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**Disability Narratives:
How Representation in American and French Literature and Media Affects Students with
Disabilities**

A Thesis in English and French

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to show the need for social change regarding disability and education. This thesis examines the representation of disability in both American and French literature and disability to answer the question “How do representations of disability affect students with disabilities in K-12 education?” By delving into the laws and social conceptions of disability, this thesis commences with the history of disability in both the United States and France. The thesis continues with an analysis of two American narratives on disability—the 2009 novel *Anything But Typical* by Nora Raleigh Baskin, and the 2014 memoir *Laughing at My Nightmare* by Shane Burcaw. This analysis uses arguments made by critical disability theorists to illustrate the complexity that disability narratives must try to obtain in order to be effective as a form of disability representation. Essentially, the thesis states that the stronger American disability narrative is the memoir *Laughing at My Nightmare* by Shane Burcaw as it shows the complex subjective experience of disability by using both the Social and Medical Models of Disability. Furthermore, this thesis explores French literature and media by examining the 2017 novel *Le garçon qui ne voulait plus de frère*, written by Sophie Rigal-Goulard, and two films—the 2002 documentary *Être et avoir*, directed by Nicolas Philibert, and the 2008 pseudo-documentary *Entre les murs*, directed by Laurent Cantet. This analysis discusses the difficulty of finding French disability literature and media as well as the high levels of ableism seen in French representations of disability. This thesis concludes with the sentiment that media and literature are meant to be consumed by the public, which contains policymakers, educators, students, and the disabled. Consequently, representations of disability consumed by these people can affect their perceptions of disability and, ultimately, how they treat disabled students.

Author's Note

Given that this honors thesis discusses disabilities and ableism, it is crucial that we understand the importance of the history of disability and the language and its effect when talking about disabilities, specifically when choosing between person-first and identity-first language. First and foremost, the history of disability has been studied through the perspective of cisgender, disabled white men. Therefore, this thesis cannot account for the intersections between the experience of disability and being a person of color, queer, or an immigrant. As a cisgendered, disabled white woman, I have not lived the experience of disabled people who fit into any of those aforementioned communities, so bear in mind that this honors thesis will discuss disability in the broad sense. Secondly, regarding language, person-first language is when we say that someone is a person before we list their identity; in conversations about disability, person-first language would be calling someone in the disabled community a “person with disabilities.” Identity-first language is when the identity comes first, so in terms of someone with a disability, it would be calling that person a “disabled person.”

From my personal experience, I have come to learn that most of the people in the disabled community prefer to be referred to as “disabled people,” not “people with disabilities.” Given that I am disabled from having a chronic illness, I also prefer using identity-first language. Thus, throughout this thesis I will predominantly be using identity-first language when talking about disabled people in English. There will be times that I say “people with disabilities” or “students with disabilities” for the sake of grammar. Nonetheless, it is important that you listen to the disabled people in your life and which type of language they prefer. Although I and most of the disabled community prefer identity-first language, it does not make another disabled person less competent or less valid in their want for you to use person-first language. Therefore,

as you read this thesis, bear in mind this fact. In general conversations, refer to the whole disabled community as “the disabled community” or “disabled people,” but if you are told by a disabled person that they prefer “people with disabilities,” please respect their wishes.

Thank you, and I hope you enjoy reading this thesis.

Dedication

As a student with an undiagnosed/unknown chronic illness, rendering me disabled, I know the struggles of learning to navigate the public school system and higher education while being disabled. I have spent 17 to 18 years out of my 20.5 years of living not knowing I have an invisible, dynamic disability. Understanding the spectrum that is disability is quite difficult even with the new technology and scientific discoveries we have made over the past few decades regarding human medicine. Thus, navigating school without the knowledge that I could qualify for more accommodations than the ones I had received for my injuries (that turned out to be caused and/or exaggerated by my chronic illness), made my schooling experience much more difficult than necessary, especially when few staff members believed in me.

So I would like to dedicate this honors thesis to my fellow disabled humans, especially those who have gone to school and/or are currently attending an educational institution. I see and feel your struggles. This honors thesis is for you.

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Introduction

Since people have varying capabilities when it comes to their physical and mental fitness, one would like to think that accommodations would be accessible for those who are disabled, especially in countries that claim to be technologically and medically advanced, such as the United States and France. However, in the United States, legal progress towards equality for people with disabilities did not start until July 1990 when the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by former President George H. W. Bush. In 2008, the United States Congress created the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), which expanded the number of people who can legally claim disabilities (“Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990”). Similarly, in France, the first law, Loi n° 2005-102 du 11 Février 2005 (i.e., Law 2005-102 of February 11, 2005), to be created to advocate for citizens with disabilities was not signed into law until February 11, 2005. Still, to this day, both countries fail to fully accommodate their citizens with disabilities, especially those who are students.

Ableism, defined as “discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities” by Merriam-Webster, persists in education both in the United States and in France (“Ableism Definition & Meaning”). An analysis of American disability narratives can show ableism inhibiting disabled students’ access to accommodations. An analysis of first-person narration reveals the importance of employing the subjective (i.e., inner experience) of those with disabilities in literature and how it is crucial to understanding how this subjectivity explores the concept of the disabled fighting against some sort of entity (e.g., other people or a system). Likewise, the analysis of the French disability narratives can demonstrate ableism via the lack of representation of disabled students as well as the effects of first-person narration exposing internalized ableism. Both American and French disability narratives will also be analyzed to

discuss how representations of disability within the literature and/or media can reduce the ableism seen in schools as well as how American and French school educators can work to be inclusive and improve the access to accommodations for students.

The ways in which these formats show disability also can exacerbate the institutional ableism students with disabilities can experience in school from staff, peers, and even themselves. Thus, it is important to understand the effects of media on the experience of students with disabilities. For an effective analysis, these pieces of American literature and French media will be put into conversation with three essays from Lennard J. Davis' fifth edition of *The Disability Studies Reader*: "Stigmas: An Enigma Demystified" by Lerita M. Coleman-Brown, "The Unhealthy Diasabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities" by Susan Wendell, and "The Social Model of Disability" by Tom Shakespeare.

Through a reading of American literature that references disability and education experiences of both individuals with disabilities and those who are non-disabled, one will be able to see the different impacts of ableism in the American school systems that can be seen in literature. The two pieces of literature that will be analyzed are *Laughing at My Nightmare* by Shane Burcaw and *Anything but Typical* by Nora Raleigh Baskin. In *Laughing at My Nightmare*, Shane Burcaw divulges his life story thus far as a man with spinal muscular dystrophy. In *Anything but Typical*, Nora Raleigh Baskin writes a fictitious story about a twelve-year-old middle school boy with autism.

This study takes a similar approach with French media, analyzing two films and one novel. The two films are *Entre les murs* (i.e., *Between the Walls*) and *Être et avoir* (i.e., *To Be and to Have*) that both show different types of schools settings in which one can see some students with potential unnamed, or undiagnosed, disabilities. These films will serve as more of a

third-person lens on disability in French education. The novel that will be discussed is *Le garçon qui ne voulait plus de frère* (i.e., The Boy Who No Longer Wanted a Brother) by Sophie Rigal-Goulard, focusing on the fictitious story of a younger brother who must watch over his older brother with a physical disability.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will conduct an historical overview on the disability literature in both the United States and France. I first will delve into the literature on disabilities in United States by discussing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the American with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (ADAAA) of 2008, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975. After discussing these pieces of legal literature, I will provide examples of how ableism is still seen in American schools today based on some short stories and factual evidence provided by people with disabilities and medical professionals. The first chapter will also discuss the French Law 2005-102 of February 11, 2005 while also giving instances of ableism seen in a French magazine about two American students with disabilities as well as French schools, including schools that specialize in disabilities. Given these various examples of institutionalized ableism in both American and French schools, it is crucial to examine how American literature and French media represent ableism in schools for students with disabilities, which will be discussed in my second chapter. Two pieces of American literature that will be analyzed in this thesis are *Laughing at My Nightmare* by Shane Burcaw and *Anything but Typical* by Nora Raleigh Baskin. French media that will be analyzed in this thesis are the films *Entre les murs* (i.e., *Between the Walls*) and *Être et avoir* (i.e., *To Be and to Have*) as well as the book *Le garçon qui ne voulait plus de frère* (i.e., The Boy Who No Longer Wanted a Brother) by Sophie Rigal-Goulard.

I will be using the essays “Stigmas: An Enigma Demystified” by Lerita M. Coleman-Brown, “The Unhealthy Diasabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities” by Susan Wendell, and “The Social Model of Disability” by Tom Shakespeare from Lennard J. Davis’ fifth edition of *The Disability Studies Reader* to expose issues of ableisms seen in these pieces of American literature and French media as well as how these instances of ableism cause barriers for students with disabilities to have access to accommodations in K-12 Education. The third chapter will focus on the French media and literature, placing the two films and novel into context with the three essays. Lastly, the conclusion will include a comparison of French and American disability narratives, finalizing what has been effective so far and what still needs improvement to help disabled students have true access to the full schooling experience.

Chapter 1: Disability in American and French Education

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, critical disability theory, also called critical disability studies, is a “a diverse, interdisciplinary set of theoretical approaches. The task of critical disability theory is to analyze disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social, and political phenomenon” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Critical disability theorists extend critical disability theory beyond the lens of academia to reach society as a way to redefine disability and lessen the detrimental effects ableism has on the lives of people with disabilities (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). However, this theory is relatively new, starting in the United States in the early 2000s. It still lacks pertinence in other countries, including France. When talking about accessibilities for students with disabilities in public schools, these three central ideas are necessary to put into conversation with disability: law, education, and personal experience.

The criticisms of disability within law primarily focus on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the American with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (ADAAA) of 2008, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975. As critical disability theorists explain, the ideology of what constitutes being part of humanity affects laws of those who are disabled. In the chapter, “Disability and the Right to Have Rights” in his 2008 book *Disability Theory*, Tobin Siebers discusses that in European societies, people must be able to show certain abilities, conveying that they are well adapted to live in the civil society (Siebers 177). Siebers continues to reference the construct of the modern day human as being built on an idea from the eighteenth century. He says,

When political membership relies on the ideology of ability, people with physical talents, the famous, and those considered geniuses have little difficulty maintaining and adjusting

their citizenship status, even during times of great crisis. But if a person does not display rational thinking, healthiness, or technical skills, that person risks being seen as less than human and losing the rights bestowed by membership in the human community. (Siebers 179-180).

The idea of one's ability or lack thereof constituting whether or not they qualify as a human being affects how politicians create laws, especially those for people with disabilities. In fact, several countries treat their citizens with disabilities as less than human, subjecting them to inhumane treatment. For instance, in the United States, people with disabilities are less likely to have the ability to sue against their discriminators, denied compensation as repercussion from employment discrimination, less able to vote in elections due to inaccessibility of polling places and/or voting rules, and have severe limits to if and how they can travel (Siebers 180).

The sole purpose of the ADA is to fight the societal barriers that people with disabilities face. The American with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (ADAAA) of 2008 is included in the current version of the ADA. The ADA defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities (e.g., daily life tasks or major bodily functions), of an individual, a history/record of an individual having such impairment, and being seen as having such impairment (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990). Regarding education, any terms referring to education and or schooling is seen approximately 20 times in *Chapter 126 - Equal Opportunity for Individuals with Disabilities of Title 42 - The Public Health and Welfare*. In this section, the ADA notes that its creation is important due to the prevalence of discrimination people with disabilities face, including in education, and there are statistics via census data, national polls, and other studies that support this statement as well the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990). To help lessen the amount of discrimination people with

disabilities face, public transportation, school transportation, and institutions must make their buildings accessible for people with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990). However, religious institutions, including educational institutions, are not prohibited from having preferential treatment in employment to people of specific religions working in their vicinity (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990). Nonetheless, it is likely that these religious institutions can claim religious preference as a reason to exclude hiring a person with disabilities. Furthermore, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects people with disabilities from being “excluded from the participation in, be[ing] denied the benefits of, or be[ing] subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service” (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). This section continues by detailing that “program or activity” includes any post-secondary and higher educational institutions and any school system within the country (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

The function of IDEA is to serve as “a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975). IDEA ensures that students with disabilities can have access to a regular classroom as much as possible, participate in class, and use assistive technology when deemed necessary. In accordance with IDEA, some students with disabilities may need special education classrooms in which they receive rigorous instruction from teachers who have special certification and professional development protocols of which they follow. IDEA emphasizes scientifically researched classroom pedagogy is necessary in the success of education for students with disabilities.

Even though US law clearly states that students with disabilities and disabling health conditions deserve a right to an equal education and provides guidelines on how to help students receive accommodation, American students with disabilities still suffer from issues of ableism on a daily basis, especially at the hands of private K-12 schools and society's understanding of the disability spectrum. In her book, *Criptiques*, Caitlin Wood collects short stories from various people with disabilities, some of which discuss their experiences of disability in the world of education. One of these short stories includes "On Surviving 'Little 'T' Trauma'" by Nina G. Comedian, where Comedian describes her traumatic experiences from enduring special education. Comedian, enduring two learning disabilities (e.g., issues with studying and dyslexia), attended a Catholic school where teachers consistently told her parents that if she were to need accommodations, she did not belong at a Catholic School (Comedian 170). Comedian also notes that her accommodations allowed her to complete only half her schoolwork which would be the only work that was graded. However, one teacher proceeded to fail her because even though she followed her accommodations, saying that she only gets half a grade since she only finished half of her work (Comedian 172). Similarly, the same teacher used Comedian's disabilities against her during presentations in which she received an A- in comparison to her friend who received an A because her stuttering disorder made her speaking harder to understand (Comedian 172). Although her accommodations are technically allowed by her private school, Comedian's teachers still do not accept them nor understand their biases against her disabilities, placing her at an academic disadvantage.

Likewise, students with disabilities from chronic illness also are more likely to be dismissed as chronic illnesses tend to be more dynamic and invisible, leading them to experience ableism at intense rates, especially in the school setting. For example, I, myself, have

experienced ableism for having a dynamic, chronic illness that has yet to be specified. I have been told by my peers that I am either faking my condition for attention and/or academic benefits, and from various school experiences, I have been told that I do not qualify for accommodations as I do not have a known diagnosis, even though all my symptoms qualify me as a student with disability. Other students with chronic illnesses have faced similar types of ableism. Specifically, there are not many students with chronic illnesses who have written about how schools have impacted their lives, but people with chronic illnesses have to handle comments from healthy-bodied people regarding how they should always be looking for a cure (Moore 111-114). In fact, medical professionals from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Center, Mary Kay Irwin and Megan Elam, note that chronically ill students are the most overlooked in the classrooms and are most likely to fall behind. They note how laws, such as IDEA, try to help students with disabilities; however, for students with chronic illnesses, IDEA only classifies them as "other health impairment," leaving it up to the funder of the school as to whether money can be spent specifically on these children (Irwin and Elam 68-69). Irwin and Elam state, "With limited knowledge and resources to draw from, well intended teachers and administrators respond to acute health episodes with impromptu plans, inadvertently creating educational barriers, eliminating the possibility of an equitable educational experience for students with an illness" (Irwin and Elam 68). Thus, those with invisible, dynamic diseases experience even more institutionalized ableism within school settings.

Moreover, the ADA ensures that all buildings, including schools, must adhere to the guidelines in which they eradicate physical barriers that can limit access or cause further harm to people with disabilities. However, the United States Government Accountability Office found that approximately two-third of public K-12 education schools in the United States have physical

barriers, such as steep ramps, that can limit access for people with disabilities, including students and teachers, to these schools (“K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacements”). Needless to say, the Department of Justice, who is responsible for civil rights issues such as these, has yet to address or provide a solution to this issue (“K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacements”). If students cannot even access their schools due to the buildings failing to adhere to the ADA’s guidelines specifications, the administrators at these schools fail to give students full access to the school buildings, emphasizing that they do not have accessibilities to an equal education although the law grants them it.

Just as the United States has issues with ableism within schools, so does France. First, one must address the main law that focuses on education and disability in France, which is the Law 2005-102 of February 11, 2005. This law focuses on the “equal rights and opportunities, participation, and citizenship for people with disabilities” in France (“Loi n° 2005-102 du 11 Février 2005 pour L'égalité des Droits et des Chances, la Participation Et la Citoyenneté des Personnes Handicapées”). For students, French schools are supposed to make academics personable, meaning that each students’ training is tailored to their needs, especially for students with disabilities. Specifically, to qualify for special education, a student must have a disability or a disabling health condition in which the school will test the student’s skills related to their specific disability. Some students can choose to attend a specific school for specific academic training needs based on a proposed benchmark. Students with disabilities and their school must come to an agreement based on what type of special education may work best for the students. Specific human resources and financial aid departments, designed for disabled people in the field

of education, help these people when necessary (“La Scolarisation des Élèves en Situation de Handicap”).

In addition, France has had a history of being more openly prejudiced towards people with disabilities and are less progressive in social justice movements in comparison to the United States. For example, an American woman, Ariel Henley, often received prejudice from other students in her American school for having Crouzon syndrome, a rare genetic condition in which the bones in the head do not form and/or grow normally (Henley 68-71). In fact, these students would call her ugly and would point out her flaws (Henley 68-71). Although the bullying to which she was subjected is absolutely a problem in the United States, how some French people treated her and her twin sister was astronomically worse. Two French people from the French edition of Marie Claire magazine interviewed Ariel and her twin when they were nine years old just to write in their French magazine that “Their faces resembled the work of Picasso” (Henley 75).

Similarly, in French schools, especially during the Coronavirus pandemic, French students of disabilities struggle with receiving their specialized plans as guaranteed by the French 2005-102 law. In fact, a student in France, Robin, has a hearing condition and dysphasia, which make language learning and speaking in general more difficult (Montilly and Cornet). Although his mother has sent in a request to receive help with special education programs, Robin has yet to receive help from his school in France, and many specialized schools for disabilities in France are filled (Montilly and Cornet).

Chapter 2: Disability Narrative in the United States

To answer the overall question “How do representations of disability affect students with disabilities in K-12 education,” it is crucial to comprehend who writes a disability narrative and the techniques with which they engage while creating their stories. Similarly, one needs to understand the complexities that arise when non-disabled and disabled writers alike create narratives that talk about disabilities. In this chapter, I will be communicating the importance of illuminating, in literature, the complex subjectivity, or inner experience, of those with disabilities in which they try to find a balance between disability as a social construct and a physical impairment. By drawing on two contemporary texts—the novel, *Anything But Typical*, and the memoir, *Laughing at My Nightmare*—I show how portrayals of disabled characters fighting against ableism need insight into subjectivity in order to be effective in rallying for social change, especially in the American K-12 education system.

Novel vs. Memoir

To understand any narrative strategies used by Baskin or Burcaw, it is significant to see the difference between a novel and memoir as well as why one may prefer one genre over another. To commence, one should understand what it means for a literary text to be a novel or a memoir. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a novel is “A long fictional prose narrative, usually filling one or more volumes and typically representing character and action with some degree of realism and complexity; a book containing such a narrative” (“novel, n.”). Meanwhile, Oxford English Dictionary defines memoirs as “Records of events or history written from the personal knowledge or experience of the writer, or based on special sources of information” (“memoir, n.”). Given these definitions, one can see that a novel is a fictitious

narrative while a memoir tends to serve as an autobiography that is pertaining to a specific time period of the life of the individual who is telling the story.

The novel, *Anything But Typical*, written by Nora Ralieg Baskin, creates a story that focuses on education, writing, and online friendship through the lens of a 12-year-old autistic boy named Jason Blake. However, the characters and plot Baskin creates are fictional since Baskin is an able-bodied adult woman, meaning she could not have created an autobiographical piece (e.g., a memoir) to speak about a neurodiverse disability. In fact, Baskin started her novel with an acknowledgements section, explaining that both the founder as well as the current president of the Autism Acceptance Project (TAAP) helped her write this novel by answering her questions and providing feedback on her story (Baskin). Notwithstanding, Baskin uses a diary-esque style as there are dates and then recountings given by Jason of what happens on those specific days.

For the memoir, *Laughing at my Nightmare*, Shane Burcaw describes the first 21 years of his life as a physically disabled person. Specifically, Burcaw explains that he has a chronic health condition called Spinal Muscular Atrophy in which his muscles degenerate over time. As a memoir, Burcaw details various scenarios that have taken place throughout his childhood and early adulthood as a person with a physical disability. Given that his memoir spans from his birth to the age of 21, most of his memoir consists of situations that occurred during his schooling experience and/or social life.

Given these two genres, one should question whether the novel or the memoir are better able to reflect the inner experience of living with disability. To fully answer this question, it is critical to comprehend how both novels and memoirs have factored into the history of disability literature. In his essay “Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation,” G. Thomas Couser notes

that representation of disabled people was uncommon in the 1970s, and “[t]he cultural representation of disability has functioned at the expense of disabled people, however, in part because they have rarely controlled their own images” (Couser 1268). Furthermore, Couser states that there has been a shift in North America within recent decades, starting in the late 20th century, as more disabled people are writing on their own behalf about their experiences with disability (Couser 1269). However, this representation tends to be at their own expense since “the expectation is that their [disabled people’s] accounts will serve to relieve their auditors’ discomfort” and “is expected to conform to, and thus confirm, a cultural script” (Couser 1272). Furthermore, Couser notes that one’s capacity to write about an experience as a disabled person is just one form of limited accessibility in an ableist society, and their pieces tend to focus on philosophy, ethics, and/or biomedical ethics seen in “quality-of-life” writings (Couser 1275). Couser suggests that if the disability narrative is to be understood and adequately representative of all people with disabilities, literature on disability should be required, offering a unique perspective of chronic disability and the little commitment to accessibility typically seen in societies (Couser 1275).

For Baskin, the novel is the better genre to show the concept of her narrative, while the memoir genre seems to work best for Burcaw’s narrative. Since Baskin cannot relate to her neurodiverse disabled character, she has to create a fictionalized narrative so that the story is permissible by society in the first place. Using a novel as her genre of choice allows her to try to evoke the inner experience of a disabled student without actually having it. Meanwhile, for Burcaw, the use of the memoir genre makes the most sense; he has his own lived experiences and feelings as a physically disabled man to speak subjectively about the disabled experience. Surely he can write novels if he would like to do so, but his personal anecdotes allow him to

authentically describe his own perspective of navigating the world, including the American school system, as a disabled person. In other words, both novels and memoirs have the potential of conveying the point of view and subjectivity of people living with disabilities. In what follows, I, therefore, assess and evaluate the effects of particular strategies that Baskin and Burcaw use in their respective works.

First Person Point of View

The commonality between Baskin's *Anything But Typical* and Burcaw's *Laughing at My Nightmare* is the use of the first person perspective by using first person pronouns, such as "I," "my," "me," "we," and "our." The first-person narration allows readers to connect to the personal thoughts and feelings of the narrator; however, the readers' knowledge is limited to what the narrator tells them (Diasamidze 162-163). Hence, one can see that both Baskin and Burcaw strive to show the importance of the disabled person's feelings and perspective by using first-person narration. Nonetheless, since the first-person perspective is limiting, how readers of these understand disability is also quite limiting, which can cause harmful misconceptions that negatively impact the disabled community.

Effects of Baskin's Use of First-Person Narration

In *Anything But Typical*, Nora Raleigh Baskin writes as a twelve-year-old boy, Jason Blake, who has autism, yet uses his love for writing as a coping mechanism, resulting in him making an online friend, Rebecca. Although the plot surrounds his journey with writing, Baskin primarily focuses on Jason's internal monologue by using a diary-esque writing style in which the readers are able to see how Jason differs from his neurotypical peers, especially those with whom he attends school. Thus, it is necessary to analyze the effects that Baskin's use of first-person narration can have on the book's audience.

First, Jason's first-person perspective between his interactions with other students in the classroom should be analyzed to see how Baskin portrays Jason's thoughts and feelings about interacting with his peers, especially since these interactions are how she commences her narrative. In the beginning of the novel, Jason says, "And this is what someone would say, if they looked at me but could only see and could only hear in their own language: That kid is weird (he's in SPED, you know)" (Baskin 2). By "their own language," Jason refers to the language of students who are not autistic and are neurotypical (Baskin 2). The use of the pronouns "me" and "their" shows the alienation that Jason feels from his neurotypical classmates (Baskin 2). Jason uses the pronoun "he" to refer to how his classmates would view him further supports this notion as well (Baskin 2). This separation that Jason has perceived internally between himself and his classmates conveys that he has experienced ableism and has also internalized it.

Similarly, Jason's first-person narration shows the concept of stigmatization. Lerita Coleman-Brown's essay "Stigmas: An Enigma Demystified," explains that stigmas are formed during childhood development, initially as a form of curiosity when children notice differences between themselves and others. (Coleman-Brown 432-433). During this process, children determine their preferences of others and then tend to form and understand stereotypes about select groups of people, such as disabled people (Coleman-Brown 432-433). In exchange, children use these learned concepts as ways to enhance themselves and their role in society, leading to the social exile of those they view as different from themselves (438-443). Since people who are stigmatized tend to be viewed as different by society, they are seen as less capable; consequently, these people see normality as the extreme goal that they must obtain (444-445). Jason's first-person narration demonstrates that he has been able to internalize the

social hierarchy that his peers' have constructed about disabled people, illustrating that he also feels embarrassed and inferior to non-disabled people as he is subjected to their social constructs.

Furthermore, this idea of stigmatization is reproduced within the next few lines where Jason describes an incident of bullying which occurred when he was in second grade. He states, "In second grade Matthew Iverson sent around a note saying, *If you think Jason Blake is a retard, sign this*, and Matthew got sent to the principal's office, which only made things worse for Jason" (Baskin 2). Although this text uses first-person narration, Jason refers to himself in the third-person. The use of third-person during a first-person narration can imply the alienation Jason feels from his peers but also from himself. Thus, Jason still receives the harsh realities of Matthew Iverson getting sent to the principal's office, but by using self-alienation, the egocentric intensity of his sentiments about the situation is then placed onto a third party, showing both the externalized and internalized ableism. This sentence alone illustrates the understanding of a social hierarchy between students who are disabled and non-disabled. This notion is further fortified as the creation of the note shows that non-disabled students are resorting to the use of an ableist slur, resulting in Jason's experience of social exile as Coleman-Brown would say (Coleman-Brown 438-443).

In addition, the effects of Jason's first-person narration explores the dynamics between a 12-year-old disabled boy and the non-disabled adults that work for his schools. One can notice the issues of ableism and the lack of accessibility for students that Jason observes in his school in a section of the text that occurs when he is in art class. Jason dislikes his art teacher, Mrs. Hawthorne, and he claims that she dislikes him since he broke her potter wheel when he was feeling overwhelmed (Baskin 54-56). Nonetheless, in the following week, Mrs. Hawthorne attempts to be nicer to him by helping him complete some of his art classwork, yet he says that

she states how he does not even try to do art projects on his own (Baskin 58). Although one can see how Jason believes his teacher is unable to properly handle this situation as she fails to understand that some autistic students struggle with classwork, it is the following internal monologue that Jason says which exhibits his beliefs that his school lacks accessibility for his disability. When speaking to his audience, Jason says, “My mom and dad fought really hard so that I could stay in class like everybody else, but I miss Jane. Jane would have known what to do.... But I don’t need a one-on-one aide anymore. That’s what my mother says. That’s what it says in my IEP....” (Baskin 58). In this section of the text, Jason refers to Jane, his former school aide (Baskin 58). One can note that Jason perceives his parents as wanting him to have access to an equal education as his peers by keeping him in the normal classroom, but his Individualized Education Program (IEP) makes him feel that his school does not want him to become too reliant on his accommodations and use his aide as a way to avoid doing his work (Baskin 58, Coleman-Brown 444-445). The sentence “But I don’t need a one-on-one aide anymore,” shows the hesitancy Jason feels internally (Baskin 58). He says that he does not need Jane anymore because he has internalized what his school has told him in his IEP, hence the use of the personal pronoun “I” (Baskin 58). Nonetheless, one can see that Jason may feel forced into this social concept of social normalization, but he feels his class is less accommodating and accessible for him without his aide.

Moreover, Jason expresses his frustration with ableism in his schooling experience so far in a section of the text where he is in a classroom. Specifically, there is an instance at Jason’s school where he accidentally rips a sheet from his math book into small pieces while he is overthinking about his online friend (Baskin 85). As a response, his math teacher forces him to stay alone in the classroom with her to pick up the pieces of paper off of the floor while the other

students attend a presentation in a separate math class (Baskin 85-86). However, it is Jason's first-person narration that conveys the internalized ableism and lack of accommodations he experiences in life. He thinks, "I start to think of how many times in one day does something like this happen to me. And how I am so used to not getting what I want. How many times as I am on the floor under my desk picking up pieces of paper, metaphorically, that is. Every day, maybe twenty times a day. Maybe more" (Baskin 86). When "something like this happens to [him]," Jason refers to the punishment he receives for his behavior in the literal sense (Baskin 86). However, this sentence articulates a pattern, revealing how he has to navigate through several negative situations and undergo horrendous experiences because his neurodiverse disability causes him to have different social cues and needs than his neurotypical peers. The "pick up pieces of paper, metaphorically" as Jason states, is literally him forcing himself to endure the bullying from his classmates and lack of accommodations from his teachers (Baskin 86). Jason's issue is not the fact that he is being held accountable when he acts poorly due to his emotions, but rather the fact that he is not given the necessary accommodations because non-disabled people are telling him what he actually needs. The intensity that these situations occur "Every day, maybe twenty times a day. Maybe more" elucidates that ableism and the lack of accessibility for Jason is a constant factor and presence in his schooling experience (Baskin 86).

Effects of Burcaw's Use of First-Person Narration

Shane Burcaw's memoir *Laughing at my Nightmare* is another literary piece to consider when discussing real-life school experience with a physical, chronic disability. In *Laughing at my Nightmare*, Burcaw uses humor to convey the complex subjectivity that is the first twenty-one years of his life with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (i.e., chronic condition that leads to

wasting of muscles), ranging from discussions about friendship and school experiences to the creation of his non-profit organization, Laughing At My Nightmare, Incorporated (Burcaw).

To commence, Shane Burcaw's first-narration of an experience he had in elementary school can show the start of the effectiveness or lack thereof when it comes to accommodations to students with physical disabilities. Initially, Burcaw started pre-kindergarten at a school specifically designed for students with disabilities, so that school helped him to get and learn how to use an electric wheelchair as well as provide some physical therapy (Burcaw 16-19). Nonetheless, Burcaw notes that his parents wanted him to attend "normal" classes starting in kindergarten because he is bright for his age, regardless of his physical disability (Burcaw 43). After a corrective spinal surgery, Burcaw was assigned a full-time assistive aide in the second grade to help him with physical tasks with which he may have had trouble (Burcaw 50). However, Burcaw states, "After two years of maturation, I began to realize the negative impact she [his aide] was having on my social life. My peers didn't want to hang out with Shane and his aide; adults were dumb and they yelled at us for cursing" (Burcaw 50-51). He then goes on to say that he made skater friends and developed the "skater mind-set [that] taught [him] that [he] didn't need the help of adults," resulting in him no longer using his aide (Burcaw 51). Within this first-person narration, one can see an "us vs. them" concept forming; however, it was "us" referring to students and "them" referring to adults (Burcaw 51). The personal pronouns Burcaw uses, especially referring to the phrases "my social life" and "my peers," shows that he prioritized, at the time, his social status and social conformation opposed to disability, reflecting on internalized ableism (Burcaw 51). Needless to say, this concept of needing to obtain normalcy as some supreme goal for Burcaw reflects the stigma of disability as Coleman-Brown states in her essay (Coleman-Brown 444-445). In addition, the need to choose his social life at school

over his disability suggests that his classmates and friends had not learned how to be inclusive to a disabled student who was their friend, and it also implies the school possibly had not informed their students and potentially their aides of this problem.

Furthermore, as Burcaw ages, his first-person narration about experience with school will change as he enters the space of secondary education (e.g., middle school and high school) seems to become more overtly ableist against himself and other members of the disabled community. One example that Burcaw mentions was when he was trying to become friends with new students in middle school and was nervous of how other students would perceive him since he was in a wheelchair (Burcaw 75-81). He describes a story about talking to a girl sitting next to him in one of his classes:

“Hi, I’m Shane,” I said, my voice probably noticeably shaking.

“Hey, Shane, I’m Samantha. Do you like East Hills?”

That was an odd question for a pretty girl to ask. And she asked it with a clear condescending tone in her voice, like she was speaking to a toddler. She already thought I was mentally challenged.

“Yeah, it’s pretty cool, but the hallways are so fucking crowded! I accidentally ran over like four people on the way to class.” Cursing was an excellent way to show social normalcy. She noticed. Her giggle was nervous but genuine, like she wasn’t sure if I was being funny on purpose. I just continued, “Hey, could you possibly be my helper for this class? I just need help with small stuff like getting my books out of my book bag. I would do it myself, but I’d probably end up on the floor.” She laughed, a little harder this time. There’s nothing like meeting someone who quickly understands my sense of humor. I watched her facial expressions and

heard her voice completely shut over the next few minutes as she began to see past my wheelchair. Getting people to see past my wheelchair was one of my biggest concerns when I was young. This desire came from not only my interactions at school, but also a particular event during a summer camp for disabled kids that made me question how nondisabled people perceived me. (Burcaw 79-80)

Some issues of ableism and accessibility become apparent within Burcaw's narration. First and foremost, the phrase "She already thought I was mentally challenged" holds significant weight in this section (Burcaw 79). The use of first-person in this section suggests two co-occurring situations: 1. Burcaw has perceived that many non-disabled people think that physical disabilities tend to be accompanied by mental disabilities, and 2. Burcaw has internalized ableism to which he can now vocalize in a memoir. The second thought pattern can be supported when Burcaw states, "Getting people to see past my wheelchair was one of my biggest concerns when I was young. This desire came from not only my interactions at school, but also a particular event during a summer camp for disabled kids that made me question how nondisabled people perceived me" (Burcaw 80). Burcaw's narration shows he dislikes being perceived as incompetent but also that seeing other disabled children, some of whom had mental disabilities, makes him not want to be seen as mentally disabled. This narration displays the duality and complexity of being a disabled person—the fact that disabled people can be ableist internally and against other types of disabilities, whether or not it is intentional. Moreover, his narration about wanting "to show social normalcy" correlates with the ableism that Coleman-Brown states within the fear of how one's disability will make them be perceived as abnormal and/or a social exile (Burcaw 79-80, Coleman-Brown 444-445).

Another factor that one should consider is how Burcaw expresses his oscillating views about himself within his first-person narration. Although his humor shows his upbeat nature and perseverance through adversity, his fears about his condition worsening are just as apparent as well. At one point during the text, he notes, “One of my biggest fears has always been not knowing how much longer I have to live. My fear of death is more of a long-term, always-in-the-back-of-my-mind type of fear and usually does not largely affect me on a day-to-day basis” (Burcaw 26). However, one needs to be cognizant of this fear being a contributing factor to how Burcaw lives his life and tells his story. Although his disability is quite visible, it is still considered a progressive chronic condition, showing the unpredictability of his health, an argument that Susan Wendell makes in her essay “The Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities” (Wendell 473). One can see this notion when Burcaw explains that one day, during the eighth grade, he randomly started having issues chewing his food at lunch. He states, “At this point in my life, I had not given any consideration to the idea that my disease would slowly get worse as I got older. My disease is really good at fucking with my brain because it progresses so slowly that it is almost impossible to notice myself getting weaker (Burcaw 143). Given his slow progression with his disease, Burcaw’s narration shows that he is unable to predict when he could notice the effects of his muscles deteriorating, such as in this instance when he jaw muscle spontaneously could not chew food (Burcaw 143). Hence, the wasting of other muscles can cause unpredictable difficulties for Burcaw in the future of his academics, a debilitating fear he notes within his narration. Consequently, as Wendell argues, those with chronic conditions need to be given the opportunity to schedule and pace for themselves to make life requirements, such as school and work, for disabled people more feasible and accessible (Wendell 487-488). Burcaw’s narration expresses this notion as well

when he talks to his one classmate and says, “Hey, could you possibly be my helper for this class? I just need help with small stuff like getting my books out of my book bag” (Burcaw 80). Burcaw did relinquish his right to have his aide in the classroom for social conformity, which has its own implication, but seeing that he has the control he wants to ask people to help him with carrying his school supplies can also carry over to him needing access to have control over his schedule and work pace due to his chronic condition.

To Whom Should We Listen? Which Literary Representation is Effective?

Who Are We Competing Against?

Both Baskin’s novel and Burcaw’s memoir show that the disabled narrator is against some sort of entity. In *Anything But Typical*, Jason has the mentality that it is him against non-disabled people (e.g., his family, classmates, and school’s staff). Meanwhile in Burcaw’s memoir, it is a combination of Burcaw against his disability and Burcaw and allies against an ableist system and society. Nonetheless, Burcaw’s narrative reveals a more complex portrait of the forces—both internal and external—that disabled people must confront, rather than Baskin, who creates an easy, binary opposition between disabled and non-disabled groups

To understand this perspective, it is crucial to talk about the Social Model of Disability, a concept that Tom Shakespeare explains in his essay of the same title. Tom Shakespeare notes how the Social Model of Disability was created by white, British, heterosexual men who primarily had spinal injuries who wanted to focus on explaining that disability is not a medicinal problem but rather a social conflict created by people without health complications (Shakespeare 563-568). Shakespeare also explains that the social model focuses on dismantling oppression by forcing legal action to be required to reduce inaccessibility and discrimination while the medical model tries to react to disabilities via finding a supposed cure (Shakespeare 564-565). Moreover,

to date, many normalisations for disabled people have started with the idea that people with learning disabilities are normal and can be seen as inspirational to others (Shakespeare 559). Regardless, those who are disabled are seen as the best to lead the disability rights movement, ensuring that all disabled people are heard and receive necessary accessibilities and a diminished experience of prejudice (Shakespeare 569). Nonetheless, one struggle within the Social Model of Disability is its capacity to differentiate and find a balance between disability as a social construct and disability as a physical impairment, meaning that those with chronic conditions still have physical limitations to their daily lives, while some people just experience difficulties socially (Shakespeare 570-571). Ergo, Shakespeare notes that disability is a spectrum and that different solutions are required for different individual experiences, especially for those who are a part of other stigmatized groups, such as disabled people who are also considered racial/ethnic minorities (Shakespeare 568-578).

The Social Model of Disability suggests that the society needs to prioritize the particular, subjective experience of disabled people since it follows the notion of “us versus the system,” suggesting that Burcaw’s approach seems more effective in depicting the subjective experience of disabled people. Although the aforementioned experiences Jason has can contribute to how an autistic child may think about disability, his character ultimately lacks depth to the disabled experience because disabled people mainly want to be considered within the system as Shakespeare suggests (Shakespeare 569). Surely Jason wants his accommodations, like Shakespeare notes, but by primarily blaming specific students and teachers, Jason is not necessarily striving for or wanting a better system for disabled people, but rather wanting to be accepted for his character. However, Burcaw’s narrative voice does not lack depth, given that one can see he has what seems to be more explained coping mechanisms, such as humor to cope with

his pain. Burcaw is also providing more explicit details to his lived experience and mentions other types of ableist views in which disabled people, including himself, can have internalized ableism against other types of disabilities. Jason's character, though, never discusses any other disability other than autism and only focuses on himself versus "NTs," an abbreviation he gives to neurotypical people (Baskin 2). Jason's character has no insight to intersectionality, which most disabled people possess given the social hierarchy referred to by both Coleman-Brown and Shakespeare as well as Shakespeare's notion that "learning disabilities are being more normalized and are used as stories of inspiration for society" (Coleman-Brown 432-445, Shakespeare 559).

Which Disability Narrative Should We Read?

One should not necessarily think that one author is more correct in their writings per se, but rather how one author has more of an authentic perception of the inner experience as a disabled person. Considering G. Thomas Couser's essay, from the aspects of disability narratives seen in North America, especially the United States, one can infer that non-disabled people have written on behalf of disabled people prior to recent decades given that it had taken until approximately after the 1970s for disabled people to typically have authorship and ownership over writing about their lived disabled experience (Couser 1269). Consequently, when comparing Baskin's and Burcaw's work, one must try to comprehend that Burcaw has actually lived the disabled experience whereas Baskin has not, possibly granting him an easier ability to provide insight to the subjective experience of disability where Baskin cannot. However, there is nuance within this idea as well, given that Burcaw does show in his memoir that "the expectation is that [his] accounts will serve to relieve their auditors' discomfort" and "is expected to conform to, and thus confirm, a cultural script" (Couser 1272). Specifically, as stated in a previous

section, one can see his humor as a deflection and a form of relief, such as when he talks to his classmates and then thinks, “there’s nothing like meeting someone who quickly understands my sense of humor. I watched her facial expressions and heard her voice completely shit over the next few minutes as she began to see past my wheelchair” (Burcaw 79-80). Humor is not merely just a coping mechanism as he writes, but just as he treats his classmate with humor to compensate for her misconception of his disability, he seems to use humor to act as a way for his audience to not feel discomforted by his disability. Consequently, his narrative may not be as fully authentic to his subjective experience as he may like, given that he feels the need to conform to societal expectation.

Notwithstanding, given that Nora Raleigh Baskin is not disabled mentally or physically, understanding why she wanted to contribute to American disability narratives is imperative to discern how her reasoning affects her and the way she has written her novel. At a TEDx conference at The Benjamin School, Baskin spoke on behalf of her novels, including *Anything But Typical*, and said:

I wasn’t trying to speak for autistic people or write a book about autism. I wasn’t trying to be a doctor, a teacher, policy maker, or social worker. I was writing about one boy, one fictional character, one possible human being who I had brought into existence, with the hope that his single, small story would speak to a larger universal truth: ACCEPT ME FOR WHO I AM.

That novel, ANYTHING BUT TYPICAL, won The American Library Association Schneider Family Book Award in 2010, an award given to books that embody “the artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences.”

(Baskin)

In general, it is positive that Baskin acknowledges that she “wasn’t trying to speak for autistic people or write a book about autism,” yet her response misconstrues the difference between intention and impact (Baskin). Those who are not disabled, including Baskin, should not expect to write a book about specific communities without expecting it to somehow affect said communities, with this situation pertaining specifically to the autistic community within the disabled community. In addition, her response seems to be boasting for the fact that she won an award for a piece of literature that pertains to “the artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences,” which seems to suggest that she thinks she can successfully write on behalf of the disabled experience without actually being disabled nor her intention even being focused on disability in the first place (Baskin). Although not definite, these comments may attest to the reasons as to why she does not explain various types of intersectionalities of disability that Jason may endure or why he uses the me versus them rhetoric within his narration.

Hence, there is not necessarily one author who is more correct than the other when writing disability narratives. However, by being knowledgeable on the spectrum of disability and ableism as well as understanding what ableism can look like, one can know how to detect ableism within a disability narrative to an extent. For instance, one can appreciate the subjective experience of Burcaw’s Spinal Muscular Atrophy while still recognizing that he has internalized ableism about himself and those with other disabilities, especially mental disabilities. Similarly, one can appreciate that Baskin wishes to show why people need to accept autistic students for the way they are while realizing that her text does not elucidate other ableist conflicts endured by autistic people nor holds appropriate space for accommodations for when ableist situations occur, such as when Jason narrates when another student calls him an ableist slur despised by the disabled community.

Chapitre 3: Le récit du handicap en France

En suivant l'analyse de la littérature américaine et son effet sur la représentation des élèves en situation de handicaps dans le milieu scolaire, nous voyons qu'il y a du capacitisme dans la littérature américaine bien que les États-Unis soient considérés comme progressifs. Ici, nous pouvons comprendre que le capacitisme, ou sinon le validisme en société en France, a des préjugés clairs ou subliminaux contre les personnes en situation de handicap ou les handicaps en général. Donc, j'ai voulu examiner de la littérature et des médias français pour analyser des représentations des handicaps et du validisme.

Il est important de voir comment la littérature et les médias français affectent le regard de la société sur les élèves en situation de handicap. Il est intéressant en effet de noter qu'un balayage rapide des sources indique qu'il y a assez peu de films produits par des réalisateurs français qui se penchent sur ces questions. Et lorsqu'ils le font, c'est un peu "en passant" dans le contexte plus large de problèmes bien connus du système de l'éducation en France, notamment par exemple dans les films de banlieue (c'est-à-dire les films qui se passent dans les quartiers des grandes villes). J'ai choisi deux films et un roman, qui, entre de nombreux autres sujets qu'ils abordent, présentent des élèves en difficultés pour des problèmes d'apprentissage ou de handicaps difficiles à identifier pour l'audience, car non spécifiques ou même pas particulièrement reconnus comme des difficultés. Ces représentations dont nous parlons dans ce chapitre ne sont pas bien sûr le reflet direct d'une réalité, mais elles offrent des réflexions importantes sur le sujet qui nous intéresse dans cette thèse, qui est que les Français ne discutent pas beaucoup des problèmes dont les élèves en situation de handicap sont victimes. Donc deux films et un roman français analysés dans ce chapitre, donnent une idée de ce qu'un handicap dans le milieu scolaire représente dans l'imaginaire des réalisateurs ou du romancier, mais aussi

dans l'imaginaire des spectateurs et lecteurs. Offrent-ils des solutions aux questions que nous nous posons ici? Ces solutions prennent-elles en compte les mesures gouvernementales qui ont été développées récemment pour traiter le problème de validisme et la capacité de créer des adaptations pour les élèves en situation de handicap? Pour ce chapitre, j'analyserai quelques scènes de deux films, *Être et avoir* et *Entre les murs*, et le roman *Le garçon qui ne voulait plus*. Ensuite, je comparerai ces média et ce roman avec les essais tirés de *The Disability Studies Reader (Le lecteur des études sur les handicaps en français)* qui se focalisent sur les handicapés. Ce livre est le même livre que j'ai utilisé dans le chapitre précédent.

Être et avoir

Être et avoir est un documentaire de 2002 qui a été réalisé par Nicolas Philibert. Le film se focalise sur un professeur français, Georges Lopez, dans une campagne en Auvergne, région centrale de la France. Ce film représente la situation d'une classe unique, c'est-à-dire un espace que 12 élèves qui ont entre 4 et 11 ans partagent pour progresser dans leur parcours scolaire. Ce genre de classe unique est particulièrement visible dans le milieu rural où il y a peu d'enseignants et peu d'espaces scolaires. La difficulté que l'on perçoit immédiatement est la situation de l'enseignant qui doit gérer tous ces enfants et leur apprentissage qui va de la maternelle au CM2, juste avant que les enfants partent pour le collège. Donc l'enseignant jongle avec des sources et matières extrêmement diverses et il doit adapter sa pédagogie à l'âge de l'enfant, son style d'apprentissage et ses capacités. Quelques scènes qui en comprennent une avec une fille jeune ainsi qu'un garçon et une fille qui sont dans leur dernières années de l'école élémentaire, c'est-à-dire le CM2 et que l'enseignant doit mettre à niveau pour qu'ils puissent passer en 6ème (première classe du collège) sont intéressants pour notre analyse. Ce qui les caractérise, c'est que les deux filles parlent rarement et qu'elles se tiennent prostrées dans de

nombreuses scènes et le garçon a des problèmes de comportement et de compréhension pour les mathématiques. Rien n'est dit sur un diagnostic de handicap d'apprentissage possible, l'enseignant semble par moment être familiarisé avec ce genre de problème (puisque'il enseigne depuis 30 ans) mais ne mentionne rien qui pourrait donner au spectateur une idée plus précise de ce dont souffre peut-être cette fille, ce qui est intéressant à noter. Il est possible que ces handicaps ne soient pas mentionnés dans ce film d'une part parce que le réalisateur ne savait pas qu'il y avait des élèves en situation de handicap ou d'autre part parce qu'il y avait des lois ou des contrats qui protègent la vie privée et de la santé des élèves. Rappelons qu'il s'agit en effet d'un documentaire et non pas d'une œuvre fictive, donc les personnages ne "jouent pas leur rôles," les personnages sont des personnes réelles dans un cadre réel. Ceci est un fait important à garder à l'esprit parce que le genre du documentaire offre à la fois d'autres contraintes et opportunités pour aborder le sujet du handicap à l'école. Avant de continuer, il est important de signaler qu'il n'est pas question ici de donner un diagnostic spécifique puisque nous ne nous spécialisons pas nécessairement en médecine. Mais le film souligne néanmoins une différence dans l'apprentissage de certains enfants, différence qui fait qu'ils ont besoin de plus d'attention et de soutien psychologique pour gérer leur situation.

Donc examinons d'abord quelques passages du film, notamment celui où la jeune fille semble avoir du mal à se concentrer sur son travail scolaire, mais qui arrive à se concentrer sur son travail lorsque le maître l'aide. Les choix cinématographiques soulignent aussi cette différence puisque lorsque la caméra montre la salle de classe dans son ensemble, la caméra s'arrête d'abord sur la jeune fille et la maintient dans un plan quelques secondes de plus que d'autres élèves. A ce moment-là, on peut remarquer que la fille bouge beaucoup ses mains et fait des expressions faciales qui montre son stress en travaillant sur son travail scolaire (Philibert

52:41-52:52). Elle complète son travail qui consiste à former des phrases en français, mais elle semble être distraite (Philibert 1:10:49-1:10:52). Ce cas semble indiquer la présence d'une difficulté d'apprentissage dans une salle de classe typique à cause d'un handicap potentiel comme l'autisme et/ou le trouble du déficit de l'attention avec ou sans hyperactivité (TDAH). Le maître, Monsieur Lopez reste calme en toute circonstance et rend la salle de classe très accessible pour elle en lui donnant toute l'attention et l'aide dont elle a besoin. Il est très important néanmoins de considérer aussi que la fille est jeune; donc, il est possible qu'elle soit tout simplement distraite en classe de temps en temps et qu'elle bouge beaucoup son corps. Elle est un peu plus distraite en comparaison avec ses pairs mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle est nécessairement dans une situation de handicap.

Pour poursuivre notre analyse, il y a aussi une autre fille qui ira en 6ème, passage important en France, mais encore plus dans ce milieu rural où la prochaine école sera loin et extrêmement différente de cette petite école. Le maître s'inquiète car elle est très maladivement timide et ne parle pas du tout en classe. Dans une autre partie du film, on réalise aussi qu'elle a du mal à faire ses devoirs qu'elle ne peut y arriver qu'avec l'aide de sa mère, femme gentille et calme mais qui consulte Monsieur Lopez pour apprendre une façon d'aider sa fille. Elle prend rendez-vous avec lui pour discuter des conflits et des solutions pour sa fille (Philibert 48:48 - 52:08). Comme nous l'avons déjà dit, notre propos ici n'est pas de diagnostiquer cette fille mais on peut supposer qu'elle a un handicap mental. Ce qui est intéressant c'est que nous pouvons voir le fait que les parents des élèves s'impliquent dans l'éducation (et le succès) de leurs enfants. Par ailleurs, cette conférence montre aussi que Lopez se soucie de ses élèves et il est disposé à adapter sa classe pour eux. Bien sûr, le fait que les handicaps ne soient pas considérés comme une raison pour avoir des préjugés contre ses élèves montre le fait qu'il est plus préoccupé par

cet environnement de l'enfant en plein apprentissage et il essaie du mieux qu'il peut d'encourager tout le monde. Donc, ce type d'environnement devrait être émulé dans toutes les écoles françaises puisqu'il accepte les élèves en situation de handicap et crée une méthode qui marche pour chacun. En même temps, on se rend compte que le maître n'a pas du tout de soutien venant de l'institution de l'école. L'éducation nationale ne paraît pas avoir implémenté soit des solutions ou des recours pour le maître et pour l'enfant.

Un autre exemple à considérer est un garçon qui s'appelle Julien. Comme la fille mentionnée dans le paragraphe précédent, Julien est sur le point de passer en 6ème. Pour rappel, ce passage est important car il signifie que l'enfant passe de l'école primaire au collège. En classe, Julien a des problèmes avec son comportement et avec les mathématiques. Dans une scène où il fait ses devoirs de mathématiques, sa mère le gifle quand il lui donne, pour blaguer, une réponse fautive. Après cela, sa mère, son père et deux autres membres de sa famille l'aident avec ses devoirs (Philibert 35:34 - 41:20). En général, Lopez aide tous ses élèves avec leurs devoirs, alors ce n'est pas un problème. Mais, il y a le fait que nous voyons une réunion de parents avec Monsieur Lopez, où il discute de Julien et d'un autre garçon (Olivier) qui créent des problèmes. Là nous apprenons que les deux garçons ont tendance à des confrontations physiques (Philibert 30:15 - 35:34). Lopez permet à Olivier de pleurer et d'exprimer ses sentiments (Philibert 30:15 - 35:34). Cette conférence donne une idée de la pédagogie que le maître déploie pour expliquer l'importance de la communication et améliorer le rapport entre ces deux garçons. En dépit de la possibilité que les élèves ont des problèmes de comportement à cause de handicaps mentaux potentiels, nous pouvons voir que Lopez rend la salle de classe aussi accessible que possible s'il a un élève qui est en situation de handicap.

En théorie, il y a quelques types de soutien gouvernemental en France pour les élèves en situation de handicap. En effet, il y a la « Loi n° 2005-102 du 11 février 2005 pour l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées », dont nous avons parlé dans notre introduction, qui se focalise sur les droits des personnes en situation de handicap qui incluent des élèves dans cette situation (« Loi n° 2005-102 du 11 février 2005 pour l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées »). Cette loi mentionne que les écoles françaises doivent créer un plan éducatif qui est personnalisé pour chaque élève, surtout les élèves en situation de handicap (« La Scolarisation des Élèves en Situation de Handicap »). Dans ce film, le maître met bien en place une pédagogie adaptée à chaque enfant, ce qui est remarquable, mais cette approche ne paraît pas être dictée par des standards éducatifs. En général, les enfants qui ont des besoins très spécifiques, doivent pouvoir s'inscrire dans une école en éducation spécialisée. Mais ils doivent pouvoir prouver qu'ils ont une maladie invalidante ou un handicap physique pour lequel leurs compétences académiques seront testées (« La Scolarisation des Élèves en Situation de Handicap »). Les élèves et leurs parents doivent travailler avec leurs écoles pour décider du type d'éducation spécialisée qui convient le mieux aux élèves (« La Scolarisation des Élèves en Situation de Handicap »). Dans ce film, qui documente le milieu de l'éducation pour les enfants de 4 à 11 ans, l'approche du maître est plutôt décrite comme un art, où le maître s'occupe de chacun, quels que soient leurs besoins, avec beaucoup de sensibilité. Cette sensibilité personnelle est ce qui permet à l'enfant d'apprendre. Mais en tant que spectateur, on se demande si cette approche est durable et si en fin de compte l'enfant verra ses besoins satisfaits plus tard, après le passage au collège.

De plus, dans le contexte de ce documentaire, il n'y a pas d'école qui se spécialise dans l'éducation spécialisée puisqu'il y a environ 200 personnes qui habitent dans ce village. Mais il

est très important de noter que ce film est sorti en 2002, quelques années avant la publication de cette loi. Ce serait intéressant qu'un autre documentaire soit fait pour voir si l'éducation s'adapte maintenant à un enseignement très personnalisé sur la base de cette loi et de la technologie moderne. Néanmoins, basé sur l'année où ce film est sorti, Lopez a créé les adaptations dans sa classe quand elles étaient nécessaires.

Entre les murs

Entre les murs est un film de 2008 qui a été réalisé par Laurent Cantet. Ce film est un pseudo documentaire où l'histoire est fictive mais le style de tournage est réaliste au point de faire croire que c'est en fait un documentaire. Il essaie de souligner les problèmes (comme le racisme et la xénophobie) dans les écoles défavorisées. Il est tourné dans le style des films de banlieues, mais en fait l'histoire se passe à Paris dans une école du 20ème arrondissement. L'histoire se focalise sur un professeur de français, François Marin, d'une école dans la cité pauvre de Paris. Il montre beaucoup de conflits avec les élèves qui viennent de beaucoup de cultures différentes. Beaucoup d'élèves sont des personnes de couleurs et dérivent de la pauvreté. Il y a, par exemple, trois élèves intéressants, Esmeralda, Souleymane et une autre fille qui parle avec un cheveu sur la langue. Pour le but de ce chapitre, je me focaliserai sur ces personnages. Premièrement, je discuterai du personnage d'Esmeralda que l'on entend en fait très peu tout au cours du film, mais qui affirme d'abord vers la fin du film qu'elle n'a rien appris pendant l'année scolaire et qui finit rapidement par changer cette affirmation, ce qui choque l'enseignant. Il y a aussi le personnage de Souleymane, qui est un immigré du Mali et qui a quelques difficultés en classe. Finalement, je me concentrerai sur le personnage de la fille qui a un défaut d'élocution.

Premièrement, pendant tout le film, il semble que la salle de classe soit très hostile, en particulier de la part de l'enseignant, François Marin, et il est possible que les actions et les

comportements de Marin font dire à Esmeralda qu'elle n'apprend rien en classe. Telles que sont représentées ces heures de français au niveau de la 4ème, on a du mal à imaginer qu'il est possible d'apprendre quoi que soit car le maître est sans arrêt interrompu, les élèves ne l'écoutent pas vraiment et lorsqu'ils écoutent, il y a un assez grand niveau d'agressivité qui tourne mal plusieurs fois. Bien sûr, il y a parfois des moments de rire de la part de Marin et des élèves, mais la majorité du film montre Marin dans une classe hostile. Il y a une scène où Souleymane se comporte mal en classe et lorsque Marin le fait sortir de la classe pour l'emmener au principal, il demande méchamment à Souleymane de se dépêcher et puis le bouscule ou le frappe. Les élèves voient cette action depuis la fenêtre de la classe (Cantet 1:21:56 -1:23:32). En continuant, il y a une scène où Esmeralda et une autre fille sont dans la salle de conférence, écoutant ce que les professeurs disent de leurs élèves, en particulier Souleymane, entre eux et le principal. Pendant toute la conférence, nous pouvons voir Esmeralda et l'autre fille se chuchoter à l'oreille et rigoler. Cependant, à la fin de cette scène, ces deux filles chuchotent, regardent Marin et prennent des notes, semblant stressées pendant ce temps (Cantet 1:23:32 -1:30:08). Les filles exposent ce que Marin a dit à propos de Souleymane lors de cette conférence à la classe quand Marin et Souleymane commencent à se disputer devant la classe. Tout ce que fait Marin, c'est faire une expression faciale frustrée et dire « C'est bien. C'est bien » en hochant la tête. Ensuite, il confronte les filles de manière hostile et leur répond. Puis il commence à se disputer avec le reste de la classe et les élèves se disputent. Souleymane quitte alors la pièce et son sac à dos a blessé l'œil gauche d'une autre fille (Cantet 1:33:11-1:36:17). Ce comportement hostile pourrait contribuer à expliquer la raison pour laquelle Esmeralda dit initialement qu'elle n'a rien appris en classe avant de changer sa déclaration. Ainsi, cet environnement de classe hostile n'a pas l'air approprié pour un élève en situation de handicap en particulier. Aucune aide des administrateurs

n'est là pour soutenir le maître qui doit essayer de s'adapter à l'environnement hostile de sa classe.

Comme dans le film *Etre et avoir*, le thème du handicap n'est pas directement traité. On ne peut qu'interpréter les actions de certains enfants par des différences de style d'apprentissage (auquel le maître n'est pas vraiment formé) ou même parfois de handicap. Dans la scène où Souleymane présente son projet comme une collection de photos avec des légendes à la place d'une vidéo car on voit que les autres élèves ont fait des vidéos pour leurs projets, Marin l'aide et l'élève finit par avoir l'idée de montrer ses images sur un tableau d'affichage. Ses camarades s'approchent du panneau d'affichage pour qu'ils puissent les regarder et lire les légendes. La capacité de Souleymane à réaliser un projet photographique montre que des adaptations peuvent être faites en classe et que ces adaptations peuvent également s'appliquer aux élèves en situation de handicap (Cantet 1:05:22-1:12:02).

En dernier lieu, il y a la fille qui parle avec un cheveu sur la langue. Il y a une scène où cette fille répond aux questions de Marin mais elle doit expliquer à nouveau ses réponses. Ceci se passe de temps en temps parce que Marin l'interroge pour la forcer à avoir une réponse plus détaillée; c'est un processus typique des enseignants. Néanmoins, elle a l'air d'exprimer son opinion plus souvent en comparaison aux autres élèves (Cantet 32:38-33:38). On ne sait pas si son zéziement est la cause des conflits avec son éducation où comment les enseignants la voient. Mais il est possible que Marin ait des stigmatisations internalisées contre les défauts d'élocution. Ceci est une spéculation mais les élèves qui zéziaient peuvent être traités différemment. En fait, nous entendons rarement cette fille parler après cette scène.

Ce film se focalise plutôt sur les problèmes de comportement des jeunes mais certains de ces problèmes font penser à des problèmes de handicap. Aucun n'est traité comme tel, le maître

est seul à tout gérer et il n'est pas question ici de faire appliquer la loi française pour les personnes en situation de handicap. Cependant, on peut voir qu'il y a des problèmes dans les salles de classes pour les élèves qui font partie de communautés marginalisées, comme la communauté de handicap. En outre, les écoles dans les banlieues sont moins préparées pour les élèves en situation de handicap comme on peut le voir dans ce film.

Le garçon qui ne voulait plus de frère

Le roman de 2017 *Le garçon qui ne voulait plus de frère* écrit par Sophie Rigal-Goulard se focalise sur la perspective d'un garçon, Hugo Morceau, qui a un frère, Sasha, en situation de handicap mental. Mais Hugo ne mentionne pas de quel handicap il souffre. Puisque cette histoire se concentre sur les pensées de Hugo, un garçon qui n'a pas nécessairement de handicap, il y a beaucoup de choses qui se passent qui ne s'occupent pas de Sasha. Donc, j'utiliserai seulement les situations où il décrit ses opinions et ses expériences avec Sasha.

En ce qui concerne la narration, ce roman est écrit du point de vue de la première personne qui porte la voix de son personnage principal, Hugo. Hugo et sa famille ont déménagé de Toulouse vers la région parisienne, Eaubonne, et il doit aller dans un nouveau collège. Entre les dates du 26 août et du 14 janvier, Hugo note ce qui se passe pendant plusieurs jours dans la première partie de l'année scolaire, et pendant les vacances d'hiver. Il est important de noter le fait que Hugo tient un journal parce que celui-ci lui permet d'exposer ses sentiments personnels et aussi de mettre l'accent sur la vision qu'il a de son frère, Sasha.

Pour introduire son frère, Sasha, à ses lecteurs, il note le fait que Sasha aime le film *Toy Story I*, un film très connu de Pixar et se focalise sur le point de vue des jouets d'un garçon qui s'appelle Andy. Sasha aime beaucoup son jouet de Buzz l'Éclair (Buzz Lightyear en anglais), un jouet de la franchise de *Toy Story* qui est un garde de l'espace. Mais Sasha ne comprend pas le

concept que Hugo aime passer du temps seul. Donc, Sasha lui dit, « Méchant Hugo! Chacha jouer Buzz. École avec Nanard » (Rigal-Goulard 11). Basé sur ce dialogue de Sasha, nous pouvons voir que Sasha a une difficulté pour former des phrases complètes et de prononcer quelques mots. Par exemple, Sasha prononce mal son prénom comme « Chacha » (Rigal-Goulard 11). De plus, Sasha a soit-disant un esprit d'enfant. Hugo affirme que « Sasha a trois ans dans sa tête et quinze ans dans son corps » (Rigal-Goulard 12). Avec ces descriptions, on peut comprendre que Sasha a un handicapé mental comme l'autisme.

Il y a quelques problèmes dans la manière de décrire Sasha. Quand Hugo décrit Sasha comme un enfant, il pratique un concept qui s'appelle l'infantilisation. L'infantilisation est le moment où les gens traitent une personne en situation handicapé comme un enfant à cause de ses handicaps. En fait, Hugo mentionne souvent que Sasha a des conflits avec ses émotions. Par exemple, Hugo écrit:

Sasha jouait nerveusement avec Buzz l'Éclair. J'ai senti qu'il allait encore passer un sale quart d'heure. Et ça n'a pas loupé. Mon frère a projeté son robot à travers la pièce. Buzz a atterri contre le verre d'un cadre qui s'est brisé en mille morceaux. C'est le deuxième depuis le début du mois. Maman est arrivée en courant parce qu'elle avait entendu le verre se casser et Sasha a eu peur. Il a piqué une crise de nerfs. (Rigal-Goulard 21)

Évidemment, Sasha a une hyper-fixation sur son jouet auquel il est très attaché. Mais Hugo se focalise sur cet attachement que Sasha possède et son angoisse par rapport au changement. C'est néanmoins la manière qu'Hugo utilise pour décrire son frère qui est problématique. En décrivant son frère comme une personne en situation de handicap très émotionnelle, Sasha peut être perçu comme un fardeau pour Hugo et cet aspect du roman renvoie à la réalité du fait que souvent les gens qui ont des handicaps mentaux paraissent être à la charge des gens bien portants.

Plus loin dans le roman, Hugo mentionne son journal. Il dit qu'il a eu une conversation avec quelques nouveaux amis à propos de leurs grandes sœurs et du grand frère d'Hugo. Mais Hugo note, « Ils m'ont demandé si j'étais fils unique et j'ai juste répondu que j'avais un frère aîné.... Je ne sais pas pourquoi je n'ai pas parlé du handicap de Sasha » (Rigal-Goulard 34). Donc, nous voyons que Hugo est embarrassé par le handicap de son frère et une allusion au fait qu'il peut être stigmatisé par ses amis s'ils apprennent le handicap de son frère apparaît. Par ailleurs, le mot « unique » peut augmenter la stigmatisation des gens en situation de handicap et les gens en bonne santé, une idée proposée par Brown-Coleman de son essai « Stigmas: An Enigma Demystified » (Coleman-Brown 444-445).

Il y aussi deux cas où la légitimité de la nouvelle école de Sasha est mise en doute. Par exemple, selon Hugo, Sasha a expliqué que Nanard était parti et « C'est ce qu'il a expliqué à maman quand elle lui a demandé pourquoi il ne tenait pas en place dans sa nouvelle «école» » (Rigal-Goulard 23). Il est important de noter que Nanard (prononcé Bernard le plus probable) est un ami de Sasha qui est un élève de son école précédente mais Hugo ne mentionne pas Nanard. Le fait que le mot « école » est placé entre guillemets évoque le fait que Hugo ne considère pas l'école de Sasha comme une école légitime (Rigal-Goulard 23). De la même façon, l'ami de Hugo, Charles, mentionne que cette «école» est en fait « la maison pour les fous...Souvent, ils sont accrochés à la grille et ils bavent. Quand j'étais même, ils me fichaient la trouille ! C'est flippant de les voir ! (Rigal-Goulard 40). Une école spécialisée pour les enfants en situation de handicap évoque un asile psychiatrique ce qui fait passer le handicap dans le domaine du dérangement mental, un amalgame dans l'imaginaire des personnages et peut-être des lecteurs également. Les lecteurs de Hugo voient le validisme dans les élèves, notamment Charles et Hugo eux-mêmes. Si nous observons ces sentiments dans les livres comme lecteurs, ces sentiments

pourraient-ils affecter la perception des personnes handicapées que d'autres lecteurs ont? Et si les lecteurs interprètent qu'il y a des problèmes avec le capacitisme dans les personnages, cela ne signifierait-il pas qu'il existe encore un capacitisme au sein de la société française qui doit être appris ou discuté?

Des trois cas examinés dans ce chapitre, c'est sans doute ce roman qui se rapproche le plus d'une description qui renvoie à la loi française pour les personnes en situation de handicap. Sasha est un élève dans une école spécialisée régie par la loi française. L'intrigue du roman se focalise surtout sur Hugo qui jette son regard sur Sasha et son handicap. Donc ce récit à la première personne est en fait écrit du point de vue de l'observateur du handicap. Il dénonce non seulement l'expérience dure de l'école pour Sasha, mais aussi le regard de l'entourage de Sasha.

La représentation des élèves en situation de handicap en France

Basé sur la littérature et les médias que j'ai analysé, on constate d'abord qu'il est difficile de trouver des sources qui parlent directement du handicap dans le milieu scolaire en France. Dans les deux films, le handicap est suggéré mais jamais attaqué de front et aucune mention n'est faite de ressource possible pour les enfants dans cette situation. Ce qui frappe c'est en fait la solitude du maître ou de l'enseignant face aux problèmes dans les salles de classe.

Synopsis

This chapter focuses on the representation, or possible representation, of disability and education in French literature and media. I analyze two films, *Être et avoir* (*To Be and To Have*) and *Entre les murs* (*The Class*), and a novel, *Le garçon qui ne voulait plus de frère* (*The Boy Who No Longer Wants a Brother*).

First, I discuss *Être et avoir*, a 2002 documentary directed by Nicolas Philibert. *Être et avoir* takes place in the rural area of Auvergne in France, a town of a small population. Mr.

Lopez is the teacher for students from kindergarten to fifth grade, teaching all the students in the same classroom. One sees in the film that Mr. Lopez remains calm with all his students and attempts to help them as much as possible by having one-on-one discussions with them and some conferences with their parents. Although it is unknown if any of the students have disabilities and/or have been diagnosed with disabilities, one can see that he tries to make his classroom as accessible as possible. Given that this film was released a few years before the creation of the 2005 French law for people with disabilities, one can assume that Lopez would be able to further accommodate his disabled students based on the law and with modern technology.

For this film, I focus on some scenes with a young girl as well as a boy and a girl who are in their last years of elementary school, and that the teacher must upgrade so that they can pass in their first year in middle school. What characterizes them is that the two girls rarely speak and that they stand downward in many scenes, and the boy has problems with his behavior and understanding concepts of mathematics. There has not been a stated diagnosis but the teacher seems at times to be familiar with this kind of problem since he has been teaching for 30 years. These disabilities may not have been mentioned because 1.) the director didn't know if there were any students with disabilities or 2.) laws or contracts require the students' health to be kept quiet since it is a documentary, not a fictional film. These students do not play an acting role, rather they are real people in a real setting. This is an important fact to bear in mind because the genre of a documentary offers both other constraints and opportunities for addressing the subject of disability at school.

First, I talk about a young girl who seems to have trouble concentrating on her schoolwork based on a few scenes in the film. She seems to be able to focus when Lopez, the teacher, forces her to refocus on her schoolwork. Similarly, when the camera shows the entire

classroom, the director starts with the young girl and keeps her in one shot for a few seconds longer than other students. At this moment, the audience can see that she moves her hands a lot and makes facial expressions that show her stress while working on her schoolwork. She completes her work of forming the French sentences but she seems to be distracted. These situations show that she may have difficulty learning disability, such as autism and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Lopez makes the classroom very accessible for her by giving her the extra attention and help she needs. It is very important to consider that the girl is young; so, it makes sense that she gets distracted in class from time to time and moves her body around a lot. She is a bit more distracted compared to her peers, but that does not mean she is necessarily disabled.

I continue my claim by talking about a shy girl in her last year of elementary school who does not speak in class. She has difficulty with some of her work, with which her mother calmly helps her but eventually schedules an appointment with Lopez to discuss the conflicts and solutions for her daughter. Although we cannot guess the potential diagnosis of this girl, we can see the fact that the parents of the students are involved in the education and the success of their children as well as Lopez's willingness to adapt his classes to their needs. The fact that disabilities are not seen as a reason for being prejudiced against his students shows the fact that he is more concerned with creating an environment that encourages all students to succeed. So this type of environment should be emulated in all French schools since it accepts students with disabilities and creates a method that works for everyone.

Lastly, I talk about a boy named Julien who is also in his last year of elementary school. In class, Julien has problems with his behavior and with mathematics. There is a scene where Julien is doing math homework and his mother slaps him when he gives her a fake answer for

fun. Then we see his mother, his father and two other relatives help him with his homework. In general, Lopez helps all of his students with their homework, so that is not a problem. However, there is a scene where we see a conference with Julien, Lopez and another boy, named Olivier, where we learn that the two boys have the tendency of physical confrontations. Therefore, we can assume that there are conflicts with Julien's actions and behaviors in class, perhaps as a response to the way his parents treat him. Nonetheless, Lopez allows Olivier to cry and express his feelings, showing that this conference allows for a way of communication that is very accessible for both boys and enhances the opportunity to get a strong education. Despite the possibility that students have behavioral issues because of potential mental disabilities, we can see that Lopez makes the classroom as accessible as possible if he has a student who has a disability.

To conclude this section, I discuss the “Law n° 2005-102 of February 11, 2005 for Equal Rights and Opportunities, Participation and Citizenship of People with Disabilities,” which focuses on the rights of disabled people, including disabled students. The law mentions that French schools must create an educational plan that is personalized for each student, especially students with disabilities, but in order to be able to enroll in a school specializing in special education, students must have a disabling illness or a physical handicap for which their academic skills will be tested. Notwithstanding, students and their parents should work with their schools to decide what type of special education is best for students, but in the context of this documentary, there is no school that specializes in special education since there are approximately 200 people who live in this region. Also, this movie was released in 2002, so it is possible that there are now more of the students living in this countryside and/or there are more types of adaptations that could be made in the classroom based on this law and modern

technology. Nonetheless, based on the time this movie was set, Lopez created the adaptations in her class when they were needed.

The second film, *Entre les murs*, is a pseudo documentary that was released in 2008 and directed by Laurent Cantet. The film uses the structure of an actual documentary but has the plot of a fiction movie. The plot surrounds the French teacher, Francois Marin, and his French class in a school in the neighborhoods surrounding Paris. Thus, most of the students come from working class families and are people of color. Some of the students are also immigrants. In the film, one can see that the teachers and principal have judgments about their students and talk about them negatively at conferences. There are three students that I focus on analyzing: Esmeralda, Souleymane, and a girl with a speech impediment.

First, Esmeralda claims she has learned nothing in Marin's class and then redacts her statement by the end of the film. Souleymane is an immigrant from Mali, and the other girl is a student with a potential disability, a lisp. Regarding Esmeralda, one can see that Marin's classroom is quite hostile throughout the film. There is a scene where a Souleymane misbehaves in class, so Marin walks him to the principal's office. However, when walking him there, Esmeralda and the other students in the class see that Marin shoves or hits Souleymane. Esmeralda and another girl also attended the teacher's conference, took notes, and reported back to the class the negative comments that Marin made about his students, especially Souleymane, which results in the students arguing with each other and Marin arguing with Esmeralda and Souleymane. This type of classroom environment does not give the impression that would be safe and/or accommodating for disabled students.

Secondly, there is a specific scene where Marin assigns the class to create videos of themselves in which they talk about themselves. Here, Marin allows Souleymane to create a

bulletin board of photos of him and people important to him with captions. He even inspires this idea of using the bulletin board and helps Souleymane put the pictures on the board. The students then approach the board and converse about it. This type of accommodation for Souleymane shows that the school is capable of making accommodations and could extend them to disabled students if and when necessary.

Lastly, there is a student who has a lisp, and near the beginning of the film she answers some of Marin's questions. He asks her more questions partially to probe her into thinking more critically, but she seems to have more questions asked in response to her answers than some other students. She is also only seen talking in those first few scenes of the movie, and then the majority of the movie she does not speak again, or at least the attention is not on her speaking. Thus, this situation forces one to question the stigmas surrounding disability and whether Marin, or the French in general, could have internalized stigmas against disabilities, such as speech impediments. It is not said whether her lisp affects her learning, but these situations still need to be considered carefully, especially as they can affect the public's understanding of how disability is seen and treated in the classroom.

The choice to mix fiction and reality must be discussed when talking about this pseudo documentary. Given that this film occurs after the creation of the 2005 French law on disabilities, one can assume that there is still a lack of disability representation within French media, so creating a fiction movie is more attainable when discussing disabilities. However, the choice of the film serving as a pseudo documentary implies that the director wants the film to emulate the importance of what an actual documentary would show, the seriousness of the maltreatment of poor city students in France. Likewise, the film does not explicitly mention disability so there is still a disconnect between the French and their comprehension of disability.

Furthermore, the 2017 novel *Le garçon qui ne voulait pas de frère* written by Sophie Rigal-Goulard focuses on the perspective of a boy, Hugo Morceau, who has an older brother, Sasha, that has an unnamed mental disability. This story is written as a diary and only focuses on the thoughts of Hugo, a boy who does not necessarily have a disability, and how he and his family have moved from Toulouse to a region of Paris. Hence, one cannot know exactly the history of Sasha's experiences of school, but Hugo does mention that Sasha goes to a school that specializes in special education. Additionally, most of the novel is Hugo feeling ashamed of having a brother who is disabled, and when he talks about his brother to his new friends he purposely excludes the fact that his brother is disabled so that he is not seen differently. One sees that Sasha's school is considered a "crazy house" by Hugo's new friends and his friends also ask if his brother is "unique," not knowing about his brother attending said school (Rigal-Goulard). Hugo also tends to refer to his brother as his "older little brother" because he thinks that Sasha "has the mind of a three year old in the body of a fifteen year old" (Rigal-Goulard). Eventually, Hugo does write an essay about his brother, which shows that he cares for his brother but that his brother is quite a lot to handle. Ergo, this novel shows the ableism that the public, including young students, and family members of disabled students can have against disabled people. Specifically, this story pushes the idea of infantilization of disabled people and disabled people being burdens.

Overall, most of these pieces of French literature and media fail to fully address the issues that disabled students face in the French school system, probably since the French do not discuss disabilities that often as compared to the United States. Likewise, there is a lack of connection between these pieces of French literature and media to the 2005 French law focused on reducing the discrimination of disabled people. Consequently, one can infer that the lack of

conversation about French disabled students can translate to their lack of appropriate accommodations, and, therefore, a lack of access to a strong education in France.

Conclusion

Critical disability studies and the implications of ableism, overt and/or subliminal, have been becoming more known within the last few decades, especially with help from the creation of the American with Disabilities Act in July of 1990. However, considering that ableism can still be seen in disability narratives in both the United States and France, one can say that both countries need to improve how they include disabled people in their spaces, especially disabled students who contribute to these countries.

In the United States, there are novels, such as *Anything But Typical* by Nora Raleigh Baskin, and non-fiction books, such as Shane Burcaw's memoir, *Laughing at My Nightmare*. Both Baskin and Burcaw use first-person narration to show what ableism looks like internally and externally, but Baskin's autistic character, Jason, does lack some depth given that he uses a "me versus them" type of argument, while many disabled people, including Burcaw, employ a "us versus the system" argument even if they do occasionally have internalized ableism against themselves as Burcaw has demonstrated.

In France, as far as I can tell now, there is not a lot of representation which focuses solely on disability, but the French literature and media that does touch upon disability tends to lack insight into ableism and its effects on society. The novel *Le garçon qui ne voulait plus de frère* (i.e., *The Boy Who No Longer Wanted a Brother*) by Sophie Rigal-Goulard focuses on the fictitious story of a younger brother who must watch over his older brother with a mental disability that is not named but assumed to be similar to autism. The first-person narration exposes the internalized ableism that the main character, Hugo, feels towards his disabled brother, Sacha. Hugo infantilizes Sacha and also uses him within a homework assignment, resulting in people believing that Hugo is an inspiration for dealing with what they consider to be

a burdensome, disabled older brother. Given that most French literature does not discuss disability, this representation of disabled people is harmful to the disabled community.

Furthermore, the French films, *Entre les murs* (i.e., *The Class*) and *Être et avoir* (i.e., *To Be and to Have*) in which both show different types of schools settings in which one can see some students with potential, unspecified disabilities. In *Entre les murs* disabilities are not the focus, but one can see that accommodations that are made for other students could be applicable to disabled students. However, one can also notice that the school is not welcoming or kind to any students of marginalized groups, so disabled students would most likely be mistreated in places similar to this fictitious school. In *Être et avoir*, disabilities are also not the main focus, but the way Mr. Lopez makes his classroom environment about care and concern for all his students suggests that he makes accommodations for his students when necessary, which is beneficial for all students, disabled or not.

Just as it is important to discuss disability narratives and the techniques authors and directors employ when they create their stories, it is just as crucial to communicate the effect these stories have on public perception. Public perception does and will continue to change how society perceives and treats disabled people, including disabled students. In his essay, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Wolfgang Iser addresses how the reading process works in which he states how the phenomenological theory of art stresses the importance of the text itself as well as addressing the actions that are involved with responding to a literary text (Iser 279). Iser notes that as readers continue to read the literature, the literature changes as the people are forced to engage with blank ideas by filling in their own experiences, which in exchange, change how they view their own reality, including those experiences (Iser 281-287).

Thus, literature can continuously have several various interpretations for each person who is reading it. Perhaps the most pivotal statement that Iser makes is:

By grouping together the written parts of the text, we enable them to interact, we observe the direction in which they are leading us, and we project onto them the consistency which we, as readers, require. This “gestalt” must inevitably be colored by our own characteristic selection process. For it is not given by the text itself; it arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook. The “gestalt” is not the true meaning of the text; at best it is a configurative meaning; “...comprehension is an individual act of seeing-things-together, and only that.” With a literary text such comprehension is inseparable from the reader’s expectations, and where we have expectations, there too we have one of the most potent weapons in the writer’s armory—illusion. (Iser 289)

When noting “gestalt,” Iser refers to “A ‘shape’, ‘configuration’, or ‘structure’ which as an object of perception forms a specific whole or unity incapable of expression simply in terms of its parts (e.g. a melody in distinction from the notes that make it up)” and is typically associated with Gestalt psychology—“a school of psychology which holds that perceptions, reactions, etc., are gestalts” (“gestalt, n.”). Iser claims that how people select information from the text in conjunction with both their own experiences and the historical context of the text, is integral to the process of how literature acquires meaning.

Readers may, in fact, select to focus on the more ableist factors in both texts, especially if they happen to be ignorant about the spectrum of disability as well as the presentation and effects of ableism. People who interact with these texts include community members who affect

education, such as school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and policy makers. Consequently, depending on how much these readers are socially aware about ableism and disability, their comprehension of disability will be affected. Depending on how they interpret the texts, those who are ignorant to these social issues will draw upon their ignorance and perpetuate ableism in any sphere that is occupied by disabled people, including in school.

Given that literature and media, regardless from which country it derives, are shared with the public, they inherently inform the public about disabilities and can change their views on disability. The public includes people who are policy makers, educators, and students. These people control the school systems in the country either through the creation of laws (i.e., policy makers) or through the treatment of students (e.g., educators to their students and students to other students). Consequently, when people have misperceptions of disability, they can harm disabled students by preventing them from adequate access to accommodations and, therefore, not having a strong quality education. Disabilities most likely have existed as long as humans have, so it is crucial to comprehend how disability narratives can affect them for better or worse.

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