

# Disability as Narrative Prosthesis in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*

Farshid Nowrouzi Roshnavand (Corresponding Author)<sup>1</sup>

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty  
of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, University of Mazandaran, Iran.

Sara Saei Dibavar<sup>2</sup>

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty  
of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, University of Mazandaran, Iran.

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.34785/J014.2023.001>

Article Type: Original Article

Page Numbers: 1-13

Received: 19 December 2021

Accepted: 4 January 2023

## Abstract

Disability was a ubiquitous image in the fiction of the nineteenth century, an age which witnessed controversial discussions regarding the questions of normalcy and deviance. Considered by many as the most famous writer of the period, Charles Dickens also widely employed disabled characters in his novels. One of the most memorable of these characters is Tiny Tim, a disabled child in Dickens's novella *A Christmas Carol*, whose pathetic condition greatly moves Scrooge, the narrative's notorious protagonist, facilitating and expediting his spiritual transformation. This paper aims to analyze the character of Tiny Tim and his influence on the main character in the light of the theory of narrative prosthesis. Introduced by disability critics David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, the theory holds that disabled characters have served as prosthetic devices in many narratives; that is, they have not been appreciated, described, and understood for who they are as physically / mentally different people. Rather, they have only functioned as metaphors and symbols that have been constructed to convey a moral message to "normal" characters and readers. Research findings show that Tiny Tim exemplifies narrative prosthesis as his short presence in the work only reinforces the ableist discourse of the novella.

## Keywords

Disability; Narrative Prosthesis; Charles Dickens; *A Christmas Carol*; Tiny Tim.

## 1. Introduction

Disability, in its different forms and kinds, has served as the staple of many literary works over the course of history. According to critics, however, such representations of disability are largely unrealistic and stereotypical in the sense that they cater to the prevalent clichés that have been constructed in different discourses about people with physical and cognitive differences. Disability scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L.

<sup>1</sup> [f.nowrouzi@umz.ac.ir](mailto:f.nowrouzi@umz.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup> [s.saei@umz.ac.ir](mailto:s.saei@umz.ac.ir)

Snyder famously address the stereotypical employment of disabled characters in literature, emphasizing that these “abnormal” *others* serve as a kind of “prosthesis” for texts in ableist atmospheres. That is, they turn into narrative tools that help extend the plot, which is primarily concerned with the destinies of non-disabled characters. Moreover, disability is at times used to impart moral lessons to both “normal” characters and readers. What disability scholars find fault with is that the stereotypical representation of disabled characters fails to depict them as human agents with real human experiences and thus, these characters cannot be known, understood, and admired for who they are (Mitchell and Snyder 17). Otherwise stated, the construction of disability is more about the observer than the subject being observed. In line with their argument, we try to apply Mitchell and Snyder’s theory of “narrative prosthesis” to Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, first published in 1843, to shed light on the prosthetic role of Tiny Tim, a disabled child, in the novella.

## **2. Literature Review**

As a renowned and permanent fixture in the canon of British literature, *A Christmas Carol* has been analyzed from different perspectives. Regarding the work as a morality tale, Martin H. Sable (1986) attempts to decipher the moral plotline of the story in the light of the principles of Judaism about repentance and charity. Similarly, Terry W. Thomson (2017) compares Dickens’s protagonist Scrooge to King Belshazzar, the ruler of Babylon mentioned in the Old Testament, noting that while the king failed to heed and decode God’s warning offered to him in Aramaic and eventually, paid with his death, Scrooge finds salvation and is reformed via the power of love, altruism, and human kindness. Likewise, Joseph (Jody) H. Clarke (2009) discusses the roots of the protagonist’s moral conversion, stressing that it goes beyond the psychological healing of neurosis and becomes a metapsychological phenomenon which drastically alters the character’s orientation towards life and the whole world. Moreover, Jolene Zigarovich (2016) points to Dickens’s frequently employed rhetorical strategy of narrating proleptic deaths in many of his works; touching upon Scrooge’s spiritual transformation, the critic specifically analyzes proleptic deaths in *A Christmas Carol*, stating that the protagonist’s numerous encounters with the imminent deceases of the people around him and also with his own death, play a consequential role in changing his worldview.

Primarily concerned with the economic structure of the Victorian society, Andrew Smith (2005) elaborates on the interrelationship among market, ownership, labor, sociopolitical power, and morality. He further adds that the appearance of visible ghosts in the story gives rise to a new economic unconscious which brings to the fore the marginalized figures of the society and finally makes them visible, too. Disability critics have also addressed the novella in various research projects, some of which have been

discussed and cited throughout the present study. It goes without saying that disability studies on *A Christmas Carol* center around the character of Tiny Tim and his role in the narrative. Russel W. Chesney (2012), for instance, calls Tiny Tim Dickens's most famous medically based character and sets out to determine the causes of his mobility impairment, citing tuberculosis, polio, and renal tubular acidosis as probable reasons. Furthermore, he tries to depict how social factors like poverty and malnutrition may have exacerbated Tim's fragile health. The list of disability analyses of *A Christmas Carol* is not limited to the above-mentioned as the work is one of most canonical works of the discipline; however, none of them have interpreted the novella in the light of the theory of narrative prosthesis, an advantage which makes the present study original and different from previous research projects.

### **3. Methodology: Narrative Prosthesis and the Instrumentality of the Disabled Character**

One of the most recent trends in literary theory, disability studies has been gaining increasing popularity over the past three decades. Basically addressing the representations of disabled characters in literary works, disability studies aims to analyze the ways ableism has effectively reproduced its hegemonic discursive practices through such mediums as literature and art.

Although the terms "impairment" and "disability" are often used interchangeably, it is of great importance to note that many disability scholars differentiate between the two. Impairment is defined as the state of lacking an organ or having a defective one; it results in physical or cognitive differences. However, disability is the process of imposing systematic discriminations against impaired people. When a person becomes disabled, he / she is barred from participating in sociopolitical activities as a "normal" person would. Simply put, (deliberate) lack of facilities pushes him / her into the sphere of disability. For example, a person who has a mobility impairment and uses a wheelchair will experience disability when he / she would not be able to enter a building due to the lack of ramps; or a deaf person would experience disability when he / she is in the company of people who do not understand and use sign language (Hall 21).

According to disability critics, literature has also functioned as one of the disabling instruments employed by the ableist discourse in order to propagate negative stereotypes and justify the prevalent discriminations against physically and cognitively different people. At times, disabled characters are represented as innocent creatures who are pitifully doomed to eternal suffering and are, thus, in dire need of the sympathetic help of "normal" people (Shakespeare 77). The pathetic, disabled child in Elizabeth Gaskell's short story "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras" (1847) belongs to this category.

In addition, disabled people are sometimes portrayed as “supercrips,” that is, abnormal overreachers whose physical or cognitive limitations are compensated for by an extraordinary gift or talent that is not available to non-disabled people (Hall 36). The blind oracles in Greek mythology who are exceptionally able to prophesize future events belong to this second representational strategy. Moreover, the disabled are even depicted as villains and agents of evil as their physical deformities are taken to embody their immorality, wickedness, and degeneracy (Mitchell & Snyder 17). William Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1597) is a remarkable case in point. As the evil disabled character, he serves as a kind of moral warning, a menacing phenomenon to be shunned, rejected, and annihilated.

What is common among all these stereotypes is that they are not true to life; that is, they do not provide a realistic picture of the lives disabled people are forced to live. At the end of the day, such fictional portrayals serve the needs, desires, and fantasies of the ableist society. They depict disabled characters as radically different and deviant from the norms and conventions of the mainstream society, a strategy that is typically used by totalitarian power structures to control and oppress any kind of racial, gender, and sexual alterity. Through exaggerating their physical and cognitive differences, the ableist society manages to push disabled figures to the margins where they are constantly under a surveying gaze with either pathetic attitudes or punitive measures.

Mitchell and Snyder are two of the most renowned disability scholars whose book *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, first published in 2000, has turned into one of the most canonical sources of the discipline. Noting the instrumental representations of disabled people throughout history, they coined the phrase “narrative prosthesis” to refer to the roles “abnormal” characters have conventionally been given in literature and art. According to these critics, disabled characters are ubiquitous in fiction; however, they seldom play a central role in it. Even if they do, the role totally abides by demeaning ableist stereotypes. Mitchell and Snyder postulate that disability and the disabled figure have served “as a character-making trope in the writer's and filmmaker's arsenal, as a social category of deviance, as a symbolic vehicle for meaning-making and cultural critique” (1). As a result, despite “rely[ing] upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure,” such stories “rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions” (48). Disabled figures have, then, merely served as symbols and metaphors that more frequently than not fail to provide much information about the lived experiences of disabled people, but just point to something else about the normative, normalizing society.

In other words, narrative prosthesis is “meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (49). Functioning as a crutch (that is, a prosthesis), disabled characters propel the plot of the narrative forward; they are required as long as they carry out this task and are, thus, wiped out the moment they have completed their metaphoric role.

Mitchell and Snyder further maintain that disabled characters are never treated as human beings, but as objects whose only defining characteristic is their disability; they are employed as prosthetic devices just to convey a message about / to non-disabled characters. In many instances, they are just peripheral characters against whom the protagonist can fashion his / her identity; in other words, they provide a moral lesson for both the protagonist and the readership and thus catalyze the process of ethical reform for the non-disabled (33). On this basis, Mitchell and Snyder are right in proposing that “literature serves up disability as a repressed deviation from cultural imperatives of normativity, while disabled populations suffer the consequences of representational association with deviance and recalcitrant corporeal difference” (8).

It is worth bearing in mind that prosthesis is defined in Dorland’s Medical Dictionary as “an artificial substitute for a missing body part, such as an upper limb, lower limb, eye, or tooth, used for functional or cosmetic reasons” (1530). In the context of disability, it can be argued that an impaired person may use prosthesis in order to restore normalcy to his / her deviant body and thereby, circumvent the stigma which the ableist society inflicts upon his / her physical differences (Hall 63). However, Mitchell and Snyder propose that it is not the disabled character / person who uses the prosthesis to look normal; it is the ableist society that, in its attempt to perpetuate its central position and disabling norms, (mis)uses the disabled character as a prosthesis. As the two critics state, in literary works throughout history, “physical and cognitive differences have been narrated as alien to the normal course of human affairs” (Mitchell and Snyder 5); consequently, to represent disability in a prosthetic manner is “to engage oneself in an encounter with that which is believed to be off the map of ‘recognizable’ human experiences” (Mitchell and Snyder 5). In an ableist atmosphere, this *other*, unrecognizable as it is, must be brought under control. This is when prosthetic stereotypes are introduced to aid and abet the prevalent normalizing discourses. To further clarify this point, we intend to study the role of Tiny Tim, a minor character, in Dickens’s highly anthologized novella *A Christmas Carol* as a perfect example of the use of narrative prosthesis as a medium of ableist discourses.

#### **4. Discussion: Tiny Tim as a Narrative Prosthesis in *A Christmas Carol***

From the late eighteenth century onwards, there has been an increasing obsession in the West with questions of normalcy and deviance, especially in terms of psychical and chromatic characteristics. Thus, it is no surprise that such words as “norm,” “normality,” and “normalcy” all entered the English language over the span of twenty years from 1840 to 1860 (Davis 3). Many reasons can be cited for this unparalleled preoccupation: the West’s confrontation with non-white, non-Christian people gained momentum as a result of the expansionist agenda of the juggernaut of colonization; industrialization demanded

more and more workforce, many of whom were left disabled and deformed because of dreadful working conditions in factories; the burgeoning capitalist ethos triggered individualization to an unprecedented degree, with Samuel Smiles famously publishing his best-seller *Self-Help* in 1859, a book which hailed autonomy and independence as cherished Victorian ideals. The amalgamation of all these factors, that is, imperialism, capitalism, and the overemphasis upon individual independence, worked its way through the controversial discussions of the body in the nineteenth century (Lacom 547).

Concerns with bodily normativity can be traced back to the classical antiquity. Aristotle believed that there is a direct correspondence between the deformity of the body and the depravity of the soul (Wilson 74). Greek historian Plutarch recounted that all the new-born infants in Sparta had to go through a selection procedure in which the deformed ones were separated from others and sent to a special site on Mount Taygetos to die a silent death (Laes 25). Roman satirist Juvenal famously wrote about the relationship between body and mind (“mens sana in corpore sano”: a sound mind in a sound body), a quotation which over time turned into a widely employed proverb in different cultures (Bond and Gellar-Goad 229). Interestingly, the same standpoint could also be detected in the Victorian age when Britain’s fear of and obsession with its racialized *other* was translated into the realm of the body. When Charles Kingsley introduced the term “muscular Christianity” in 1857, he was obviously referring to something more than physical strength; the power of the body was viewed to be a true indicator of the eminence of the Christian soul, a power that is indubitably inaccessible to the “lesser” forms of being (Lacom 547).

In the nineteenth century, disability evolved into a stigma which marked a person as different and separated him / her from normalcy. As a result, “freak shows” became so popular at that time. They were exhibitions in which the so-called wonders of nature, that is, the different *others* such as blacks and disabled people, were put to public display. This disparaging stance can also be attributed to the rising medical and clinical discourses of the day in which science emerged as the prime index of valuation and categorization (Rodas 55-56). Notoriously, the popular Darwinism of the nineteenth century further inferiorized – in the name of science – disabled people as “evolutionary defectives” which would sooner or later be exterminated in the process of natural selection (Davis 7).

Considering the burgeoning fascination with the deformed *other(s)*, it comes as no surprise that disability becomes ubiquitous in the Victorian fiction. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), Wilkie Collins’s *Hide and Seek* (1854), George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and Johanna Spyri’s *Heidi* (1880) are just a few examples of the nineteenth century works which center on disability. Most notably, disabled characters are frequently employed in Dickens, considered by many as the

spokesperson of the Victorian era. Disabled children like Tiny Tim, Paul Dombey, and Smike are pathetic figures who are shown to be the innocent, angelic victims of the society; on the other hand, disabled adults like one-eyed Wackford Squeers, dwarf Daniel Quilp, and paralytic Grandfather Smallweed, are demonstrated to be ruthless victimizers whose physical deformity correspond to their moral decadence. Also, one of the common punishments meted out to Dickens's villains is disability, mostly in the form of paralysis or aphasia (Wainapel 629). Both these stereotypes in Dickens, i.e., the "angelic" or "demonic cripples," function as narrative prostheses, that is, "effective metaphors for aspects of the human condition which excited his sympathies or indignation" (Wainapel 632). The prosthetic instrumentality of Dickens's disabled characters can best be captured in *A Christmas Carol*, which addresses the life and subsequent spiritual transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge, one of the novelist's most memorable characters, as a result of his encounter with a disabled child.

Notorious for being a stingy miser, Scrooge lives an extremely austere life and is also very hard on others. As a practical-minded, strict businessman, he rejects his nephew's cordial invitation to a Christmas party, believing Christmas time is no different from the rest of the year as money-making is the only thing that matters. Meanwhile, he reluctantly gives a day off to his low-paid clerk, Bob Cratchit, but insists that he be at the office the day after the holiday. When he returns home at night, he is unexpectedly visited by the ghost of his fellow business partner, Jacob Marley, who passed away a few years ago. In pain and suffering for his disregard of the plights of the impoverished when he was alive, the ghost warns Scrooge against his current lifestyle and informs him he will be visited by three other ghosts in the coming nights: the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come.

Frightened and dumbfounded, Scrooge, in the company of the three ghosts, sees episodes from his past, present, and future. The experience is of grave impact on his worldview because he comes to realize that as soon as he dies, he would be doomed to eternal perdition as a result of his egocentric demeanor and turning a blind eye to the anguish of the poor. However, what causes a drastic metamorphosis in his worldview is the fate of Timothy Cratchit, the disabled child of his clerk, nicknamed in the work as Tiny Tim. First encountering him in his imaginary trip to the neighboring vicinities with the Ghost of the Christmas Present, Scrooge notes Tiny Tim's deteriorating health as the child first enters the narrative upon his father's shoulders with a crutch in his hand. This happens in Stave III of the novella when the Cratchit family have all gathered together to celebrate Christmas with a Turkey feast. In the next section where Scrooge is transported to the future, he sees Tiny Tim's vacant chair with his crutch on the side, a cautionary sign that the child will die soon if he is not looked after well. Tiny Tim's most probable decease greatly grieves Scrooge and catalyzes his final decision to embark on a generous, philanthropic lifestyle.

As the above-mentioned synopsis clearly depicts, Tiny Tim serves as a kind of narrative prosthesis against which the protagonist can fashion his identity, an “abnormal” device whose sole aim is to pave the way for the moral reform of the “normal” character. Nonetheless, in order to provide a deeper analysis of the role of the disabled child, we first need to have a closer look at the institution of childhood and its implications in Romantic and Victorian eras.

Before the Romantic era, children were viewed as adults-to-be; thus, the society aspired to instruct them via conduct books and other forms of inculcation in order to prepare them to adopt adulthood as soon as possible. This means that children were belittled as imperfect adults and were deemed to be of lesser value, hence the adjective “childish” as a pejorative term (Allen et al. 137). In the Romantic era, however, children found an unprecedentedly privileged position both in literary and social spheres because, according to the Romantic mindset, children were closer to nature and the sources of divine innocence and inspiration. Not yet corrupted by the detrimental effects of civilization, children could allegedly serve as role models for Romantic artists who actively sought new ways to see and interpret the world in a different light (Robinson 2). Consequently, the adjective “childlike,” which alludes to the positive attributes of childhood, became popular in the era (Allen et al. 137). William Blake’s “innocence” poems and William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” are prime examples of the Romantics’ idealized view of childhood as a blessed, enviable period. This new outlook resulted in appreciating children based on who they are, not according to what they ought to be in the future.

The same preoccupation with children can also be traced in the Victorian era, and most famously in the works of Dickens who painstakingly addressed the plights of workers, debtors, and child laborers in a highly industrialized age. It is no exaggeration to say that the novelist, who himself had a very difficult childhood, owes much of his popularity to his masterful characterization of children in his works. Little Nell, Oliver Twist, Pip, and Paul Dombey are just a few examples of Dickens’s vast array of children. Nevertheless, the case of Tiny Tim is totally different from Dickens’s other non-adult characters. Throughout *A Christmas Carol*, the reader cannot find any occasion in which Tiny Tim behaves like a typical child. Surprisingly, he never shows any desire to engage in playing games, which was deemed a hallmark of childhood in the Victorian era. Tiny Tim’s only movements, albeit short and restricted, can be seen during the family’s Christmas festivities where he happily “beat[s] on the table with the handle of his knife” and yells “Hurrah!” like his siblings (Dickens 51), but he is conspicuously absent when the Cratchits start to play. This can be in part explained due to his disability as he is always supported by an iron frame. However, “Tim seems as limited by Victorian notions of disabled children as he is by his physical limitations” (Kanwit 39); in other words, he is both physically impaired and socially disabled.

In fact, Tiny Tim is not characterized as a child because his being a child is not what constitutes his identity; it is his disability that irrevocably defines him. Otherwise stated, he is not a child who happens to be disabled, but a disabled person who happens to be a child (Kanwit 34). It should be noted that it is a very common practice in ableist discourses to fixate and reduce the personality of a disabled person to their so-called abnormalities, a process which is named “disability creep” (Mitchell and Snyder xi). In the same vein, Tiny Tim’s identity is perpetually marked and stigmatized due to his physical differences. This reductive, restrictive attitude can be most prominently detected in Timothy Cratchit’s nickname and surname. His name “Timothy” is altered to “Tiny Tim,” which is a direct reference to his disability and diminished physical stature (Rodas 66). Meanwhile, his surname “Cratchit” may signify a crutch or a feeble person, both connoting the character’s physical differences and their negative implications (Adams 31). Elsewhere, Scrooge remarks that the turkey to be served at the Cratchits’ Christmas party is “twice the size of Tiny Tim” (Dickens 79), once again indicating the diminutive physique of the child. As these points clearly demonstrate, Tiny Tim’s existence is limited to his disability, which means that his life can be defined only within the limits of prevalent ableist stereotypes. That is why he functions not as a fully developed, round character, but as a narrative prosthesis, “a certain kind of moral touchstone” in the words of Jonathan Loesberg (626), whose main responsibility is to give meaning to the lives of non-disabled character and readers, particularly that of the protagonist.

Longmore asserts that Tiny Tim encapsulates many of the stereotypical features of the disabled figure in the Victorian psyche: he is a pathetic object of charity who is totally dependent on others’ assistance as a fundamentally different being; he is a sentimental figure who is there only to touch the hearts of the “normal” people; although he is suffering, he accepts his condition with a stoic dignity, thus serving as a kind of inspiration for the non-disabled (2005, p. 506). Bone calls Tiny Tim a “supercrip,” a disabled hero “who has no sense of personhood beyond his ability to be cheerful in the face of suffering” (1301). According to Bone, Tiny Tim’s “inspirational disability” reduces the child to no more than an “inspiration for Scrooge to change from a wicked, heartless man into one of the most generous in London” (1301). A. M. Petro calls him the epitome of “the good disabled,” whose exuberant and enthusiastic acceptance of his role as a source of inspiration for others turn him into the “moral grounding” of the narrative (359).

Given the stereotypical roles discussed above, it is worth bearing in mind that Tiny Tim is himself aware of this secondary, prosthetic position when he reportedly tells his father that his very existence as a disabled person can provide a moral lesson for others: “he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see”

(Dickens 50). Noting this, Jaffe calls Tiny Tim a “sympathetic spectacle” (262), something like a freak show curio which can instill morality and melodramatic emotionality in the minds of the protagonist and the audience: “Dickens's text situates its readers in the position of the man without feeling in a narrative whose function is to teach him how to feel” (Jaffe 256). Furthermore, Holmes states, “The connection between emotion and impairment has become a kind of cultural shorthand: to indicate or produce emotional excess, add disability” (3). That is to say, by employing disability, one can arouse sentimentality, and through sentimentality, one can provoke the target group to embrace certain moral codes.

As aforementioned, the didactic quality of the disabled prosthesis can best be traced in the relationship between Scrooge and Tiny Tim. On many occasions, Scrooge is depicted as a stone-hearted machine devoid of any human feelings. Significantly, “the only living thing to which he is compared is an oyster, which identifies Scrooge with an organism lacking in human qualities” (Robinson 3). In order to transform into a philanthropist, Scrooge needs to develop a feeling of empathy through the intervention of metaphysical *others*, i.e., the ghosts, and a physical *other*, i.e., Tiny Tim (Harrison 263). Robinson touches upon this point to argue that Tiny Tim “acts as a measure for others about how much worse their own lives could be” (7). This is best exemplified in a scene in Stave IV of the novella where Scrooge is notified in his visions that Tiny Tim’s grave is going to be green, venerated, and frequented by the Cratchits while his own will be neglected and forgotten, a frightening contrast that further motivates his rebirth.

The blindman’s-buff, a game in which one participant is blindfolded and is then urged to find and identify other players, is another manifestation of disability in the novella which can help strengthen our argument about the prosthetic function of physical differences in serving non-disabled characters. The game is played twice in the story, once in the Cratchits’ household and secondly, at Scrooge’s nephew’s home. The structure of the play resembles the prosthetic role of Tiny Tim in the narrative: a non-disabled player apes disability and feigns blindness solely for the sake of entertainment and pleasure; once the desire is fulfilled, the player strips himself / herself of the assumed disability and gets back to his / her normal state, once again referring to the instrumentality of disability. This prosthetic device, that is, the intentional imitation of disability only to benefit the non-disabled characters, can be observed in Stave III where a minor male character named Topper, deeply attracted to one of Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, finds the blindman’s-buff the only opportunity to express his physical attraction to the lady: though claiming temporary blindness via the veil, he stealthily looks at her, finds her, and then touches her playfully, the single occasion he can satisfy his desire under the pretext of not seeing (Kanwit 38). As we can note, disability is once again employed as a prosthetic instrument at the service of the “normal” characters, only to be cast away once the need is fulfilled.

It deserves to be mentioned one more time that Tiny Tim has a very short presence in the narrative. Remarkably, the work provides a passing reference to Tim's physical differences "without inviting a more complex negotiation of how we or the characters feel about disability;" this gap is so great that no information is given on the cause(s) of Tiny Tim's disability (Holmes 2). Notably, this brief presence functions as the moral yardstick of the narrative; thus, Tiny Tim is given the advantage to finish the novella with a Christian blessing: "God bless Us, Every One!" (Dickens 83). The disabled character bestows blessings upon people; he catalyzes their reform into socio-morally accepted individuals. Nevertheless, as a catalyst, he himself never changes. He is a metaphor that can only feed the spectators' voyeuristic whims and fantasies. A prosthesis only to be used when the need or the fad requires, Tiny Tim is fixed and fixated within an already rigid ableist framework.

## 5. Conclusion

In *A Christmas Carol*, the disabled character is a vehicle that is not important in its own right, but is used as a symbolic tool to reveal something about the mainstream society. It is for this reason that, Mitchell and Snyder argue, many disabled characters are granted short, temporary roles in fiction and exit the narratives as soon their metaphoric function is performed. As a result, the centrality of the "normal" subject remains intact and no major change can be observed in the status quo of the disabled characters as the narrative does not basically address the lived experiences of such subaltern groups.

However, even if a change is effected in the lives of disabled people, like what we observe in the case of Tiny Tim who will most probably have a much better life after Scrooge's prospective help, it is through the perpetuation of one of the negative stereotypes, that of disabled people as incompetent and weak and thus, unable to govern themselves and handle their needs. By looking at disabled people as pathetic objects of charity, the agency will forever remain in the hands of the "normal" people and this will leave the subaltern group further marginalized, unvoiced, and passive.

It should be borne in mind that disability studies is not just a literary endeavor; it is also part of a larger political movement whose main aim is to provide better living conditions for people with disabilities. This can only be realized if we are ready to have a critical look at our past in order to find the cracks within it. Once the past is critically examined and analyzed, we can come up with appropriate strategies to ameliorate the present and the future. As a result, the study of such canonical works as Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* can provide literary scholars and researchers with an outline to scrutinize and evaluate contemporary productions. Moreover, it can create the praiseworthy attitude of *other-consciousness* among cultural agents such as authors and directors, making them aware that the representation of disability in their works may bolster or undermine discriminatory ableist stereotypes. The academia needs to consider this very important fact that any attempt to shed light on the workings of mainstream ableist discourses would at the end of the day benefit the cause of disability studies and pave the way for the integration of physically and cognitively different people within the society.

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