



Reading Embodied Citizenship: Disability, Narrative, and the Body Politic (The American Literatures Initiative)

Emily Russell

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Liberal individualism, a foundational concept of American politics, assumes an essentially homogeneous population of independent citizens. When confronted with physical disability and the contradiction of seemingly unruly bodies, however, the public searches for a story that can make sense of the difference. The narrative that ensues makes "abnormality" an important part of the dialogue about what a genuine citizen is, though its role is concealed as an exception to the rule of individuality rather than a defining difference. *Reading Embodied Citizenship* brings disability to the forefront, illuminating its role in constituting what counts as U.S. citizenship.

Drawing from major figures in American literature, including Mark Twain, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, and David Foster Wallace, as well as introducing texts from the emerging canon of disability studies, Emily Russell demonstrates the place of disability at the core of American ideals. The narratives prompted by the encounter between physical difference and the body politic require a new understanding of embodiment as a necessary conjunction of physical, textual, and social bodies. Russell examines literature to explore and unsettle long-held assumptions about American citizenship.

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