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Christopher Krentz’s *Elusive Kinship: Disability and Human Rights in Postcolonial Literature* (2022) is a thorough interdisciplinary examination of the importance of highlighting disabled fictional characters in the postcolonial Global South through the use of three interdisciplinary fields: postcolonial studies, studies of human rights and literature, and literary disability studies. In his detailed yet concise monograph, Krentz argues that “dynamic postcolonial literature often helps to create the imaginative connection required to implement meaningful human rights and justice for disabled people” (p. 10).

The highpoint of Krentz’s book is his use of literary characters to convey his argument. He draws upon the three aforementioned interdisciplinary fields to historicize and discuss how the characters and their situations are conveyed by the writer and reader. After a detailed introduction, meticulously presented, and the study’s overall presentism in drawing parallels between the state of disabled people in larger twentieth-century postcolonial Global South and the present day, Krentz presents the reality of disabled peoples’ health and medical, social, and cultural fate through several stories in their behind-and-forward histories by using postcolonial literature.

Krentz then jumps right into literary works and subjects that voice detailed, and at times harrowing, depictions of life as a disabled person in the postcolonial Global South. He introduces us to *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Nigerian native and author Chinua Achebe (1930-2013). Following a discussion about the impact of Northern colonialism, Krentz sets up his exploration of the novel and its characters by connecting colonialism to the state of disabled people in the postcolonial Global South—abandoned, ignored, reduced to begging, living one day at a time, and burdened by the fear of death. While discussing cultural views cast upon disabled people and the role of late-nineteenth-century Northern colonization on Igbo society during a time of change, Krentz establishes his theoretical framework for the remainder of the book.
Historical realities surrounding the transition from the colonial world come through in the book. Themes of traditionalism are pitted against the unknown future and the day-to-day realities of living in the postcolonial Global South, especially as a disabled person. Through the lens of disability justice and disabled people, Achebe highlights this sense of uncertainty even in a possibly positively changing period. This is also seen in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), in the discussion of which Krentz introduces readers to the protagonist of the novel, Saleem, one of many children left to a life of impoverishment and begging as a disabled person. Saleem is viewed as being special for having supernatural telepathic powers, which makes him, among other disabled people in the novel, what I term “characters with privileges” due to their disabilities. Krentz explains that this trope is seen throughout literature and history concerning powers possessed by disabled people, often those with physical impairments, to compensate for their permanent frailty. He concludes that such tropes, especially in literature, further stereotypes.

The fourth and fifth chapters of the book center on the ways in which disabled people are often disregarded and discounted in both literature and reality, and the role of empathy on the parts of the author and the reader in the presentation of disabled literary figures. In the fourth chapter, readers are introduced to the “frequent metaphorical significance” of literature when examining disabled people in the postcolonial Global South (p. 85). While this idea is detailed in the first two chapters of the book, Krentz emphasizes that “this metaphorical aspect has often caused critics outside of disability studies to skip over the realistic, material side of disability representation” while explaining and using Clare Barker’s theoretical framework to note that “the two often happen simultaneously” (p. 85). While examining the work of psychiatrist, social philosopher, and Marxist theorist Frantz Fanon (1925-61) in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Krentz uses several disability studies scholars’ works and words to explain the significance of metaphor in postcolonial literature. He highlights that “in some of the best postcolonial literature, authors do employ the trope [of disability] creatively, making it something fresh and new and creating connections between readers and disability” (p. 89). He positions the characters in the first two chapters of the book to explain that, while disability is often used to evoke sympathy, the use of metaphor transports the reader to a larger argument and history where such realities are equated and contextualized to a bigger story about the long-standing ideas of perseverance and the day-to-day realities many people face. Along a precarious line, Krentz balances where metaphor can be used as mysticism or allegory of a larger history and societal realities.

In chapter 5, Krentz focuses on the role of gender in discussions of disability and disabled people in literature. More so than in previous chapters, he leans on theory over literary style to discuss the importance of disability in female authors’ literary works. While focusing on the works of Anita Desai, Edwidge Danticat, Jhumpa Lahiri, and other female writers, Krentz discusses how they convey ideas surrounding caregiving in depictions of disability and daily realities. Much like gender studies, disability studies grew from a larger civil and human rights movement throughout the world during the 1960s and 1970s.

The book concludes with a discussion about the limits of disability rights in society, a focus that forms a precise bookend to a book that began by discussing a 2012 story about disabled Africans and the African Youth with Disabilities Network’s importance in bringing to light stories of prejudice, hate, and ostracization of disabled people in the postcolonial Global South. Krentz’s expansive sources span numerous fields and employ a large number of recent works in disability studies. The latter is significant because of how expansive the field has become since its emergence from the lin-
guistic change in the social sciences and humanities during its explosion in the mid-1990s.

*Elusive Kinships* is a vital contribution, not just to the interdisciplinary studies on which Krentz centers his argument, but also to educators, historians, and writers because of its emphasis on highlighting and incorporating often-marginalized communities. As a historian and educator, I am always looking for new histories and stories that discuss the likes of the disability rights movement. The stories Krentz focuses upon to negotiate his arguments are literary works that belong in the classroom. As a disabled specialist in African American history and in US South history, I did, however regret the exclusion of the disabled African American experience. While situated in the Global North, it shares many similarities to the those featured in the book during the age that marked the end of colonialism. In chapter 4 of *Elusive Kinship*, Krentz passes up a prime opportunity to include these stories when discussing apartheid. Aside from this one critique, Christopher Krentz’s *Elusive Kinship: Disability and Human Rights in Postcolonial Literature* serves as an important interdisciplinary work that adds to a richer discourse within disability studies and other fields of study.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at [https://networks.h-net.org/h-disability](https://networks.h-net.org/h-disability)

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