

(Re)Writing Dyslexia: Margarita Engle, Caroline Starr Rose, and Narrative Prosthesis as
Activism in Children's Historical Fiction

Like race, gender, and sexuality, disability is a site of cultural conflict, one which has been woefully under-interrogated in literature and society generally. While the history of literature represents disability as an abnormality in need of narrative correction (Kermode, 1968) (Davis, 1995), modern and postmodern writers present disability counternarratives which disrupt the idea of “curing” or “fixing” disabled persons (Mitchell and Snyder, 2014). Both normalcy narratives and disability counternarratives can be read using narrative prosthesis: a concept emerging from narrative theory which situates discussion about disability within a literary domain while enabling scholars to draw upon the history and socio-cultural context of representation leading to a greater understanding of disability and thus of ourselves. While there is some scholarship on disability in children's literature (e.g. Keith, 2001), there are few examinations of disability in children's historical fiction (Schalk, 2017). Recent verse novels *The Wild Book* by Margarita Engle and *May B* by Caroline Starr Rose are prime examples of disability counternarratives which have yet to receive significant academic attention. Both texts represent a new wave of genre-texts featuring dyslexic protagonists published within the last ten years—the ten years since the last extensive study of dyslexic texts within children's literature (Altieri, 2008). While Engle explores Fefa's frustration with word-blindness in the Cuban countryside circa 1910 and Rose depicts May's un-diagnosed reading struggles on the Kansas frontier, both texts evoke empowerment through literary representation. Through the lens of narrative prosthesis, I will examine how these disability counternarratives re-examine the history of dyslexia and rewrite its representation using modern sensibilities of activism and empowerment.

References

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