Belittling "Mr. Big": Teaching Ray Bradbury's "The Dwarf"

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#### Abstract

Ray Bradbury's neglected short story "The Dwarf" (1955) offers a welcome opportunity to introduce undergraduates to readings based on the perspective of body studies, and to investigate the phenomenon of stigma. A dwarf named Mr. Bigelow comes to the mirror maze on a carnival pier every night to look at his image in size-enhancing mirrors. One night the mean and petty operator of the mirror maze plays a cruel practical joke, substituting size-reducing glass in the mirror maze and shattering the fragile image of his diminutive customer. While there is no doubt that we are meant to condemn this belittling of the dwarf, we also need to consider whether the story embeds disparaging stereotypes about those with anomalous bodies. I propose approaches to teaching this story to offer a body studies perspective in introductory college English classes as well as in disability studies courses.

If it is true that "the only permissible prejudice in PC America is against dwarfs," then it is worth taking a second look at Ray Bradbury's short story, "The Dwarf" (1955). Set in the milieu of a carnival side show, "The Dwarf" has been neglected in scholarly literature. I include this story both in the syllabus for my survey course on Disability Studies and in my introduction to literature course. "The Dwarf" offers a welcome opportunity to introduce undergraduates to readings based on the perspective of body studies, and to demonstrate how even stories that on the surface condemn mockery of those with anomalous bodies may embed disparaging stereotypes.

Ralph Banghart (appropriately named), runs a two-bit mirror maze on a pier with carnival attractions. Every night an "ugly" (4) dwarf comes to the mirror maze to look at himself in size-enhancing glass. Although the dwarf obviously wants to keep this activity a secret, Ralph delights in furtively watching the dwarf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Solomon (116), citing personal interviews with Dr. Betty Adelson, author of *Lives of Dwarfs and Dwarfism*.

as he dances, waves, and bows in front of the mirror. One night Ralph shares the spectacle that he finds so amusing with his romantic interest, Aimee, and reveals to her that the dwarf has asked if he could buy one of the mirrors. In contrast to Ralph who callously refuses to tell the dwarf where he can buy one. Aimee surprises Ralph by her sympathetic reaction. Aimee's interest in the dwarf increases when she finds out that "Mr. Bigelow" is a writer of murder mysteries and has "a soul as big as all outdoors" (8). Notwithstanding Ralph's snide remarks about her "benevolence," Aimee orders a size-enhancing mirror to be sent to Mr. Bigelow's room. The day before the mirror is to be delivered, Ralph plays the cruelest of practical jokes on Mr. Bigelow, and installs diminishing glass. When the dwarf pays his nightly visit to the glass corridor, he is devastated by his tiny image and leaves the mirror maze "shrieking hysterically and sobbing" (15). Soon the man who operates the shooting gallery runs in, telling Ralph and Aimee that Mr. Bigelow has just swiped a loaded gun. While Aimee joins the search, Ralph returns to his mirror maze. The story ends with Ralph staring at his own image, "a horrid, ugly little man two feet high, with a pale, squashed face" (17). Ralph has ironically become a doppelganger of the man whom he sought to belittle.

There is little doubt that the small man in this story is Ralph Banghart. While we don't know much about Mr. Bigelow's character, we do now that from Aimee's perspective, he has a "big" soul and a "big" brain—in contrast to the narrowness and dullness of Ralph and the others on the carnival pier, including herself. Although it is obvious that the reader is meant to reject Ralph's belittling of Mr. Bigelow, it is more difficult to assess whether Bradbury has himself belittled his dwarf by portraying him through a stereotype—an ugly, lonely, poor, friendless wretch who lives a miserable existence because of his appearance. This story raises the fraught issue of the connection between the anomalous body and self-loathing.

In the introduction to literature course, I wish to expose students to the variety of perspectives in which we can approach literary texts. In addition to

readings that foreground race, feminist, or queer studies perspectives, "The Dwarf" can be used to introduce a body studies or disability perspective. In my disability studies survey, I include a unit on the body (in addition to units that focus on race and gender issues; functional impairments such as blindness and deafness; intellectual disability and mental illness; aging; caregiving; and statutory protections).<sup>2</sup> I assign Andrew Solomon's chapter on dwarfism from his collection of narratives about parents and children with disabilities, *Far From the Tree*. Students are encouraged to watch a documentary or television show about dwarfs, and to discuss their reactions in a posting on the course blog. For those who are new to teaching the topic, I recommend Solomon's chapter on dwarfism or Betty Adelson's essay on "The Changing Life of Archetypal 'Curiosities," as easily accessible background on the lives of dwarfs—progress made, continuing challenges.

There are a variety of texts that can and should be used to offer undergraduates a disability studies approach to American literature. In a recent essay, Sarah Hosey proposes insightful readings of the representation of the disabled subject in Tennessee Williams's play "The Glass Menagerie" (1945) and Flannery O'Connor's short story "Good Country People" (1955). In interpreting these works, older criticism contended that the women's physical flaws were outward signs of character weakness or spiritual deficiency. Hosey offers a disability studies approaches that reinvents outmoded interpretations which approached impairment "as symbolic of internal lack" (23).

Similarly, Bradbury's "Dwarf" represents an opportunity to engage students on the phenomena of stigma. We first discuss the effect of short stature on the dwarf's self-image. We consider the extent to which individuals with bodily difference may feel experience social ostracism or frank discrimination solely

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The readings for the unit on the body include selections from Rosemarie Garland Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies*, Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face*, Nancy Mairs's *Waist High in a Wheelchair*, and Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People."

because their body differs from that of "a normate." We explore the extent to which literary portrayals reflect, or diverge from, the real-life experience of little people today. Second, I propose that Mr. Big is portrayed with characteristics that may be associated with narcissistic personality disorder. I suggest that Bradbury has used dwarfism as a literary metaphor, a narrative prosthetic device through which Bradbury explores his interest in abnormal psychology.

### The Effect of Stigma on the Dwarf's Self-Image

Dwarfism is the paradigmatic example of a socially constructed disability because most dwarfs can fully participate in normal activities of daily living if the obstacles of physical access barriers and discriminatory attitudes are overcome.<sup>4</sup> Part of the challenge of dwarfism is that given the rarity of achondroplasia, the dwarf is generally surrounded by individuals of taller stature. Because the anomaly is based on appearance, the need to come to terms with one's body image assumes special importance.

It remains a controversial topic whether dwarfs have lower self-esteem than other individuals, and the extent to which family and social attitudes will affect their self-image. Joan Ablon describes the phenomenon of "avoidant behavior," and gives as an example a dwarf who told an interviewer that if she saw another little person she'd "go around the block...I just didn't want to look at that. I couldn't stand to look at myself" (*Little People* 91). It caused a furor when the keynote speaker at a 1976 Congress of French dwarfs told the audience, "When I pass before a shop that reflects my image, I find myself ugly and hate myself." Dr. Betty Adelson, a psychologist and mother of a dwarf child, observes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> This wonderful term, which inevitably invokes comparison to ape-like "primates," was coined by Thomson to describe "a social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings," a figure "outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Dwarfs may suffer from a variety of medical issues including especially skeletal problems. See Adelson, *Dwarfism: Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Profound Short Stature*, chapter 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Quoted by Adelson in Dwarfism: Medical and Psychosocial Aspects (220).

that most self-report studies find that American dwarfs are "reasonably content" (*Dwarfism, Medical and Psychosocial Aspects* 143-45). However, Adelson acknowledges that "no one reports that short children and young adults find it easy to cope with society's reaction," and that males suffer "significant stress at various developmental stages" (147, 148). Parents may react with dismay when they are told by their obstetrician that their child has been born a dwarf; much depends on how the news is given and whether support is provided (Ablon *Living with Difference* 16-17). Many dwarfs experience difficulty growing up—taunts from classmates when they are small children, difficulty in dating and exclusion from social events as adolescents (Solomon, 115-68). Most dwarf adults have relatively low incomes; they are underrepresented in the professions and more likely to find work in carnivals, circuses, and the entertainment industry. Given limited employment options, some participate in "dwarf bowling" and "dwarf tossing" despite the degradation inherent in being tossed around as if one were a ball.

Like others with anomalous appearance, dwarfs are confronted with the phenomenon of stigma. Stigma is a social identity that in effect represents "a mark of disapproval" which allows "insiders" to draw a line that excludes outsiders to affirm their own presumed superiority (Falk, 17).<sup>8</sup> In his landmark work, Erving Goffman divides stigmas into bodily imperfections, tribal difference, and deviations in conduct and behavior. When there is a discrepancy between "virtual identity" (attributed identity) and "actual identity" (felt identity), identity is "spoiled" (19). The stigmatized person may react to her perceived distance from the norm by experiencing shame or self-loathing or may adopt a compensatory strategy (for example, attributing all failings to the stigmatized condition) (9-10).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> According to a recent study of 189 persons with achondroplasia, only 31% make more than \$50,000 per year (Gollust 450).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The Little People of America have protested such events. "Statement of Little People of America Regarding Proposed Legislation that Repeals Ban on Dwarf Tossing."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The word "stigma" originates in the branding of slaves and derives from the ancient Greek term meaning "to prick."

Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face* illustrates the effect of stigma on an individual has who has been mocked for her anomalous appearance. After undergoing cancer surgery as a child that left her face severely disfigured, Lucy is cruelly taunted by other children: "Hey, girl, take off that monster mask—oops, she's not wearing a mask!" (118). Lucy begins to self-identify as a "freak" (120). She lives her life avoiding mirrors and other shiny surfaces that might reflect her face, and only "comes out" on Halloween. In an effort to change her face that has determined her physical, social, and psychological identity, she undergoes multiple painful surgeries in an effort to improve her (self-)image. "When my face gets fixed, then I'll start living" (221). Her body determines her destiny, as she is the victim of prejudice and spoiled identity. After dozens of operations, a final surgery appears to yield a real improvement and friends congratulate her, but Lucy continues to feel ugly and experience self-loathing.<sup>9</sup>

There have been some compelling literary portrayals of the self-loathing that can result from stigma associated with short stature. In *Gulliver's Travels*, the eponymous hero enters other worlds where his presumed "normal" height of six feet is perceived as anomalous. Gulliver literally lords it over the Liliputians, among whom he becomes a Nardac, and drives a coach in four. However, in Brobdingnag, the Land of the Giants, Gulliver experiences terror when he is menaced by supersized animal threats and enormous humans: "As human Creatures are observed to be more Savage and cruel in Proportion to their Bulk, what could I expect but to be a Morsel in the Mouth of the first among these enormous Barbarians who should happen to seize me?" (75). Here Gulliver confronts the type of obstacles that complicate the lives of small and disabled individuals when he is too short to pass through tall hedges and to climb giant

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The tragic epilogue is Grealy's death by heroin overdose. For discussions of the effect of stigma on Grealy as reflected in her Autobiography, see Mintz, "Writing as Refiguration" and Brown, "Scripting Wholeness."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See the discussion of images of dwarfs in art, literature, television and film in Adelson's *Lives of Dwarfs*, chapters 7, 8, and 9.

steps (74). He is bestialized as a "Toad," a "Spider," an "Insect," and a "splacknuck" (77, 123). When Gulliver falls in muck, he becomes a laughing stock at court: "all the Mirth, for some Days, was at my Expence" (112). Gulliver's experience shows what it is like to be mocked for a non-conforming body. He reflects that in Lilliput he was regarded as "the greatest Prodigy that ever appeared"; it is "a mortification" to "appear as inconsiderable in this Nation [the land of the Giants], as one single Lilliputian would among us" [the English] (74-75). When a cruel farmer displays him in a freak show, Gulliver is subject to the "ignominy" of being shown with monsters (85).

Dwarfs have been prominent among the "freaks" on display at sideshows from Bartholomew Fair through Barnum and Bailey. 11 As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has observed, the identities of the individuals on display were reduced to an overriding bodily anomaly:

On the freak show stage, a single, highlighted characteristic circumscribed and reduced the inherent human complexity of such figures as the Dwarf, the Giant, the Bearded Woman, the Armless or Legless Wonder, and the Fat Lady (61).

The staging was designed to "exaggerate the ostensible difference and the perceived distance between the viewer and the showpiece on the platform" and imposed on the freak "the silence, anonymity, and passivity characteristic of objectification" (62). Leslie Fiedler writes that the freak show was intended to be "therapeutic" and "cathartic"; human oddities who "respond to our basic insecurities" by reassuring the viewer that it they who are the freaks: "Nor you. *Not you!*" (31). As David Gerber comments, because many individuals in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Display of freaks was especially popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, declining in the early twentieth century until its final demise in the 1940s. Robert Bogdan uses the word "freak" not to denote individuals with certain physical conditions, but to describe "a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people" (35).

freak show performed no act or feat, the only purpose of the gawking was to mock the odd body: "We are left with a likelihood that a large dose of contempt, mockery, or hunger for bizarre spectacle lay behind the popularity of the freak show" (46).<sup>12</sup>

Ralph Banghart in effect organizes his own private freak show, with Mr. Bigelow as the object of his contemptuous gaze. Ralph is typical of the freak show voyeur—on the social margins, personally insecure, with an ego that needs bolstering from staring at one whose body is perceived as inferior. Although the freak show is a thing of the past, it remains the case that dwarfs are frequently victimized by the voyeuristic curiosity of strangers who stare at them as if they were curiosities in a side show. Tom Shakespeare, a disability activist who is also a dwarf, complains:

Restricted growth is pretty rare, and people never seem to get over their curiosity about dwarfs. Like everyone else with a visible impairment, we get stared at all the time - and not just by children. Total strangers think it's perfectly acceptable to come up to us and ask intrusive questions. You always know when some daft enquiry is coming your way, because it's prefaced by the immortal words, "I don't mean to be funny, but ..." And no, my sex life is none of your business.

Shakespeare is often asked "whether it would be a good idea to make a film about (deep breath); dwarfs and sex, dwarfs and pantomime, famous dwarfs, sad dwarfs, happy dwarfs, dwarfs getting their legs lengthened, dwarf actors, dwarf teenagers, and dwarf babies." Shakespeare observes that most of these are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Gerber opposes Bogdan's suggestion that the freak show was founded upon the willing participation of those displayed, who found value and status in their role as human exhibits; for Gerber, given the marginalization and oppression that so-called freaks encountered, one cannot speak of free choice.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Freak shows were especially popular with those on the social margins including the working class and less prosperous rural people who were threatened by immigration, emancipation, and other perplexing social trends (Thomson *Extraordinary Bodies* 65).

motivated by "voyeuristic curiosity" and a desire for high ratings. He urges that the media give dwarfs a break and "stare at someone else for a change."

There is a complexity to the portrayal of Mr. Bigelow here because despite his "ugly" appearance and short stature. Ralph is jealous of the dwarf. From Ralph's perspective, his beloved (Aimee's name is, of course, a tautology) has developed too keen an interest in Mr. Bigelow. Under René Girard's theory of triangular desire, an object of desire stands at the apex of a triangle and commands the competing interest of two rivals. 14 If we apply the model of triangular desire to Bradbury's story, Ralph is the subject, Aimee the object, and Mr. Bigelow is the rival. Yet there is little evidence that Aimee is sexually attracted to Mr. Bigelow or that he reciprocates her regard. Ralph teases Aimee about her interest in "Charles Boyer, or is it Cary Grant?" (11); he is too dense to understand that Aimee's attraction to Mr. Bigelow is not physical and that she might admire a person for reasons unrelated to his appearance. Aimee's real interest in the dwarf is that he has a "soul" and "brains"—she tells Ralph that "Mr. Bigelow is something we can never be, you and me...we got the bodies but he's got the brains and can think things we'll never guess" (10). When Mr. Bigelow writes murder mysteries, he may be trying to exercise a subjectivity after a lifetime of objectifying treatment. By becoming a writer of detective stories, Mr. Bigelow has adopted, or "self-fashioned" a more glamorous life, in which he can imagine himself in other roles, as a detective or even as a murderer. Although not a dwarf, Bradbury was himself a man of short stature; his family nickname

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See De Angelis for a discussion of Girard's theory of triangular desire. Sandra Cavender has noted that triangular desire figures in two of the finest literary portrayals of hunchbacks, Quasimodo in Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and Cousin Lymon in Carson McCullers's *Ballad of the Sad Café*. As a child, Bradbury was "profoundly affected" by viewing Lon Chaney's production, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Mogen 2).

was "Shorty" (Eller *Becoming Ray Bradbury* 10). Bradbury wrote two detective stories that feature a diminutive sleuth who uses his brains to outwit criminals.<sup>15</sup>

Mr. Bigelow's murder mystery begins with a line that links physical and criminal identity: "I am a dwarf and I am a murderer. The two things cannot be separated. One is the cause of the other" (8). Mr. Bigelow's fictional dwarf continues to recount in the bitterest terms his dysfunctional upbringing and humiliating treatment when he became an adult:

They [his parents] kept me like a porcelain vase, small and treasured, to themselves, in our ant world, of beehive rooms, our microscopic library, out land of beetle-sized doors and moth windows. Only now do I see the magnificent size of my parents' psychosis! (9)

When his parents die, the dwarf is alone, "tossed out into a world of Monsters and Titans,<sup>16</sup> caught in a landslide of reality, rushed, rolled, and smashed to the bottom of the cliff" (9). Desperate as he is, "a job with a sideshow was unthinkable" (9). Mr. Bigelow's fictional dwarf explains that "the man I murdered" was a "persecutor of my flesh and soul" who would "stop me on the street, pick me up in his arms" and croon "Rock-a-bye Baby" (8). We infer that Mr. Bigelow is drawing on his own experience when he narrates his abnormal childhood, his lack of preparedness to cope in a world of giants, and his experience in being infantilized as an adult.<sup>17</sup> It is painful to realize that the one thing that the protagonist of this nested dwarf narrative most fears is to find himself on display in a side show. As a proud and private man, Mr. Bigelow's worst nightmare was realized when he became a spectacle for Ralph's mocking gaze.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Douser, Bradbury's very short detective, appeared in two 1944 stories, "Half-Pint" and "Four-Way Funeral," in *A Memory of Murder*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> This world "of monsters and titans" recalls the frightening Land of the Giants in *Gulliver's Travels*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> It is highly offensive, of course, to treat adult dwarfs as if they were children (Adelson *The Lives of Dwarfs* 96).

Bradbury's contempt for Ralph is obvious: he has cruelly mocked, and perhaps driven to suicide, simply because the odd dimensions of his body rendered Mr. Bigelow vulnerable. At the beginning of the story, Aimee muses: "I always wonder what it's like to be a dwarf. I always feel sorry when I see him" (4). The story seems to answer the question that Aimee poses by presenting the life of a dwarf as piteous and miserable. Mr. Bigelow is doomed by his body to a wretched existence; he can only escape his misery through the fantasy of magical mirrors that give him the illusion of a normal height.

#### Bradbury's Dwarf as a Portrayal of Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Ovid's myth of Narcissus relates the fatal attraction of self-love as Narcissus's longing for the beautiful boy in the mirror causes him to ebb away. However, when a fairy-tale dwarf looks into the mirror, he is horrified at the image that is reflected back—a reaction that may be fatal. Thus, in Oscar Wilde's dark tale, "Birthday of the Infanta" (1889), a poor dwarf who has grown up in remote woods is brought to court as a novelty to perform at a birthday party for the Infanta. "Unconscious of his own grotesque appearance" (239), the dwarf is mocked by the audience but he delights the young princess. When she invites the dwarf back to the palace to give a second performance, the dwarf, who has fallen in love with the Infanta, fantasizes that she will run away with him to the forest. In one of the rooms of the Palace, however, the dwarf encounters a strange object—a mirror that to his horror displays "the most grotesque monster he had ever beheld. Not properly shaped, as all other people were, but hunchbacked, and crooked-limbed, with huge lolling head and mane of black hair" (255). Realizing he is the "monster" in the mirror, the dwarf gives a "cry of despair," collapses, and lies immobile on the floor (246). As the spoiled Infanta stamps her foot and tells the dwarf to get up and dance, her courtiers tell her that he has died "because his heart is broken" (247). The princess responds that in the future, those sent to amuse her should "have no hearts" (247). Wilde's Infanta is a precursor to Ralph Banghart's own solipsism and hard-heartedness.

Both of them are preoccupied with their own amusement; the dwarf is not a human being, but a freak putting on a performance.

As in Wilde's tale, Mr. Bigelow's identity is determined, indeed over-determined, by the image that he sees in the mirror. Initially Mr. Bigelow seeks the mirror maze because its distorting glass enhances size. Typically the mirror reflects objective reality; the twist here is that Mr. Bigelow locates a carnival mirror designed to present an ideal image. Because it is so size-dependent, Mr. Bigelow's fragile ego shatters like broken glass when Ralph sadistically substitutes a minimizing mirror. While the story's ending is opaque, it appears that Mr. Bigelow has grabbed a loaded pistol from the shooting gallery and run off with the objective of ending his life.

How should we interpret Mr. Bigelow's nightly visits to the size-enhancing mirror in the carnival maze? It is not a matter of mere vanity, <sup>18</sup> but an obsessive desire to escape a body that he has come to loathe. I suggest that Mr. Bigelow is presented as having a narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). As we have seen, in Mr. Bigelow's murder mystery, his protagonist tells us about his traumatic childhood—locked in a miniature make-believe world where everything was small except for "the magnificent size of my parents' psychosis!" (18). Bradbury was intrigued by Freud's theories, which are worked into much of his fiction, especially the *October Country* collection (Eller 99-103).

"The hallmark of narcissism," as described by Victoria Hamilton, is "a preoccupation with one's image in the context of acute interpersonal insecurity": "The image in the mirror is used as an antidote to feelings of fragmentation and insignificance" (123). Often in literature and films, the protagonist's glance in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> In Bradbury's dark carnival novel, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962), Miss Foley, a fifty-year old school teacher, is trapped in a dangerous mirror maze by her desire for lost youth, and ultimately transformed into a little girl utterly estranged from her community. Wayne Johnson writes that those who are tempted by the dark carnival and "the attractions of sex, vanity, or eternal youth" are "doomed to live out the consequences in some way," as happens to Miss Foley who "winds up as a little girl with a woman's mind" (103).

mirror becomes a moment of epiphany, when one realizes one's true identity (as homosexual, as criminal, and so forth). For Mr. Bigelow, the image in the mirror is not his true identity but rather the ideal body image for which he longs. Individuals with narcissism frequently seek to avoid threatening feelings of inferiority and insufficiency through "grandiose fantasies" in which they change themselves to compensate for perceived or experienced defects (Ronningstam 76-78). I caution my students that "The Dwarf" should not be read as a precise textbook depiction of NPD; for example, Mr. Bigelow is not portrayed as exploitive or lacking in empathy. <sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Mr. Bigelow is portrayed as trying to make himself more grand in the semantic meaning of the word, to become large, imposing, important. He is ashamed of his real height and dependent on the externality of the mirror to bolster his fragile self-esteem. He exhibits an unstable view of self that fluctuates between admiration and contempt depending on the image in the mirror.

Although the Creature whom Victor Frankenstein creates in Mary Shelley's famous novella is super-sized, *Frankenstein* (1818) represents an important inter-textual reference. The Creature had been abandoned by his "father" Victor; repulsed by the De Laceys, a loving family whom he had in effect tried to "adopt"; and abused by every stranger whom he encounters. When the Creature looks at himself in a crystal pool he experiences disgust at his image and a recognition of the antipathy that he inspires: "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" (90). In the Lacanian

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-IV-TR, defines NPD as a pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy as indicated by five (or more) of the following characteristics: a grandiose sense of self-importance; fantasies of unlimited success, power, beauty or ideal love; belief in his or her "special" or "unique" status; requirement of excessive admiration; sense of entitlement; exploitiveness; lack of empathy; envy; arrogance or haughty behavior.

mirror stage, the infant first develops the ability to recognize his or her own image in the mirror and to identify that image as his or her own reflection. <sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Berman writes that when Frankenstein sees himself in the mirror, he experiences in contrast "no jubilation during the *stade du mirror* scene, no merging with an idealized image. The mirror affects Narcissus and the Creature differently, awakening the former's self-love and the latter's self-hate" (71). The Creature understands that he is doomed by the ugliness of his body to a life of continuing rejection and his response to this rejection is to embark on a path of murder and revenge.

Similarly for Mr. Bigelow, the miniaturizing mirrors that Ralph installed could have triggered a narcissistic rage by stripping the dwarf of any illusion about his appearance and indeed projecting an image of Mr. Bigelow that was even smaller than his true dimensions. Heinz Kohut writes about phenomenon of narcissistic rage:

Narcissistic rage occurs in many forms; they all share, however, a specific psychological flavor which gives them a distinct position within the wide realm of human aggressions. The need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply anchored, unrelenting compulsion in the pursuit of all these aims which gives no rest to those who have suffered a narcissistic injury—these are features which are characteristic for the phenomenon of narcissistic rage in all its forms and which set it apart from other kinds of aggression. (Kohut 380)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Lieve Spaas writes: "Since the child is in fact identifying with an image which is both self (his/her own reflection) and other (merely a reflection), the mirror stage can be seen to prefigure the whole dialectic between alienation and subjectivity which is basic to the human condition" (125).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> See also Kernberg, Severe Personality Disorders and Aggression in Personality Disorders and Perversions.

Suicide is the ultimate self-directed aggression: narcissistic rage attacks can arise from humiliating or threatening experiences. Elsa Ronningstam observes:

With regard to NPD, there is clinical agreement that narcissistic patients are prone to suicidal behavior. C. J. Perry (1990) noted that the extreme vulnerability to loss of self-esteem coupled with dysphoria in response to failure, criticism and humiliation should put these individuals at high risk for suicide attempts (p. 159). One study (Apter et al., 1993) found that as many as 23.3% of young males who committed suicide had a diagnosis of NPD.... For the narcissistic patient, suicidality serves as an inner regulator, that is, to compensate for loss of self-esteem and impaired affect regulation—intolerance or impaired capacity to process affects, especially feelings of rage, shame, and inferiority. (180)

Murder can occur as an act of "malignant narcissism" in response to the pain of chronic humiliation. <sup>22</sup> Because "The Dwarf" is a nested story, Bradbury is able to write two accounts of the effect of a dwarf's narcissistic rage: Mr. Bigelow's presumed suicide and the murder committed by Mr. Bigelow's literary protagonist.

Tobin Siebers writes that it is damaging to forge a connection between psychological disorders and disabilities and to "automatically assume" that people with disabilities are "narcissistic" (47-48). Arguably, Bradbury has reinforced the supposed linkage of disability with narcissism in this story. According to David Mitchell, metaphors of disability "extrapolate the meaning of a bodily flaw into cosmological significance" (25). Thus, blindness may represent

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ronningstam discusses the studies investigating murder as an outcome of NPD: Murder as an act of malignant narcissism has been studied by Stone (1989), who associated murderous feelings with the pain of being chronically humiliated or feeling like a nobody, or with the experience of being rejected and abruptly losing status. Malmquist (1996) described the dynamics of narcissistic killing as a righteous act of retaliation, a desperate effort to gain control, and to protect and raise self-esteem. (107).

our inability "to see into the future"; deafness may represent "a refusal of leaders to listen to their constituencies"; diabetes may "conjure up a gluttonous commodity culture" (25). In a similar fashion, I argue that Bradbury has used the dwarf's deformity as a crutch to explore NPD, a syndrome in which he had a significant intellectual interest and in which he inspiration for his creative talent.<sup>23</sup>

On the one hand, Bradbury exhibited sympathy for a man who is mocked for his small stature. "The Dwarf" portrays his tormentor Ralph as a mean man—cruel, low, and contemptible—because he belittled the dwarf. Nevertheless, Bradbury's portrayal of the dwarf is problematic from a disabilities perspective. The dwarf's obsession with the size-enhancing mirror reflects (the pun is unavoidable) the author's own views that small stature is a misfortune, that a dwarf may be ugly, that the life of the dwarf is wretched, and that because of his low self-esteem, if provoked the dwarf could harm himself or others out of narcissistic rage.

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While "The Dwarf" tells the story of a freak's quest to look normal, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* tells about normal people who are transformed into freaks when they succumb to the temptations of the carnival—in effect a contrapasso suitable to their shortcomings. Mr. Dark and his evil partner, Mr. Cooger, proceed by supernatural means to transform their victims into captive freaks. The novel includes a relatively minor character, Tom Fury, a man who is initially of normal size who is transformed into an insane dwarf. Fury, a lightning rod salesman who never stays around after selling his rods but "leav[es] others to face the storm," is turned into "a mean ball of grotesque tripes, all self-involved" (219). In *Something Wicked*, as Jonathan Eller and William Touponce observe, the mirror maze captivates individuals who want "a change of body, change of personal environment" into freakish living images of sins—typically sins associated with failure to make common cause with others or narcissism (418).

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