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**David Bolt. (2023). *Finding Blindness: International Constructions and Deconstructions*. London and New York: ISBN: 9781032229928.**

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*Finding Blindness: International Constructions and Deconstructions* is edited by David Bolt, who contributed to the volume in *Introduction: Cultural Stations of Blindness: From Ignorance to Understandings* and the last chapter of the book, *Revisiting Ruins of Blindness: A Sketched Out Silhouette*. This collection consists of sixteen writings about the cultural station of blindness explored from international perspectives and utilizing different methods. As the title suggests, each piece critically analyzes and engages with the cultural interpretation of blindness and cultural contexts in which a specific meaning of blindness is constructed. These essays are organized according to three main themes, which is consisted of part one, the *Directions and Redirections of Education: Critical Spaces and Events*; part two, *The Blind Reading the Blind: Politics and Religion*; and part three, *Stage and the Page: Performance, Dramatics, and Literary Representation*.

Autocritical ethnography, taken as a method by many authors in this book, is significant in disability studies scholarship when unpacking the impact of ableist views on the lives of people with disabilities. The autoethnography is used in many chapters to show how different knots and threads of cultural locations, social structures, and related identities intersect and come together, creating a certain experience of blindness. David Bolt, who is also an author of the book, the *Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing*, combines his expertise in literacy theories with auto-critical analysis in the last chapter of the

book. This approach intends to interrupt and challenge the dominant “ocularcentrism” (p.42) by elucidating and providing different views on what people with visual impairment have experienced and lived through under the epistemology of sighted cultures. As such, this reading makes me decide to incorporate my reflection on my own lived experience as a blind person into this review.

First, and importantly, the collection shares an understanding of blindness as social construct which is comprised of the cultural images and narratives of blindness that the sighted people think of what blindness is and how blind people should feel and behave. This is what David Bolt terms “ocularnormative epistemology” (p.182), meaning that the supremacy of normalized vision, and knowledge derived from the sight, are assumed to be superior to the other ways of being and knowing. This epistemology, in turn, contributes to the production of the social institutions and cultural stations of charities and rehabilitations. Accordingly, the main theme that runs through these pieces is to critically analyze the problematic views on blindness, which is entrenched in a variety of forms of cultural artifacts and literatures. For instance, in chapter, three, Simoni Symeonidou and Kyriakos Demetriou address how blindness is culturally constructed as a binary opposite to the sightedness and often used for “supercrip” (p.32) narrative in Cyprus. Likewise, in chapter five, Monika Dubiel analyzes that the famous Polish story about a blind child and her friendship with a sighted child, ‘Katarynka Spotkanie nad morzem’, is indeed crafted for the sighted readers. This ocularcentric views persist on the stage of representation as Devon Healey demonstrates in chapter twelve that, when even a blind actor was hired for a blind character, the performance was directed by a sighted-blind consultant who tells Healey how to act and behave as a blind person. This is clearly reflected in the remark of the sighted consultant, “No, no! A blind person would never do that” (p.132). In these contexts,

blindness is used as a prop to deliver a hegemonic message to the public. According to this message, blindness should be defined as a mere medical problem or a tragedy to overcome, and thus, blind people are left without any choice but to follow the guidelines and institutional norms built on the sighted culture. Other accounts from the lived experience of a blind person, and other ways of being and living without sight, disappear from the public narratives and views.

Second, what makes this collection stand out to me is the wealth of its international and cultural contexts and the wide-ranging accounts and related analytical tools employed in each chapter. David Bolt notes in *Introduction*, “blindness is an understanding at which many of us arrive” (p.1) through the “different cultural stages of blindness” (p.1). In this sense, it is agreed that blindness is neither a monolithic definition nor an essentialized identity. Instead, as the narratives of each chapter travels along different cultures and histories, blindness is something found at the intersection of these diverse journeys and stages. The work of these international analyses provides an important insight into my reflection on my own blindness as well that has been shaped and reshaped through my interactions with the dominant sighted cultures and historical contexts in different countries. I grew up in South Korea where accommodations for blind people in education and employment were not coded in law, while many blind people were sent to a few segregated schools where education was concentrated on occupational training for massage therapy. Its historical trajectory and culture are quite different though, the accounts related to post colonial and post war non-western analysis of cultural stations in this book resonate with my own lived experience. To be specific, in chapter nine, Neng Priyanti and Taufiq Effendi explains how cultural practices based on collectivist and religious belief systems in Indonesia plays a huge role in perpetuating the oppressive social establishment for blind and partially sighted people. Likewise, Aravinda Bhat’s narrative in chapter eight is comparable with

my experience of growing up in a cultural fabric of post colonial Christian environment. In the cultural station of South Korea, as similar to what Bhat shows, blindness was construed as a symbol of sin that needs to be healed by a faith healing practice or to be overcompensated by hard work. This analysis allows me to contemplate through these different layers of post colonial cultural contexts, and protestant-capitalist ethics where a religious system goes hand in hand with ableist views on sight loss.

Not only these chapters strive to deconstruct different modes of cultural oppressions and institutional ableism. Also, and importantly, the aim of this collection is to reconstruct blindness by finding the means to resist and counteract the narratives of “ocularnormative epistemology” (p.182). Accordingly, this book contains various analytical methods and theoretical framework that are employed to counter the violent, pathologizing and obscuring epistemology of the sightedness entrenched in the ableist cultural stations of blindness. For example, in the first chapter, *Affective Possibilities of Everyday Encounters With Blindness*, Leah Burch explores the concept of affective relations by exploring a corporeal transgression occurring when a blind person interacts with other people within a space. They suggest that changes of ableist relation is conceivable through an affective engagement of different bodies. Likewise, by analyzing the power of gaze deployed in a space of teaching, in chapter two, Lorenzo Dalvit argues that blindness is a power relation which can be subverted. Such technology as Zoom, which begin to be widely used after global COVID pandemic, demonstrates how a power relationship of gaze can be altered in a classroom setting. In chapter eleven, Carlos Ayram and Marta Pascua Canelo, also explored the meaning of gaze and sight, conceptualizing it as an embodiment of government sanctioned violence. Here, photography was discussed as a means to dislocate and resist the power of gaze. Likewise, in chapter four, Mahashewta Bhattacharya and Bijendra Singh revisit

the meaning of seeing in the context of the ethnographic observation. They theorise gaze not only as a symbol of power discovered in research but also as an embodiment of power ingrained within an ethnographic method. As they were working with blind participants, this conventional method of observation needed to be unlearned and reconstructed by adapting to and exploring a non-visual exchange with blind participants. In this sense, they argue that ethnographic research with blind participants can be an ontological exercise through which the meanings of body and sight reconstitute. In the same manner, in chapter ten, Alexis Padilla argues that the identity of being blind is something that is emerging and becoming in relation to her own encounter with other blind people.

Lastly, I appreciate the theoretical richness of literary analysis introduced in this collection. In such chapters: chapter fourteen, written by David Feeney, chapter fifteen by Brenda Tyrell and chapter sixteen by David Bolt, literary theories were discussed in depth, and in relation to disability studies' contribution to literary analysis. These chapters explore and enrich the interdisciplinary collaboration on how to interpret blindness and blind characters represented in literary works. Discussing meta narratives of disability tropes in literary work, this work of analysis opens up a conversation about how to potentially complicate, and challenge pedagogical methods in disability studies, arguing that an analysis of disability characters needs to be conducted in a way that takes the textual purposes of disability rhetoric in a given literature into the consideration. For example, David Feeney, in chapter fourteen, criticizes disability studies' urge to mechanically apply criteria made to determine biases in literary characters with disability. This application is criticized as being oversimplifying the genre of literary work because, in literary critiques, the consideration of a textual and literary purpose that a character is crafted to serve is as important as external consequences of this when analyzing the meaning and

impact of a given literature. Comparable to Bérubé (2016)'s assertion in his book, *The Secret Life of Stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter, How Understanding Intellectual Disability Transforms the Way We Read*, these authors show how to expand the scope of analysis for literary work by providing different lens that interrogates blind characters, which allows the interpretation of characters to reveal multidimensional relations and meanings through literature. This approach adds nuances to blindness in literary work, and widens a scope of what a concept of blindness can signal and do to readers as cultural stations of disability within a literature.

This book is beneficial for those who are engaged in disability studies scholarship in many ways. Since focusing on mostly cultural stations of blindness, this collection incorporates a wide range of analysis and methods, which deals with different cultural, geopolitical and historical aspects of what it means to be blind in different contexts, and how it is constructed in different cultures. These inquiries related to blindness as cultural construct not only remains as it is but leads readers towards the potential to the subverted and alternative meaning of blindness.

#### *References*

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