this desire for death was used to begin the rehabilitation narrative for many characters, like Grace McLean in *The Horse Whisperer* (1998). The redevelopment of the 'better-off-dead' trope showcased the potential of rehabilitation for people with disabilities after their initial outcry for death, suggesting that people with disabilities can adjust to their impairment and embrace their disability.

Although rehabilitation narratives do represent disability through central protagonist roles, they ultimately present people with disabilities as 'others' that should be fixed to a 'normative' status. This is particularly true with both types of the supercrip narrative, which represent disability as being 'abnormal'. By presenting them as inspirational for performing an act considered 'normal' by an able-bodied society, people with disabilities are perceived to be 'different' unless they can fulfil

this 'normative' requirement. The 'cured' narrative expands on the supercrip narrative by representing people with disabilities as something that should be 'fixed' to a status of 'normality', mainly through the use of prosthetics. By giving these characters with disabilities prosthetics, it appeared that their impairment has been 'cured' and that these characters were now reliving a 'normal' life. This was taken to the extreme in *Forrest Gump's* case, where his impairment is miraculously 'cured'. This use of a miracle 'cure', particularly in a film that aims to situate the title character in historical events, gave the 'cured narrative' an element of believability, making it a damaging narrative to use within film. The use of the 'cured' narrative during the 1990s implied to an able-bodied audience that people with disabilities were simply a problem that needed to be fixed, presenting them as 'others'. Therefore, whereas filmmakers attempt to be progressive through the use of rehabilitation narratives, and it was viewed as progressive at the time, it actually represented people with disabilities as 'abnormal', 'others', who should be 'cured'.

Very few characters with disabilities featured within mainstream films throughout the twentieth century were actually portrayed by actors with disabilities. Yet, the trend of 'disability drag' began to become increasingly popular during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. The critical acclaim filmmakers and actors received for the films featuring 'disability drag' led to it becoming a reliable tactic for filmmakers to earn praise and awards at ceremonies like the Oscars. By awarding able-bodied actors like Daniel Day-Lewis and Tom Hanks for portraying characters with disabilities, the awards ceremonies praised actors for their disability impersonations. Simultaneously, these award-winning actors became more desirable to be cast in new roles, leaving actors with disabilities to be overlooked for new disabled roles. Whilst able-bodied actors were praised for performing 'disability drag', actors with

disabilities, like Marlee Matlin, were accused of being undeserving of critical acclaim because they were too 'authentic' in their performance. Instead of the authentic portrayal of disability by actors with disabilities, prosthetic makeup was used to transform able-bodied actors into disabled characters. These prosthetics helped able-bodied actors to transform into characters with disabilities, so they could empathise with living with an impairment. However, an able-bodied actor in prosthetic makeup does not have the same experience as an actor with that impairment, making an able-bodied actor's performance appear unrealistic in comparison.

Many disability activists and actors have argued that able-bodied actors playing characters with disabilities denied actors with disabilities the opportunity to play these roles, especially as actors with physical disabilities were unable to play able-bodied characters.<sup>1</sup> In response to critics questioning the inclusiveness of the Oscars, the Academy established new representation and inclusion standards for Oscar eligibility in September 2020, recognising people with physical disabilities as an underrepresented minority group.<sup>2</sup> As part of these new requirements, there was an option for people with disabilities to be the main subject matter of a film, but actors with disabilities were only specified as being a potential requirement for the ensemble cast, with the lead role requirement being reserved for racial minority groups.<sup>3</sup> As such, the Academy encouraged filmmakers to represent disability more, but not necessarily through able-bodied actors. Consequently, 'disability drag' is still

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<sup>1</sup> Elyse Wanshel, 'Bryan Cranston Defends Playing A Man With Disabilities In New Film 'The Upside'', *Huffington Post* (8 January 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, 'Academy Establishes Representation And Inclusion Standards For Oscar Eligibility', *Oscars.org* (8 September 2020) < <https://www.oscars.org/news/academy-establishes-representation-and-inclusion-standards-oscar-eligibility>>.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, 'Academy Establishes Representation And Inclusion Standards For Oscar Eligibility'.



encouraged in the twenty-first century, particularly because it was a prominent but unacknowledged problem facing people with disabilities during the 1990s.

It is too simplistic to state that the representation of disability in mainstream film in the 1990s was progressive or not. When it comes to disability terminology, the decade could be viewed as advanced due to the slow phasing out of negative terminology by the end of the decade. However, the continued presence of negative terminology in film in the 1990s, especially terms that disability civil rights activists had been attempting to remove from as early as the 1930s, highlights an unawareness of offensive disability terminology by society. Meanwhile, rehabilitation narratives could be viewed as partially progressive due to them being used to establish characters with disabilities in a lead role outside of the villainous role, whilst the 'better-off-dead' trope showcased the potential for people with disabilities to be rehabilitated and adjust to their disabilities. However, the use of these narratives drew attention to society's belief that people with disabilities were 'abnormal', that should be 'cured' to a status of 'normal' commonly associated with able-bodiedness. Finally, through the issue of 'disability drag', the 1990s could be viewed as largely regressive, by denying actors with disabilities the same opportunities that able-bodied actors have when portraying characters with disabilities. The issue of 'disability drag' originated in the 1990s and would only begin to be identified as an issue that required resolving in the twenty-first century. As a result, the 1990s was only a slightly progressive decade for the representation of disability within mainstream film, as it solved old issues, but ultimately created new problems for people with disabilities to overcome.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 - List of Films

#### ***My Left Foot*, dir. by Jim Sheridan (Granada Films, 1989)**

The biographical drama *My Left Foot* tells the life story of Christy Brown, who was born with cerebral palsy. Shown through a series of flashbacks, the film shows a young Christy (Hugh O'Connor) being supported by his caring Mother, Bridget (Brenda Fricker), and his other family members where he learns to use his left foot, the only part of his body that he could fully control. After using his foot to alert his neighbours that his Mother had fallen down the stairs whilst going into labour, he later shows his family that he can write with his foot, writing the word 'Mother' in chalk on the floor to the amazement of his family and his doubtful Father, Patrick (Ray McAnally). As an adult (now played by Daniel Day-Lewis), Christy begins painting with his foot and eventually meets Dr Eileen Cole (Fiona Shaw) who takes him to her school for people with cerebral palsy. She manages to arrange a gallery exhibition of Christy's work, but Christy also begins to fall in love with Eileen. In a restaurant after the exhibition, Christy discovers Eileen is engaged, causing him to make a scene in a fit of rage and later consider suicide. To cheer him up, Bridget builds a private studio for Christy so he could continue painting, and he later begins writing his autobiography *My Left Foot* with the help of his brother and Eileen. The film ends with Christy having his autobiography read to him by the nurse Mary Carr (Ruth McCabe) as he waits for his appearance at a charity event, with it being revealed that Christy would at some point marry Mary.

At the domestic box office, *My Left Foot* made \$41,165 on its opening weekend, eventually grossing \$14,743,391.<sup>1</sup> The film received critical acclaim, with Paul Longmore's review for *Disability Studies Quarterly* praising Day Lewis' dedication to the film, claiming that the film was 'utterly true to our experiences as disabled people.'<sup>2</sup> At the Academy Awards, *My Left Foot* was nominated for five awards, winning two in total: Best Actor (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Best Supporting Actress (Brenda Fricker).<sup>3</sup>

### ***Hook*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Amblin Entertainment, 1991)**

The fantasy adventure film *Hook* is about Peter Branning (Robin Williams), a San Francisco lawyer whose workaholic lifestyle is putting a strain on his relationship with his wife Moira (Caroline Goodall), his son Jack (Charlie Korsmo) and his daughter Maggie (Amber Scott). The Branning family visit London to attend a charity event in Moira's grandmother Wendy's (Maggie Smith) honour. Whilst Peter, Moira and Wendy are at the charity dinner, the children, who were under the care of Wendy's housekeeper are kidnapped by Captain James Hook (Dustin Hoffman). Upon discovering the children had been kidnapped, Wendy informs Peter that he is actually Peter Pan, and that he chose to grow up after falling in love with Moira. Although he isn't convinced, the arrival of Tinkerbell (Julie Roberts) prompts the fairy to use her pixie dust and take Peter to Neverland. There, he confronts Captain Hook, but is unsuccessful at rescuing his children and is captured by the pirates. Tinkerbell makes a deal with Hook to let Peter go so she can have three days to train him for a

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<sup>1</sup> 'My Left Foot,' *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0097937/?ref=bo\\_ser\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0097937/?ref=bo_ser_1)> [accessed 16 November 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Paul K. Longmore, 'The Glorious Rage of Christy Brown', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 10:4 (Fall 1990), pp.23-25 (pp.23-24).

<sup>3</sup> 'The 62<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards', *Oscars.org* (26 March 1990), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1990>> [accessed 16 November 2020].

fight between Peter and Hook. Tinkerbell attempts to get the Lost Boys to help Peter regain his memories and learn to fly again, much to the annoyance of the Lost Boy's leader Rufio (Dante Basco), and eventually persuades them to help. Peter begins to learn how to fight and discovers his old home, where he finds his happy thought of his children and uses it to fly. Meanwhile, Captain Hook and Mr Smee (Bob Hoskins) try to turn Jack and Maggie against Peter so they view Hook as a father figure. Whilst this doesn't work on Maggie, Jack is persuaded by Hook and joins his crew. As the third day arrives, Peter and the Lost Boys face off against Hook and his pirates on the ship. There, Peter defeats Hook and rescues Maggie and Jack, reconciling with them before returning home. Arriving home, Peter vows to change his lifestyle and to devote more of his time to his family.

At the domestic box office, *Hook* made \$119,654,823 and grossed \$300,854,823 worldwide. Whilst it was a financial success, the film received mainly negative reviews, with Roger Ebert claiming the 'construction is really nothing more than a hook on which to hang a new version of the Peter Pan story' and that very little effort had been put into the film.<sup>4</sup> The film did receive 5 nominations at the Academy Awards for Art Direction, Costume Design, Makeup, Original Song and Visual Effects, but won none of these awards.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Batman Returns*, dir. by Tim Burton (Warner Bros., 1992)**

The superhero film *Batman Returns* is Tim Burton's sequel to his 1989 film *Batman*. In the film, business tycoon Max Shreck (Christopher Walken) teams up with Oswald "The Penguin" Cobblepot (Danny DeVito), who was abandoned as a

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<sup>4</sup> Roger Ebert, 'Hook', *RogerEbert.com* (11 December 1991).

<sup>5</sup> 'The 64<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards - 1992', *Oscars.org* (30 March 1992)

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child by his parents because of his disfigurement and was now living in the sewers as the leader of criminal circus troupe the Red Triangle Gang. Shreck supports The Penguin' plan on running for the position of Gotham's Mayor as he had planned to create a power plant that would drain Gotham's energy supply, something, The Penguin was blackmailing Shreck with. Shreck's secretary Selina Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer) learns of Shreck's plans, but he pushes her out of a window to silence her. Kyle survived the fall and decided to seek revenge against Shreck by adopting the identity of Catwoman. As The Penguin proceeded with his plan, Batman (Michael Keaton) began investigating Oswald Cobblepot, whilst a confrontation with Catwoman led to her and The Penguin teaming up to get revenge against Batman. They abduct Gotham's Ice Princess and kill her, framing Batman for the crime, but the two villains break their pact with each other after Catwoman rejected The Penguin's advances. Although the framing attempt initially succeeded, Batman recorded The Penguin's derogatory comments about Gotham's population and played it in front of the crowd, forcing The Penguin to retreat to the sewers. There, he planned to first abduct the first-born children of the elite of Gotham, including Shreck, a plan foiled by Batman, before attempting to use Penguin's carrying bombs to blow up Gotham's population, which was also foiled by Batman. This led to a confrontation between Batman, Catwoman, The Penguin and Max Shreck at the Penguin's lair in the sewer. There, Catwoman kills Shreck by electrocuting herself, whilst Batman fought The Penguin, making the villain fall into the sewer's toxic water, where he later dies from his wounds. At the end of the film, it is revealed that Catwoman survived the electrocution and was keeping watch over Batman.

At the domestic box office, *Batman Returns* made \$162,902,304 and grossed \$266,903,053 worldwide.<sup>6</sup> The film received mainly positive reviews, with Todd McCarthy claiming that many would 'find this sequel superior in several respects', praising DeVito and Pfeiffer's performances and the worldbuilding used to create the city of Gotham.<sup>7</sup> At the Academy Awards, *Batman Returns* was nominated for two awards, Makeup and Visual Effects, but ultimately did not win.<sup>8</sup>

***The Fugitive*, dir. by Andrew David (Kopelson Entertainment and Warner Bros., 1993)**

In the thriller film *The Fugitive*, Dr Richard Kimble (Harrison Ford) is accused and found guilty of murdering his wife, despite him claiming that it was the 'one-armed man' that killed his wife. Whilst being transported to death row, Kimble's fellow prisoners attempt an escape plan, causing the transport bus to be destroyed by a train and Kimble becoming a fugitive. He ends up being pursued by Deputy US Marshall Samuel Gerard (Tommy Lee Jones) who is trying to capture Kimble. Whilst on the run, Kimble attempts to identify who really killed his wife by intercepting the local hospital, eventually identifying Fredrick Sykes (Andrea Katsulas) and luring authorities to Sykes' home. Kimble deduced that Sykes had been hired by his colleague Charles Nichols (Jeroen Krabbé) to kill him, instead of his wife, in an attempt to prevent Kimble from exposing the issues of the drug he had been developing. On his way to the drug's launch conference, Kimble is confronted by Sykes, who shoots a transit cop before Kimble manages to handcuff Sykes to a train pole. At the conference, Kimble confronts Nichols about the death of his wife, leading

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<sup>6</sup> 'Batman Returns', *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0103776/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0103776/?ref=bo_se_r_1)> [accessed 17 November 2020].

<sup>7</sup> Tod McCarthy, 'Batman Returns', *Variety* (14 June 1992).

<sup>8</sup> 'The 65<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards', *Oscars.org* (29 March 1993) <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1993>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

to a fight between the two men. All the while, Gerard is getting closer to finding Kimble. As the fight continues, Kimble and Nichols fall through an elevator shaft to the laundry room, where Gerard is searching for Kimble, resulting in Kimble rescuing Gerard from an attack from Nichols. As Gerard has Nichols and Sykes arrested, he admits that he believes Kimble is innocent, and allows him to be freed.

At the domestic box office, *The Fugitive* made \$183,875,760 and grossed \$368,875,760 worldwide.<sup>9</sup> The film received mainly mixed reviews, with Owen Gleiberman claiming, 'it's a mainstream thriller made with conviction, intelligence, and heat' that is 'rare enough to look like artistry' and praising the performances of Ford and Lee Jones.<sup>10</sup> However, Marc Savlov states Lee Jones 'is the best thing about this all-too-often predictable chase film' that is simply not the worst and not the best film from the thriller-chase genre.<sup>11</sup> At the Academy Awards, *The Fugitive* was nominated for six awards, winning only one: Best Actor in a Supporting Role (Tommy Lee Jones).<sup>12</sup>

### ***Forrest Gump*, dir. by Robert Zemeckis (Wendy Finerman Productions, 1994)**

The comedy drama film *Forrest Gump* tells the story of Forrest Gump (Tom Hanks), who has an intellectual impairment that gives him a unique view of life, through a series of flashbacks as he tells his story to strangers at a bus stop. As a boy (then portrayed by Michael Connor Humphreys), Forrest was born with kyphosis so wear leg braces to straighten his back. After meeting his best friend, and future love interest Jenny (portrayed by Hannah R. Hall as a child and Robin Wright as an

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<sup>9</sup> 'The Fugitive', *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0106977/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0106977/?ref=bo_se_r_1)> [accessed 17 November 2020].

<sup>10</sup> Owen Gleiberman, 'The Fugitive', *Entertainment Weekly* (13 August 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Marc Savlov, 'The Fugitive', *Austin Chronicle* (6 August 1993).

<sup>12</sup> 'The 66<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards', *Oscars.org* (21 March 1994), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1994>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

adult), Forrest is bullied by the other children at the school. During one encounter, Jenny told Forrest to run from the bullies, leading to the reveal that he is actually a strong runner after his leg braces broke. Growing up, he earned a football scholarship at the University of Alabama, due to his running ability, and Forrest ends up playing a minor part in several historical events, including the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Along the way, Forrest reunites with Jenny several times, as well as Lieutenant Dan (Gary Sinise), who was injured during an ambush in Vietnam whom Forrest rescued alongside over soldiers. Forrest eventually ends up running a successful shrimping business with Dan, who slowly adjusts to his new disability. Forrest and Jenny reunite afterwards, spending the night together before Jenny leaves once more, resulting in Forrest beginning a three-year cross-country marathon. Back in the present day, it is revealed that Jenny had invited Forrest to meet him, and when they reunite, Forrest discovers he has a son and Jenny has an incurable disease. Forrest and Jenny get married, reuniting with Dan who now has artificial legs. Jenny dies a year later, leaving Forrest to care for their son.

At the domestic box office, *Forrest Gump* made \$330,455,270, eventually grossing \$678,226,805 worldwide.<sup>13</sup> The film received mainly positive reviews, with Roger Ebert praising Hanks performance as ‘a breathtaking balancing act between comedy and sadness’ and claiming the film ‘is more of a meditation of our times, as seen through the eyes of a man who lacks cynicism and takes things for exactly what they are.’<sup>14</sup> At the Academy Awards, the film received thirteen nominations, winning a total of six: Best Actor (Forrest Gump), Best Picture (Forrest Gump),

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Forrest Gump’, *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0109830/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0109830/?ref=bo_se_r_1)> [accessed 17 November 2020].

<sup>14</sup> Roger Ebert, ‘Forrest Gump’, *RogerEbert.com* (6 July 1994).

Directing (Robert Zemeckis), Film Editing (Arthur Schmidt), Visual Effects (Ken Ralston et al) and Writing Based on Material Previously Published (Eric Roth).<sup>15</sup>

***Batman Forever*, dir. by Joel Schumacher (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1995)**

*Batman Forever* is the third instalment of Tim Burton's Batman franchise, now directed by Joel Schumacher and starring Val Kilmer as Bruce Wayne/Batman. The film opens with Batman rescuing members of Gotham's population from Two-Face (Tommy Lee Jones), but Two-Face manages to escape. At work the next day, Bruce Wayne rejects researcher Edward Nygma's (Jim Carrey) idea to create a device that can beam television into the brains of Gotham's population, prompting Nygma to resign and attempt to get revenge against Bruce. He sends Bruce several threatening riddles in order to intimidate him, causing Bruce to seek the expertise of Dr Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman), and the two begin dating. Whilst Bruce takes Chase to the circus on a date, Two-Face attacks the circus tent with a bomb, causing the youngest acrobat, Dick Grayson (Chris O'Donnell), to throw the bomb in the river from the roof of the circus tent, unaware that Two-Face murdered the rest of his family. Bruce persuades Dick to stay at his mansion, where Dick discovers that Bruce is Batman and tries to join him in crime-fighting so he can kill Two-Face in revenge, but Bruce refuses. Meanwhile, Nygma adopts the identity of The Riddler and joins forces with Two-Face to take down Batman. They rob several stores and use the money to mass-produce 'the box', a device that beams television into the user's mind whilst secretly stealing information from the user's mind into The Riddler's mind. As Chase visits Bruce's mansion, The Riddler and Two-Face discover that Bruce is Batman and blow up the Batcave, kidnapping Chase. Bruce

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<sup>15</sup> 'The 67<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards – 1995', *Oscars.org* (27 March 1995), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1995>> [accessed 17 November 2020].

and Dick realise that Nygma is The Riddler and Dick becomes Batman's crimefighting sidekick Robin. Reaching The Riddler and Two-Face's lair, the two split up, leading to Robin confronting Two-Face before Two-Face ends up kidnapping Robin. Batman confronts The Riddler, where The Riddler gives Batman the ultimatum of rescuing Chase or Dick. Instead, Batman destroys The Riddler's brainwave receiver linked to 'the box', overwhelming The Riddler's mind and giving Batman enough time to rescue both of them. Two-Face corners the trio, but Batman tosses several coins at Two-Face, causing the villain to fall to his death. Nygma gets incarcerated to Arkham Asylum, leaving Chase to promise to keep Batman's secret and Bruce and Dick teaming up to fight crime as the superhero duo Batman and Robin.

At the domestic box office, *Batman Forever* made \$184,069,126, eventually grossing \$336,567,531 worldwide.<sup>16</sup> The film received mixed reviews, with Mick LaSalle praising Carrey's performance of The Riddler but criticises Tommy Lee Jones's effort in his performance of Two-Face, claiming that if 'they trimmed out Tommy Lee Jones and 15 minutes of superfluous special effects, this would be a great movie.'<sup>17</sup> At the Academy Awards, *Batman Forever* was nominated for three awards, Cinematography, Sound and Sound Effect Editing, but won nothing.<sup>18</sup>

***The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, dir. by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise (Walt Disney Pictures, 1996)**

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<sup>16</sup> 'Batman Forever', *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0112462/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0112462/?ref=bo_se_r_1)> [accessed 18 November 2020].

<sup>17</sup> Mick LaSalle, 'Film Review – 'Batman Forever' Goes On and On', *San Francisco Chronicle* (16 June 1995).

<sup>18</sup> 'The 68<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards-1996', *Oscars.org* (25 March 1996), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1996>> [accessed 18 November 2020].

The animated fantasy film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* tells the story of Quasimodo (Tom Hulce), known as the mythical Hunchback of Notre Dame. The film begins with gypsy puppeteer Clopin (Paul Kandel) telling the backstory of Quasimodo. One night, Quasimodo's Mother is seen sneaking into the city of Paris with other gypsies, but they are ambushed by Judge Claude Frollo (Tony Jay), Paris' Minister of Justice who wants to rid the world of gypsies. He peruses the Mother to Notre Dame, where he kills her on the steps and plans to kill her baby as he believed the baby's kyphosis meant he was a demon. However, he is stopped by the Archdeacon who accuses Frollo of murdering an innocent woman, forcing Frollo to take care of the baby to atone for his sin. Twenty years later, Quasimodo is seen living inside of Notre Dame, with the cathedral's gargoyles being his only companions, even if they don't actually talk to him. As the Festival of Fools is beginning, Quasimodo asks Frollo if he can attend the festivities, but Frollo refuses to let Quasimodo attend, claiming that society will treat him unfairly as a monster. Despite being told no, Quasimodo attends the festival, where he is crowned the King of Fools by the crowd. Yet, when it is revealed that he isn't wearing a mask, the crowd turn on Quasimodo, led by Frollo's guards, until gypsy Esmerelda (Demi Moore) intervenes. She pleads to Frollo to order Quasimodo's freedom, but when Frollo decides to teach him a lesson, Esmerelda frees Quasimodo herself, prompting Frollo to feel resentment towards Esmerelda. She escapes Frollo's guards by hiding in Notre Dame, but when she is confronted by Captain Phoebus (Kevin Kline) in front of Frollo, Phoebus claims Esmerelda is seeking asylum in order to protect her. She eventually finds Quasimodo's living quarters in the cathedral, and after a heart to heart, he helps her to escape. When Frollo discovers Esmerelda has escaped, he begins a citywide search for her, threatening gypsies and burning many homes on

his way. When Phoebus refuses to burn a house with a family inside, he is ordered to be executed by Frollo and is shot in the arm when he tries to escape. Esmerelda rescues Phoebus and takes him to Quasimodo, requesting Quasimodo looks after Phoebus until he recovers. Whilst hiding Phoebus, Quasimodo is informed by Frollo that he had found the gypsies hideout at the Court of Miracles and planned on attacking in the morning. Quasimodo and Phoebus team up to find the Court of Miracle, planning on warning the gypsies about Frollo's attack. However, Frollo followed Quasimodo, capturing the gypsies, Esmerelda and the two men. As Frollo begins to burn Esmerelda at the stake, Quasimodo escapes from where he was locked up and rescues Esmerelda, whilst Phoebus and the gypsies led a revolt against Frollo's guards. Frollo confronts Quasimodo and Esmerelda on the cathedral's balcony and, after trying to kill the two, Frollo ends up falling off the balcony to his death. Quasimodo accepts Esmerelda and Phoebus' love for each other, and the two encourage him to leave Notre Dame, where he is celebrated as a hero by Paris' citizens.

At the domestic box office, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* made \$21,037,414 on its opening weekend, eventually grossing \$100,138,851 domestically and \$325,338,851 worldwide.<sup>19</sup> The film received mainly positive reviews. Owen Gleiberman praised the Walt Disney Studio's adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831), particularly the animation style of Quasimodo - that helps to tell his story of somebody finding his place in society – and the seamless weaving of musical numbers in the film, claiming it is 'the best... of Disney's "serious" animated features in the multiplex era.'<sup>20</sup> At the Academy Awards, *The Hunchback of Notre*

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<sup>19</sup> 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame', *Box Office Mojo*, [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0116583/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0116583/?ref=bo_se_r_1) [accessed 19 November 2020].

<sup>20</sup> Owen Gleiberman, 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame', *Entertainment Weekly* (21 June 1996).



*Dame* was only nominated for one award, Best Original Music or Original Score (Alan Menken and Steven Schwartz), which it lost.<sup>21</sup>

***The People vs. Larry Flynt*, dir.by Milos Forman (Phoenix Pictures, 1996)**

The biopic *The People vs. Larry Flynt* chronicles the life story of Larry Flynt (Woody Harrelson), including: how he founded *Hustler* magazine; the various court cases he had regarding the sexual nature of the magazine; his romantic relationship with stripper Althea Leasure (Courtney Love) and the relationship he had with Ruth Carter Stapleton (Donna Hanover) that led to him adopting a Christian lifestyle. One day, when leaving a courthouse, Larry and his lawyer Alan Isaacman (Edward Norton) are shot, leaving Larry paralysed. Renouncing God, Larry and Althea move to Beverly Hills where he spirals into a depression and Althea becomes addicted to painkillers. After receiving surgery to deaden several nerves in his back, Larry feels rejuvenated, returning to an active role in the publication of *Hustler*, making its content more controversial. Later, Larry is in court again regarding the leaking of videos relating to John DeLorean's entrapment case. There, Larry fires Alan as his lawyer and attempts to spit water at the judge, leading to Larry getting incarcerated to a psychiatric ward. After being set free, Larry creates a satirical parody ad of established pastor Jerry Falwell, causing Falwell to sue *Hustler* magazine for defamation and inflicting emotional distress. Larry countersues Falwell for copyright infringement as Falwell copied the ad and used it to raise funds. Flynt is found guilty of inflicting emotional stress but innocent of the defamation charge. At the same time, Althea had contracted HIV, developing into AIDS. Larry later finds Althea dead in the bathtub, having drowned. Larry persuades Isaacman to appeal the result of

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<sup>21</sup> 'The 69<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards', *Oscars.org* (March 24, 1997), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1997>> [accessed 19 November 2020].

the Falwell case at the Supreme Court regarding the emotional distress judgement. Isaacman agrees and manages to overturn the original verdict, resulting in Flynt being cleared of his charges.

At the domestic box office, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* made \$523,295 on its opening weekend, eventually grossing \$20,300,385 in total.<sup>22</sup> The film received mainly positive reviews, with Janet Maslin praising Harrelson and Love's performances as Larry and Althea, claiming 'the film emerges as an object lesson in open-mindedness, winning a reluctant respect for its main character's right to crude self-expression just as Flynt has won his days in court.'<sup>23</sup> At the Academy Awards, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* was nominated for two awards, Best Actor (Woody Harrelson) and Best Director (Milos Forman), but lost them both.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Gattaca*, dir. by Andrew Niccol (Jersey Films, 1997)**

The science-fiction film *Gattaca* focuses on Vincent Freeman (Ethan Hawke) who was born via natural means, so is discriminated against by society as an 'invalid'. His younger brother Anton (Loren Dean) was genetically born, allowing society to treat him as a 'valid'. As an adult, Vincent worked cleaning offices at the Gattaca Aerospace Corporation, but wanted to have a career in a space travel, a job only 'valids' could have. He met Jerome Morrow (Jude Law), a 'valid' who became paralysed after a car accident, who provided Vincent with his DNA samples that could allow Vincent to pose as Jerome at Gattaca. Vincent ends up using the Jerome's genetic makeup to become a navigator for an upcoming trip to Saturn's

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<sup>22</sup> 'The People vs. Larry Flynt', *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0117318/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0117318/?ref=bo_se_r_1)> [accessed 19 November 2020].

<sup>23</sup> Janet Maslin, 'The People vs. Larry Flynt', *The New York Times* (27 December 1996).

<sup>24</sup> 'The 69<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards', *Oscars.org* (March 24, 1997), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1997>> [accessed 19 November 2020].

moon Titan. A week before the launch, an administrator is found murdered, and the police find one of Jerome's eyelashes at the crime scene, believing an 'invalid' to be top suspect. As the investigation continues, Vincent grows closer to co-worker Irene Cassini (Uma Thurman) who had been helping the police's investigation, and the two being to fall in love. Vincent escapes the police's capture several times, including one scene where Jerome has to pose as an able-bodied version of himself to the police to prevent them finding out the duo's secret. It is eventually revealed that Gattaca's mission director killed the administrator, and that Anton was the detective who closed the case. Anton confronts Vincent, warning him that what he is doing is illegal, and Vincent challenges Anton to a game of 'chicken'. Anton begins to drown during the game until Vincent saves him, with Anton agreeing to keep Vincent's secret. On the day of the launch, Jerome provides Vincent with enough DNA samples to last two lifetimes. After saying goodbye to Irene, Vincent realises that there is one more genetic test and he has none of Jerome's samples. However, doctor in charge of the tests reveals he always knew Vincent was an 'invalid' and changes the result, claiming Vincent was being an inspiration for his family. As Vincent begins his journey to Titan, it is revealed that Jerome had incinerated himself at home.

At the domestic box office, *Gattaca* made \$4,320,202 on its opening weekend, eventually grossing \$12,532,777 in total.<sup>25</sup> The film received positive reviews, with Roger Ebert praising Hawke and Law's performances as Vincent and Jerome, whilst also stating that the film was 'one of the smartest and most provocative of science

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<sup>25</sup> 'Gattaca', *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0119177/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0119177/?ref=bo_se_r_1)> [accessed 19 November 2020].

fiction films, a thriller with ideas.<sup>26</sup> At the Academy Awards, *Gattaca* received one nomination, for Art Direction (Jan Roelfs and Nancy Nye), but it did not win.<sup>27</sup>

### ***The Horse Whisperer*, dir.by Robert Redford (Touchstone Pictures, 1998)**

The drama film *The Horse Whisperer*, begins showing Grace McLean (Scarlett Johansson) riding her horse Pilgrim with her friend Judith (Kate Bosworth) on her horse Gulliver. As the road was icy, Gulliver slipped, and the two girls were involved in an accident with a truck, killing Judith and Gulliver and leaving Grace and Pilgrim severely injured. One of Grace's legs gets amputated and it is suggested to Grace's Mother Annie (Kristin Scott Thomas) that Pilgrim should be put down. Instead, after witnessing Grace's downbeat nature, Annie suggests to her husband Robert (Sam Neill) that they should locate Tom "The Horse Whisperer" Booker (Robert Redford), believing Pilgrim's rehabilitation could help Grace's recovery process. Annie and Grace track down Tom, and he reluctantly agrees to help if Grace also helps. Moving into the Booker ranch with Tom's brother's family, Annie and Tom begin to develop affection for each other, but refuse to act on the feelings because of Annie's marriage. Tom also forms a bond with Grace, getting her to talk to him about the accident. One day, Robert arrives, preventing Annie from acting on her feelings for Tom. As Pilgrim's rehabilitation process is completed, Grace is able to successfully ride him again. Grace and Robert leave, and, after Annie admits to Tom that she belongs in the city, Annie also departs the ranch.

At the domestic box office, *The Horse Whisperer* made \$13,685,488 on its opening weekend and grossed \$75,383,563 in total, eventually grossing

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<sup>26</sup> Roger Ebert, 'Gattaca', *RogerEbert.com* (24 October 1997).

<sup>27</sup> 'The 70<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards – 1998', *Oscars.org* (23 March 1998)

<<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1998>> [accessed 19 November 2020].

\$186,883,563 worldwide.<sup>28</sup> The film received mixed reviews, with Angie Errigo praises the film as being ‘visually stunning’ but there was ‘too little story to justify its length’.<sup>29</sup> At the Academy Awards, *The Horse Whisperer* was nominated for one film, Best Original Song (A Soft Place To Fall), but it did not win.<sup>30</sup>

***The Bone Collector*, dir. by Phillip Noyce (Universal Pictures and Columbia Pictures, 1999)**

The crime thriller *The Bone Collector*, focuses on Detective Lincoln Rhyme (Denzel Washington) who became paralysed when debris fell on him on a previous investigation. Years later, Lincoln is living with his nurse Thelma (Queen Latifah) and is planning on euthanising himself due to the seizures he had been experiencing. Meanwhile, a taxi driver picks up a couple from the airport but ends up kidnapping them. The next day, patrol officer Amelia Donaghy (Angelina Jolie) discovers the dead body of the man kidnapped the night before and stops a train from disrupting the murder scene. The evidence Amelia collected is shown to Lincoln, who is persuaded to work on the case, only agreeing if Amelia takes on a forensic role in the case to act as his eyes and legs. The two discover that the crime scene had been set up to provide a clue to the missing woman’s location, but Amelia arrives too late to rescue the woman. Whilst Amelia and Lincoln work together to solve clues to various murder scenes, only to discover they are too late, police Captain Howard Cheney (Michael Rooker) hates Lincoln’s involvement in the case and attempts to get Rhyme to quit. Amelia and Lincoln eventually realise that the various pieces of paper left by the killer at the crime scenes formed a page of the book ‘The Bone

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<sup>28</sup> ‘The Horse Whisperer’, *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0119314/?ref=bo\\_se\\_r\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0119314/?ref=bo_se_r_1)> [accessed 20 November 2020].

<sup>29</sup> Angie Errigo, ‘The Horse Whisperer Review’, *Empire* (1 January 2000).

<sup>30</sup> ‘The 71<sup>st</sup> Academy Awards - 1999’, *Oscars.org* (21 March 1999), <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1999>> [accessed 20 November 2020]

Collector' and the killer was recreating the murders in the novel. This allows Amelia and the police to have enough time to rescue a little girl who had been kidnapped by the killer with her grandfather, but they are too late to rescue the grandfather. At the crime scene, Amelia pieces together evidence to find an abandoned subway station, where it is revealed, by the use of Lincoln's police number, that Lincoln is the next victim. At Lincoln's apartment, the mysterious killer murders Cheyney and Thelma, before trying to kill Lincoln. Lincoln realises that the murderer had been posing as the medical technician, Richard Thompson, in charge of his medical equipment, but was really called Marcus Andrews. On a previous case, Lincoln had accused Marcus of planting fake evidence on a crime scene to frame innocents, leading to his own incarceration where he plotted his revenge against Lincoln. Lincoln manages to defend himself until Amelia arrives and shoots Marcus dead. An unspecified time later, Amelia and Lincoln are now dating, and host a Christmas party.

At the domestic box office, *The Bone Collector* made \$16,712,020 on its opening weekend and grossed \$66,518,655 in total, eventually grossing \$151,493,655 worldwide.<sup>31</sup> The film received mixed reviews, with Roger Ebert praising the performances of the actors in the film but criticises the plot, claiming 'the movie is a peculiar experience to sit through, because the quality of the acting is so much better than the material deserves.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 'The Bone Collector', *Box Office Mojo*, <[https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0145681/?ref=bo\\_ser\\_1](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0145681/?ref=bo_ser_1)> [accessed 20 November 2020].

<sup>32</sup> Roger Ebert, "The Bone Collector", *RogerEbert.com* (5 November 1999).

**Appendix 2A – Disability Film Database: Quantitative Data**

Character	Actor	Film	Screen Time as Disabled	Genre	Disability	
					Type	Cause
Gabriela Brimmer	Rachel Levin	<i>Gaby: A True Story</i> (1987)	-	Biographical Drama	Cerebral Palsy	Birth Defect
Ronny Cammareri	Nicolas Cage	<i>Moonstruck</i> (1987)	18:01	Romantic Comedy	Missing Hand	Accident (Blames his brother for distracting him and having his hand sliced off at work. His fiancé left him after the accident.)
Eric Cruise	Jade Caegory	<i>Mac and Me</i> (1988)	-	Comedy Sci-fi	Paralysis	Unspecified
Christy Brown	Daniel-Day Lewis	<i>My Left Foot</i> (1989)	42:04	Biographical Comedy-Drama	Cerebral Palsy	Birth Defect
The Joker	Jack Nicholson	<i>Batman</i> (1989)	22:10	Superhero	Disfigurement	Caused by Another Person (Batman dropped him into acid after trying to stop his sabotage, after Jack was set up by his employer)
Eric Sloane	Dennis Alexio	<i>Kickboxer</i> (1989)	4:23	Martial Arts	Paralysis	Caused by Another Person (Elbowed in the back in a kickboxing fight; main cause for brother Kurt's revenge narrative in the film)

Ron Kovic	Tom Cruise	<i>Born on the Fourth of July</i> (1989)	47:54	Biographical War Drama	Paralysis	Caused by Another Person (Shot during the Vietnam War)
Captain James Hook	Dustin Hoffman	<i>Hook</i> (1991)	21:58	Fantasy-Adventure	Missing Hand	Chopped off by Peter Pan & fed to a crocodile - Off Screen)
Crutchie	Marty Belafsky	<i>Newsies</i> (1992)	-	Musical-Comedy-Drama	Unspecified leg impairment	Unspecified (Known as Crutchie because he uses a crutch to get around and sell newspapers)
Joel Garcia	Eric Stoltz	<i>The Waterdance</i> (1992)	-	Drama	Paralysis	Hiking Accident
The Penguin	Danny DeVito	<i>Batman Returns</i> (1992)	29:33	Superhero	Disfigurement	Birth Defect (Abandoned by parents)
May-Alice Culhane	Mary McDonnell	<i>Passion Fish</i> (1992)	-	Drama	Paralysis	Car Accident
Fredrick Sykes	Andreas Katsulas	<i>The Fugitive</i> (1993)	3:52	Action Thriller	Missing Arm	Unspecified ("In the line of duty.")
Young Forrest Gump	Michael Conner Humphries	<i>Forrest Gump</i> (1994)	6:20	Comedy-Drama	Kyphosis (Curved Spine)	Birth Defect
Lieutenant Dan Taylor	Gary Sinise		12:31		Missing Legs	Caused by Another Person (Blown off during Vietnam War, wanted to be left for dead)
Two-Face	Tommy Lee Jones	<i>Batman Forever</i> (1995)	10:04	Superhero	Disfigurement	Unspecified (Original Narrative: Harvey Dent left scarred by a criminal and



						became a villain)
Long John Silver	Tim Curry	<i>Muppet Treasure Island</i> (1996)	15:21	Musical-Adventure Comedy	Missing Leg	Unspecified ("Lost that timber fighting brigands off Madagascar under Admiral Hawke)
Jan Nyman	Stellan Skarsgard	<i>Breaking The Waves</i> (1996)	-	Drama	Paralysis	Industrial Accident
Larry Flynt	Woody Harrelson	<i>The People vs. Larry Flynt</i> (1996)	21:24	Drama	Paralysis	Caused by Another Person (Shot outside of the courthouse by unnamed assassin)
Bern Lumley	Gregory Hines	<i>Good Luck</i> (1996)	-	Drama	Paralysis	Car Accident
Quasimodo	Tom Hulce	<i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i> (1996)	33:53	Musical Drama	Kyphosis (Curved Spine)	Birth Defect
Jerome Morrow	Jude Law	<i>Gattaca</i> (1997)	15:27	Sci-fi Thriller	Paralysis	Caused by Self (Stepped in front of a car)
Grace MacLean	Scarlett Johansson	<i>The Horse Whisperer</i> (1998)	25:26	Drama	Missing Leg	Horse Riding Accident
Kevin "Freak" Dillon	Kieran Culkin	<i>The Mighty</i> (1999)	-	Comedy-Drama	Morquio Syndrome	Birth Defect
Lincoln Rhyme	Denzel Washington	<i>The Bone Collector</i> (1999)	23:03	Crime-Thriller	Paralysis	Accident (Debris fell on him at work)

**Appendix 2B - Disability Film Database: Terminology**

<b>Character</b>	<b>Crippled</b>	<b>Freak</b>	<b>Monster</b>	<b>Other Terminology</b>	<b>Direct Reference to Impairment</b>
Ronny Cammareri	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1 Maimed</b> - 'And it's funny 'cause when my fiancée found out about it, when she found out I'd been maimed, she left me for another man.'	<b>8</b> ; details regarding how he lost his hand and thus lost his fiancée
Christy Brown	<b>4</b> ; Common terminology for film's setting	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b> ; More about speech, communication and who can understand him.
The Joker	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b> ; mainly puns and references to the Joker's smile.
Eric Sloane	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b> ; mainly when discussing why Kurt wants revenge against Tong Po.
Ron Kovic	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>26</b> ; Several references to Ron being paralysed; cynical that his body is not "whole" and his reliance on a wheelchair.
Captain James Hook	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b> ; The Hook is worshipped by the other pirates; revenge

					against Peter Pan for taking off his hand
The Penguin	0	1; Penguin is proud to be a 'genuine freak', something Batman should be jealous of.	1; Monster like Max Shreck but not respected, myth of the Penguin man living in the sewers.	0	8; Several references to being an animal and having 'flippers', when talking about parents described as 'different' and 'unusual'.
Fredrick Sykes	0	0	0	0	13; Referred to as "one-armed man/guy"
Young Forrest Gump	1; "Doctor: His back's as crippled as a politician, but we're going straighten 'im right up"	0	0	0	4; mainly curiosity about leg braces and the reason that Forrest had them.
Lieutenant Dan Taylor	4; "Dan: I'm nothing but a God damn cripple!"; negative	1; "Dan: A legless freak."; negative	0	0	5; cynical attitude towards disability, believed his fate was to die.
Two-Face	0	0	1; Batman compares him to the 'monster' that killed his parents.	0	3; The Riddler nicknames him 'segregated one' and 'bodificated one'
Long John Silver	0	0	0	0	7; Warnings of the "one-legged man"; low-angled shot of Jim & Gonzo first seeing Silver's leg - Shock and immediate suspicion.

Larry Flynt	0	0	0	0	9; mainly in hospital; bitterness that Alan can walk when they were both involved in the same attack.
Quasimodo	0	0	5; Frolo telling Quasimodo that he will be treated as a monster by the public and Quasimodo's acceptance that he is a monster.	3 Creature - "Frolo: foul creature" - negative; "Esmerelda: poor creature" – pity 1 Deformed - "Frolo: You are deformed, and you are ugly, and these are crimes for which the world shows very little pity."	4; "Clopin: We asked for the ugliest face in Paris and here he is, Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre Dame"; main focus on his "ugly" face; negative
Jerome Morrow	1; Common terminology; "Detective: It doesn't say your crippled. Jerome: I'm not crippled. I hurt my leg training, you moron. How dare you question me."	0	0	0	3; discussions of discrimination; "Vincent: the burden of perfection"
Grace MacLean	0	0	0	0	11; references to Grace's leg, Grace is cynical about what she can and cannot do

					and questioning if anybody will love her for her disability.
Lincoln Rhyme	<b>2</b> ; Negative connotations; <b>"Howard Cheney:</b> What you are is a fucking, meddling cripple!"	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b> ; negative attitude towards disability and current condition; fear of a "vegetative state"

**Appendix 2C - Disability Film Database: Themes**

<b>Character</b>	<b>Villain/Hero</b>	<b>Comedy</b>	<b>Suicide/Euthanasia</b>	<b>Fate</b>	<b>Reliance on Others</b>
Ronny Cammareri	Love interest in the film.	N/A	Threatened to kill himself in order to ruin Loretta and Johnny's wedding day but does not go through with it.	Gets married to Loretta, lack of mentioning of Ronny's hand after he and Loretta begin their affair.	Is self-reliant and able to keep a job at the bakery that he owns as the baker.
Christy Brown	Main hero in the film.	N/A	Tries to commit suicide but fails.	Learns to use his left foot to write and draw and learns to speak; Father becomes proud of Christy. He later writes an autobiography with the help of his brother.	Mother's care, saving up money for a wheelchair, brother's including him in football games.
The Joker	Main villain of the film. Slow reveal of his deformation; Surgeon shocked;	Speaks in puns regarding smiling and happiness; dances and makes a	Jokes to scare Vicki; <b>"Joker:</b> You know, without you, I'd just wouldn't want to be alone"	Falls from a helicopter after Batman tied a gargoyle to his legs when he was escaping.	Is self-reliant and sees his deformity as an improvement.

	mainly his hands shown first	spectacle when committing his acts of villainy.			
Eric Sloane	Main motivation for main character.	N/A	N/A	Still able to fight with his hands; Kurt defeats Tong Po as revenge for what he did to Eric	Uses a wheelchair; rehabilitation process not shown in film.
Ron Kovic	N/A	N/A	Whilst drunk, Ron denounces God in front of his Christian Mother and he claims, "I wish I was dead like him [Jesus]."	After coming to terms with his actions in Vietnam, Ron joins the Vietnam Veterans Against the War organisation and later writes an autobiography.	Uses a wheelchair; Father adapted family home to aid Ron's rehabilitation process.
Captain James Hook	Main villain of film; Hook scratching in house after kidnapping children, Hook as a prosthetic, revenge.	Sarcasm; " <b>Smee:</b> Let's give him a very big hand, cos he's only got one!"; " <b>Peter:</b> Can someone give me a hand? <b>Hook:</b> I already have."	Joke about committing suicide but being talked out of it by Smee.	Disappears after crocodile falls on top of him.	Smee as a right-hand man, acting as Hook's carer.
The Penguin	Main villain of the film. Treated as a monster by parents who kept him in a cage and	N/A	His parents try to kill him as a baby by throwing him in a locked baby carriage into a river, but they fail.	Thwarted by Batman, died after choking on his own 'black' blood, surrounded by his penguin family.	Raised by penguins and in a freak show, reliant on other circus acts and Max Shreck to fulfil his evil plans.

	locked carriage, wants revenge for being abandoned as a baby by trying to kidnap Gotham's first-born sons.				
Fredrick Sykes	Accomplice to main villain; often shown in flashbacks murdering Kimble's wife and alter attacks Kimble himself; assassin for hire?	N/A	N/A	Gets arrested for his crimes.	Self-reliant
Young Forrest Gump	Main hero in the film.	Leg braces described as "Magic Shoes" by Forrest.	N/A	"Run Forrest, run"; cured after running and life gets better for him (Football Scholarship).	Mrs. Gump determined for Forrest to be treated normally despite the leg braces.
Lieutenant Dan Taylor	Becomes Forrest's best friend in the film after the Vietnam War.	Cynical and sarcasm; Forrest's innocent remarks; <b>"Dan:</b> Well, I thought I'd try out my sea legs. <b>Forrest:</b> But you ain't got no legs Lieutenant Dan"	<b>"Dan:</b> We all have a destiny, nothing just happens, it's all part of a plan. I should have died out there and with my men but now, I'm nothing but a God damn cripple!"	Makes peace with God after working on the shrimp boat, gets prosthetic limbs and a new girlfriend from Vietnam; "magic legs"	Friendship between Lt. Dan and Forrest; <b>"Forrest:</b> He didn't want to be crippled, just like I didn't want to be called stupid."

Two-Face	Co-villain in the film, often showed "good" side of face first before "bad" scarred face is shown; physical villain for Batman compared to intellectual villain of The Riddler.	N/A	N/A	Batman makes him fall to his death so Robin wouldn't get revenge on Two-Face for killing Robin's family.	Self-reliant
Long John Silver	Main villain of the film; warnings of the "one-legged man"	Comedy in the film avoids mentioning Long John Silver's leg.	N/A	Escapes on a faulty lifeboat after Jim doesn't blow the whistle on him; not quite a happy ending.	Self-reliant
Larry Flynt	Main character in the film, not described as a hero by director.	N/A	After waking up in hospital, Larry denounces God and claims that he wished that he had died.	Epilogue: "Larry Flynt lives in Los Angeles and publishes 29 magazines. He is still confined to a wheelchair. His assailant was never brought to justice."	Often seen helped up and down stairs in his wheelchair, self-reliant in his bedroom with a hanging bar over bed to help him get into wheelchair.
Quasimodo	Described as a monster but main hero of the film; " <b>Clopin:</b> Who is the monster and who is the man?"	"A Guy Like You" song by the Gargoyles is comedic about Quasimodo's features.	Frollo attempts to kill baby Quasimodo but is convinced to become his carer.	Accepted by society after rescuing Esmerelda and defeating Frollo.	Frollo as his guardian; breaking free from Frollo = rehabilitation



Jerome Morrow	Major supporting character in the film.	Sarcasm; <b>"Vincent:</b> How the hell did you get up here? <b>Jerome:</b> Oh, I could always walk, I've been faking it."	After Vincent goes to Space, Jerome incinerates himself as he is no longer 'needed'; provides enough samples for Vincent to live as Jerome.		<b>"Vincent:</b> While Eugene supplied me with a new identity, I paid the rent and kept him in the style to which he had become accustomed."
Grace MacLean	Grace is shocked by the reveal of Pilgrim's face scars, similar to 'hero' reaction to a 'villain' disability.	N/A	After suggesting that Pilgrim should be put down to end his suffering, Grace asks is she should be put down.	Is rehabilitated/cured after time on the ranch and can ride Pilgrim again, with a different approach to getting on horse due to her leg.	Father overprotective, Mother tries to get Grace to live life 'normally'; mother-daughter conflict over the pressure of Grace being 'perfect'; Tom helps with grace's rehabilitation process.
Lincoln Rhyme	Main hero in the film who defeats the main villain, who is doctor.	Sarcasm; <b>"Lincoln:</b> Tell them I'm out running"; "I bet my legs on it."; "C'mon, my ass has been in a sling for four years."	Wants to commit suicide before his body goes into a "vegetative" state; several scenes of Lincoln having a seizure	Defeats villain, gets a wheelchair and is married to Amelia; sitting up instead of lying down but no medical explanation for change in condition.	Reliant on nurse Thelma for basic needs; uses Amelia as his legs in the field whilst he communicates to her from home via radio.