

CFP: Superhero Narratives and (Dis)Ability (NeMLA 2017 Roundtable)

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Popular culture narratives present ever-increasing images of persons with disability, whether through superheroes themselves or via supporting cast members. How can superpowers be read as disabilities, or disabilities as superpowers? What critical insights can such a reading provide? For example, *The Avengers* hinges on Tony Stark's ability to recruit Bruce Banner, the Hulk, by acknowledging how they both share the "privilege" of what can be interpreted as disabilities: Stark's heart injury that led him to develop the Arc Reactor powering the Iron Man robotic suit, and Banner's condition as the Hulk, which by height, weight, mentality, and emotions can compromise his involvement in the world but can also make him a superhero. We have also seen considerable discussions, at NeMLA but also in print and online scholarship, about representations of characters potentially on the autism spectrum, not only Stark but also Drax in *Guardians of the Galaxy*, to name a few. Yet these representations are far from uniform, and apart from literal impairment, superheroes and superpowers can also be read as allegories for disability and Othered bodies and minds.

While scholars such as David Perry note the Othering effect of the "disability as superpower" analogy, recent televisual texts have brought an increasing presence of characters with disabilities in the superhero genre. At times, some of these interpretations are given to offensive clichés, with large numbers of antagonists with disabilities in works such as *Green Lantern* and *Agents of SHIELD* represented as their disabilities motivating their villainy, but there are also characters whose purported heroism, such as Phil Coulson in *Agents of SHIELD*, Daniel Sousa in *Agent Carter*, Barbara Gordon as both Oracle and Batgirl, and numerous members of the X-Men and the Inhumans identify far more complex representations of characters with disabilities. How does the superhero's superpowered engagement of ableist society reveal or illustrate complications of negotiating the construction of (dis)ability? This roundtable seeks presentations exploring how the superhero's superpowered engagement of ableist society reveal or illustrate complications of negotiating the construction of (dis)ability.

Abstracts are due by September 30th, 2016. To submit, create a user account and upload abstracts into the NeMLA system. For more information, please email both Derek and Mary Ellen at derek.s.mcgrath@gmail.com and maryiatrop@gmail.com

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