

A book that could be described as equal parts sociology, history, and visual culture, the chapters unfold in a chronological, tripartite manner. The first pair of chapters considers representations of fatness in Western art up until the end of the seventeenth century, accompanied by many fascinating (and infrequently reproduced) illustrations. The second group of chapters brings the reader into the so-called long eighteenth century and the broader contexts of European colonialism and enslavement, as well as the unique American nexus of race, gender, class, religiosity, fashion, health, eugenics, and nationalism. The final chapters explore and critique the increasing dominance, within the United States, of medicalized conceptions of fatness during the mid-nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries. Notable in the author's final portion is her well-supported examination of how weight bias within biomedicine is primarily rooted in racialized and gendered aesthetic attitudes toward fatness, not in genuine health concerns.

While the attitudes of various historical thinkers toward fatness and thinness differ, the tendency to tie race, gender, and corporeal form to personality characteristics and moralized temperaments is one of the themes that helps to weave together these varied aspects of the study. Sociocultural condemnations of fatness are presented as co-constituted products of multiple, concurrent "doings" of race, gender, and class, pivoting on one dominant note: establishing white supremacy while othering its challengers. "The phobia about fat," notes Strings, "'always already' had a racial element" (210). In this regard, this book genuinely re-envisioned the ways we ought to think about the histories, and the present, of fatness.

The work contains little to fault. A short portion of Chapter 2 asserting, seemingly uncritically, that the circulation of sugar as a colonial commodity produced fatter European bodies might earn a quizzical pause, but the rest of the text is thoroughly suffused by a hermeneutics of suspicion toward health claims about fatness. Strings does choose to include the terms "obesity" and "overweight" (sans scare quotes) where that language is relevant to the specific materials considered, so pedagogical use of the book might merit a caution about the contested use of these words within fat studies contexts. Nothing about the work, however, seriously detracts from Strings's superb research, incisive analysis, and appealing, jargon-free writing. Sociological theory is present and utilized where relevant, but does not dominate the study.

Strings's incisive research might fairly be called potentially revolutionary for those who work in gender studies, fat studies, body studies, and racial and ethnic studies—and even for art historians to boot. Medical students seeking to cultivate an anti-oppressive practice would benefit from reading the latter chapters, as well. Thanks to the author's careful historical contextualization and lucid prose, the work should be found accessible by undergraduates, specialist and non-specialist graduate researchers, and general readers with an interest in bodily diversity, systemic inequalities, and/or histories of the present.

DISFIGURED: ON FAIRY TALES, DISABILITY, AND MAKING SPACE

Amanda Leduc
Toronto: Coach House Books,
2020

REVIEWED BY JESSICA DOBERSTEIN

Similar to many children in the Western world, I was told fairy tales as a little girl. I have held a fondness for fairy tales in their various forms since I was young. As an adult disabled woman, I have become very critical of them, even making them the focus of my research. So, when I heard of Amanda Leduc's book *Disfigured: on Fairy Tales, Disability, and Making Space*, I knew this book was one I wanted to read. While Leduc intended to have the book viewed primarily as a memoir mixed with criticisms of fairy tales and not as adding to either fairy tales or disability scholarship, I would say that it is a new contribution to both these fields of scholarship. This book was intended to be a mix of critical analysis and memoir, but the book highlights how the personal is political. Leduc shows how the narratives in fairy tales have had an impact on how she understands herself and the world around her. Her point is that fairy tales are "never only stories," that the language used and the use of disability within fairy tales' narratives have an impact on society (224).

The book is divided into an introduction, nine chapters, and an afterword. I truly enjoyed Leduc's way of writing. If authors write on the topic of disability, then it should be done in an accessible manner. I believe she has done this for the most part. It was easy to read, and she ensured the reader understood what each chapter was discussing,

clearly defining all the terms used. She did not assume that the reader had read all of the fairy tales or knew anything about disability studies or the history of fairy tales. She supplied summaries and definitions so the reader could follow the information being discussed. While each chapter can stand alone, they flow nicely from one into the next. This for some may seem like a little thing, but I genuinely appreciate it when an author takes the readability of their book into consideration. If one writes clearly and uses simple language, then the reader can follow what is being said, engage with, and think about it. Throughout the book, Leduc discusses disability studies theory, fairy tales, the history around fairy tales, the Disneyfication of fairy tales, popular culture, and the social and political impact fairy tales have had. All of this is eloquently connected with her own personal narrative of being a disabled woman who has struggled with her mental, social, and medical understanding of her body.

While reading the book I could tell that she had done extensive research and used multiple sources in compiling her information. The book reads as part literature review on disability studies and fairy tales, content analysis, and history, all woven together with her personal narrative. I think this was done in an attempt to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of how disability narratives in fairy tales are socially impactful on both children and adults. The common belief is that fairy tales are harmless, and Leduc has the reader questioning this. Fairy tales and Disney imply that “good” disabled people will be healed or will overcome their disability, while bad people will have to live forever with being disabled. For many disabled people, like Leduc and myself, disability is not about being “cured” or “overcoming,” but it is something

we live with every day. Leduc wants readers to realize that there is a need for more stories that tell disability narratives in a “positive” or more realistic light.

While I know this book was not meant to be an exhaustive exploration of the topic, I do have a critique that there was no feminist research used. There is some research available on the intersection of disability and gender, which Leduc does not seem to consider. The addition of feminist research on gender and fairy tales could have added to her research and narrative.

I think that Leduc’s book would be good for those interested in learning about disability in fairy tales or in the genre of memoir. For those who are knowledgeable about the topic, Leduc’s narrative is also powerful and brings the research to life. For myself, this book was enjoyable and enlightening to read.

Jessica Doberstein is a disabled woman and artist with two Bachelor of Arts degrees, one in Sociology and the other in Disability Studies. She also graduated from the Master’s program in Critical Disability Studies from York University. Her research focuses on disability narratives within fairy tales, literature, and film.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN FAT

Virgie Tovar

New York: Feminist Press, 2018

REVIEWED BY JENNY ELLISON,
PHD

You Have the Right to Remain Fat is part introduction to radical fat activism and part self-help guide. Author Virgie Tovar interweaves her personal experiences with sharp observations of American diet culture and accessibly written insights from the academic field of Fat Studies. The book follows Tovar through her childhood, into her experiences with dating and fashion, and her introduction to fat activism. Tovar’s pitch isn’t only that we all have a right to remain fat, but that we will achieve liberation by “centering the eradication of oppression” and focusing on “collective freedom” (104). Tovar distills complicated concepts with great impact. The author adopts an effective narrative approach and tone we’ve seen before in feminist and fat activist texts. We go with Tovar on a hero’s journey. First, Tovar delightfully describes herself as a child, quirky, playful, and comfortable in her body. Her confidence was undermined by “one toxic idea,” that her body was wrong. This idea is at the heart of this book, as Tovar describes her encounters with men, family, and the socio-cultural structures that normalize fat oppression. Radical, anti-assimilationist fat activism transforms Tovar’s story, fuelling her personal transformation and public engagement. For Fat Studies scholars, this book should look familiar. It stands on the shoulders of sixty-five plus years of activist writing on fat oppression. We can trace the contours of fat activism through this genre of texts, from Vinne Young’s 1953 self-help book *It’s Fun to Be Fat*, to