
Tracing the transformation of a disabled: A study of ability and inability of a blind Magistrate

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Abstract:

This article explores the remarkable journey of a blind magistrate, delving into the complex interplay between ability and inability within the context of his professional life, focusing on the intricate relationship between his disability and his role within the justice system. The study delves into the character's transformation, exploring how his blindness both challenges and redefines traditional perceptions of ability and Justice. The study also challenges conventional notions of disability and highlights the adaptive strategies that enabled him to overcome significant barriers in a highly demanding legal environment. Through a detailed examination of his experiences, the article sheds light on the broader implications for inclusivity and accessibility within the judiciary, ultimately offering a nuanced perspective on what it means to be "able" or "disabled" in a profession traditionally associated with sight. The article also reveals how the magistrate's journey underscores broader themes of resilience, adaptation, and the reimagining of Justice from a perspective that transcends physical limitations.

Keywords: Explore, Blind magistrate, disabled, Investigate, Challenges, perspective, Transcend

Introduction:

Lennard Davis, a disability activist, states in *The Disability Studies Reader* (2006): We believe that society is responsible for the disablement of physically disabled individuals. Disability is a societal construct that is placed on our physical or mental limitations, leading to our unnecessary segregation and exclusion from complete involvement in society (287). When we talk about the present novel is set in 18th-century London, where Sir John Fielding, a blind magistrate, and his assistant Jeremy Proctor are drawn into investigating a murder in the slums of the city. Fielding, along with his older half-brother Henry Fielding (the famous novelist and magistrate), established the Bow Street Runners in 1749. The story begins with the discovery of the body of a young boy brutally murdered in one of London's impoverished neighborhoods. Sir John, despite his blindness, possesses sharp powers of observation and deduction, which he employs to unravel the mystery surrounding the boy's death. Sir John Fielding is a fascinating character based on a real-life individual who, despite being blind, was famous for his ability to recognize criminals by their sounds. Fielding's strong sense of Justice and distinct detective abilities make him a unique and compelling detective figure in mystery fiction. According to Sharada Devi V. "The disabled community is one among the several marginalized sections all over the world. A large number of people with disabilities still are confined within the four walls of their homes in India." But in the case of Sir John, it is found different. As Sir John and Jeremy delve into the investigation, they encounter a wide array of characters from different social classes, each with their own motives and secrets. They navigate through the seedy underbelly of London society, uncovering layers of corruption, deceit, and intrigue. Simi Linton, a theorist in disability studies, says, "Disabled people are to be acted on, shaped, and turned out as best as can be done to fit into the existing social structure" (Linton, 2005, 519). Throughout their investigation, Sir John and Jeremy face numerous challenges and dangers, including threats to their own lives. However, their determination to uncover the truth and deliver Justice drives them forward. As the plot unfolds, the duo follows a trail of clues that leads them to confront powerful figures within London's elite circles. Along the way, they must navigate through a maze of lies and deception to uncover the identity of the murderer and bring them to Justice.

In *Blind Justice*, a biography by Bruce Alexander, Fielding's legal and social reform efforts are presented as milestones in justice reform. The book demonstrates how Fielding's perspective as a disabled person may have fueled his sense of Justice and empathy, which helped him shape more humane approaches to law enforcement. This aligns with contemporary views on disability inclusion, which argue that diverse perspectives often drive innovation and societal improvements. Some modern disability scholars, like Lennard J. Davis, argue that celebrating figures like Fielding risks putting undue pressure on disabled individuals to "overcome" their

impairments, which can obscure systemic challenges they face. In this view, the narrative of triumph can sometimes shift focus away from the need for societal support and accessible infrastructure. Nonetheless, Fielding's story remains inspiring, as he thrived not by masking his disability but by adapting to it, pushing for broader social acceptance. Alexander's novels are well-researched, with meticulous attention to historical details. He paints a vivid picture of 18th-century London, depicting the city's legal system, social classes, and criminal underworld. *Blind Justice* is not only a gripping mystery but also a vivid portrayal of life in 18th-century London, with its stark divides between the rich and the poor and its rampant corruption and injustice. The body is used as the foundation when illustrating a disability. Comparison of views on the human body from the past and the future, how society constructs and shapes the story, as well as how it perceives the body—particularly the disabled body—of impairment. The way that disabilities are portrayed has changed over time, moving from illustrating the barriers that each person has when trying to assimilate with the larger community, as demonstrated using a number of disability models or paradigms. These models with disabilities are seen as obedient subjects of social rules. According to their symbolic paradigm, Disability is viewed as a form of retribution for our past transgressions. People with impairments were either seen as divine punishments or as wonderful signs from God during the Middle Ages. People who were disabled were often seen with surprise and wonder throughout the Renaissance or Enlightenment era. Through the eyes of Sir John Fielding and Jeremy Proctor, readers are transported to a time and place filled with danger, intrigue, and suspense.

Fielding lost his sight in an accident at the age of 19. Despite his blindness, he has developed exceptional senses and honed his other faculties to compensate for his lack of sight. He relies heavily on his acute hearing, keen sense of touch, and sharp intellect to navigate the world around him. In a trial, there was a sudden hubbub in the court; a large man emerged from the crowd to one side and took a place beside the false complainant, where he displayed to him a club of intimidating size. Sir John hammered the court back to order, and leaning forward, he addressed the man before him: "Think you, sir, that because I lack the power of sight, I also lack the power of memory? To one such as myself, the human voice is as sure and distinctive a means of identification as the human face is to the rest. Perchance surer. Mr. Marsden?" Sir John is portrayed as an exceptionally intelligent and perceptive individual. He helped develop a system for disseminating information about criminals across London and other parts of England. He was known for publishing detailed descriptions of wanted criminals and stolen goods in newspapers. This was a precursor to modern criminal intelligence practices. His disability has not hindered his ability to analyze situations and people. He often makes astute deductions based on the information gathered through conversations, sounds, and other sensory input. Despite his disability, Sir

John is fiercely independent. He refuses to let his blindness limit him and actively participates in the investigation alongside his assistant, Jeremy Proctor. He is determined to contribute to society and dispense Justice to the best of his abilities. According to Simi Linton (1998), ableism “includes the idea that a person’s abilities or characteristics are determined by disability or that people with disabilities as a group are inferior to non-disabled people.” Sir John has adapted to his disability by developing various techniques and strategies to overcome obstacles. For example, he utilizes Jeremy as his eyes when needed, relying on Jeremy's descriptions of visual cues to supplement his own understanding of the situation. He is a respected figure in London society, known for his fairness, wisdom, and dedication to Justice. Despite his disability, his reputation precedes him, and people often seek his counsel and assistance in matters of law and order.

His character is a testament to resilience, intelligence, and determination. Despite facing significant challenges due to his blindness, he proves to be a formidable investigator and a beacon of Justice in the tumultuous world of 18th-century London. According to Julia Kristeva (2010), the disabled person opens a narcissistic identity wound in the person who is not disabled; he inflicts a threat of physical or physical death, fear of collapse, and, beyond that, the anxiety of seeing the very borders of the human species explode. And so, the disabled person is inevitably exposed to discrimination that cannot be shared. (Herman 251). On the other hand, Sir John compensates for his lack of sight by relying heavily on his other senses, particularly his acute hearing and sense of touch. He often listens intently to the sounds around him, using them to gather information about his surroundings and the people he interacts with. Additionally, he may use his sense of touch to discern details about objects or individuals, such as feeling the texture of a fabric or the shape of an item. While he is fiercely independent, he acknowledges the practical limitations of his blindness and occasionally relies on the assistance of others, such as his assistant, Jeremy Proctor. Mike Oliver (1999) argues that “the social theory that underpins Marxist political economy has far greater transformative potential in eradicating the oppression that disabled people face throughout the world.” Jeremy serves as Sir John's eyes in situations where visual information is crucial, providing detailed descriptions of people, places, and objects to help Sir John form a clearer understanding of the situation. He has developed various techniques and strategies to adapt to his blindness and overcome obstacles. For example, he may use a walking stick to navigate unfamiliar terrain or rely on familiar landmarks and spatial memory to navigate familiar areas. He may also employ verbal cues or ask specific questions to gather information from others, compensating for his inability to rely on visual cues. Despite the challenges posed by his blindness, Sir John is determined to maintain his independence and actively participate in the investigation process. He

refuses to let his disability limit him and demonstrates a strong sense of agency in pursuing Justice and solving mysteries.

A person who lacks autonomy—that is, who is not independent and who is unable to act or think in a way that makes sense to them—is considered crippled. People with disabilities are frequently seen as a financial drain on their families and a cause of shame. It's a common misconception that people with impairments are irrational and incapable of making decisions for them, leaving them permanently dependent on assistance. Sir John Fielding's expression of his blindness reflects a combination of adaptation, reliance on other senses, and determination to overcome obstacles, showcasing his resilience and resourcefulness in navigating a world primarily experienced through sight. Throughout the novel, Sir John Fielding demonstrates a track record of successful investigations. He has earned a reputation as a skilled magistrate and investigator known for his fairness, wisdom, and dedication to Justice. His previous successes lend credibility to his methods and approach to solving crimes. He often makes astute deductions based on the information gathered through conversations, sounds, and other sensory input. His ability to analyze situations and people allows him to uncover clues and piece together the truth behind complex mysteries. Sir John pays meticulous attention to detail, carefully considering all available evidence and information in his investigations. He does not overlook any potential leads or inconsistencies; instead, he methodically examines each aspect of the case to uncover the truth. His thorough approach ensures that no stone is left unturned in his pursuit of Justice. He effectively utilizes the resources at his disposal, including his assistant Jeremy Proctor, the Bow Street Runners, and other contacts within London society. He collaborates with others to gather information, conduct interviews, and follow up on leads, maximizing his chances of solving the case. He approaches each investigation with a commitment to fairness and integrity. He seeks to uncover the truth and administer Justice impartially, regardless of the social status or background of those involved. His dedication to upholding the principles of Justice inspires confidence in his investigative techniques.

Despite being blind, Sir John possesses keen observational skills. He listens closely to conversations, paying attention to tone, cadence, and any subtle cues that may indicate deception or hidden motives. He also relies on his acute sense of touch to gather information about objects and people, discerning details that others might overlook. He then uses deductive reasoning to analyze the information he has gathered, piecing together clues and forming hypotheses about the nature of the crime and the identity of the perpetrator. He conducts thorough interviews with witnesses and suspects, asking probing questions to elicit information and uncover

inconsistencies in their accounts. He listens carefully to their responses, noting any discrepancies or changes in behavior that may indicate guilt or deception. By carefully questioning individuals involved in the case, Sir John is able to gather valuable information and gain insight into the events surrounding the crime.

He collaborates closely with his assistant, Jeremy Proctor, as well as other members of the Bow Street Runners and contacts within London society. He delegates tasks and assigns roles to his assistants based on their strengths and areas of expertise, leveraging their skills and knowledge to further the investigation. By working together as a team, Sir John and his associates are able to pool their resources, share information, and coordinate their efforts to solve the mysteries at hand. He pays close attention to physical evidence found at the scene of the crime, such as fingerprints, footprints, and other forensic clues. He relies on the expertise of forensic experts and other specialists to analyze this evidence, providing valuable insights that help narrow down the list of suspects and corroborate witness testimony. Sir John's careful examination of physical evidence contributes to the overall understanding of the crime and its circumstances. "You'll recall, Jeremy," he said to Jeremy Proctor, "that Lord Goodhope's face bore powder burns." "One side of his face was dark as any blackamoor's." "So it must be with a pistol of such power fired at such close range," he explained. "It takes considerable black powder to propel a ball the size of the one Mr. Bailey dug out of the wall. With the ball comes also a great quantity of black powder: enough to be-soot his face complete." "Well, if powder comes out the front of the pistol along with the... ball, then some of it must also leak out the back: I mean to say, it's an explosion inside that makes the ball go. Isn't that how guns work?" Critics often praise the detective's reliance on physical evidence as a hallmark of rational and systematic inquiry in crime fiction. Tzvetan Todorov, in his essay *The Typology of Detective Fiction*, emphasizes that the detective's examination of physical clues aligns with the genre's emphasis on logic and order, contrasting with the chaos of the crime itself. He argues that this methodical approach serves to reassure the reader of the eventual restoration of Justice and order. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, in their analysis of the genre in *Detecting Texts*, suggest that the detective's scrutiny of physical evidence also engages the reader, who becomes an active participant in the crime-solving process. This collaboration enhances the narrative's depth and credibility, grounding the story in observable reality. Sir John recognizes the importance of understanding the social context in which the crime occurred. He considers factors such as class, status, and power dynamics, recognizing how these elements may influence the motives and behaviors of those involved. By contextualizing the crime within the broader social landscape of 18th-century London, Sir John is able to uncover underlying motivations and connections that may not be immediately apparent. Scholars such as John Scaggs in *Crime Fiction* explore the significance of scientific reasoning in

detective work. Scaggs notes that figures like Sherlock Holmes and their successors often embody the Enlightenment ideal of reason and empirical observation. A "careful examination of physical evidence" reflects this intellectual tradition, ensuring that conclusions are drawn from facts rather than intuition or superstition.

Fielding's investigation technique involves astute observation, deductive reasoning, collaborative effort, analysis of physical evidence, and an understanding of social context to unravel the main mysteries and bring justice to those involved. Readers can believe in Sir John Fielding's investigation technique due to his proven track record, sharp intellect, attention to detail, effective use of resources, and commitment to fairness and integrity. "Before we left on our second visit, you asked Lady Goodhope if her lord was left-handed or right-handed. What was the importance of that?"

"Considered it. If he had been right-handed, the wound just to the right of the bridge of the nose and the path of the ball diagonally to the left into the brain would have come quite naturally. But for a left-handed man to achieve the same wound with the same result, it would have been necessary to hold the pistol at a most unnatural angle, perhaps even to pull the trigger with the thumb. You see? Possible, but unlikely." His approach to solving crimes is methodical, thorough, and ultimately effective, making him a credible and compelling protagonist in the world of historical mysteries.

Despite his intelligence and capabilities, Sir John's blindness restricts his ability to move independently in the world. He often relies on others for assistance in navigating unfamiliar environments, which can be a source of frustration and dependency. In 18th-century society, individuals with disabilities, including blindness, were often viewed with skepticism and prejudice. Some people may doubt Sir John's abilities as a magistrate and investigator due to his blindness, questioning his competence and credibility. Sir John relies heavily on his assistant, Jeremy Proctor, as well as other individuals, to provide visual descriptions and assistance in various tasks. While Jeremy is loyal and trustworthy, Sir John's dependency on others for crucial information and support can make him vulnerable to manipulation or exploitation by unscrupulous individuals. His inability to see poses challenges in accessing visual information, such as written documents, visual cues, or facial expressions during interviews. This limitation may hinder his ability to gather comprehensive information and fully understand certain aspects of the investigation. His blindness may subject him to social stigma and discrimination from those who perceive disability as a sign of weakness or inferiority. Despite his accomplishments and intellect, he may still encounter individuals who underestimate or dismiss him based on his disability, further complicating his interactions with others in society.

Despite these social constraints, Sir John Fielding demonstrates resilience, determination, and resourcefulness in overcoming the challenges posed by his blindness. He leverages his other senses, intelligence, and support network to effectively carry out his duties as a magistrate and investigator, earning the respect and admiration of those around him.

The literary significance of Sir John Fielding's character being blind adds depth and complexity to the novel in several ways: Sir John's blindness serves as a powerful symbol of the obstacles and challenges faced by marginalized individuals in society. His disability becomes a metaphor for the injustices and inequalities prevalent in 18th-century London, highlighting the struggles of those who are often overlooked or dismissed due to their differences. His blindness contributes to his character development, shaping his worldview, values, and approach to life. Despite facing significant limitations, he demonstrates resilience, determination, and adaptability in overcoming obstacles and pursuing Justice. His disability adds layers of nuance and complexity to his character, making him a compelling and multi-dimensional protagonist. His perspective as a blind protagonist offers readers a unique lens through which to experience the story. His heightened senses and keen observation skills provide insights into the world around him, offering a fresh and compelling narrative perspective that challenges traditional perceptions of disability. His blindness allows the novel to explore themes of perception, truth, and Justice in nuanced ways. His reliance on senses other than sight prompts readers to reconsider the nature of perception and the ways in which individuals construct their understanding of reality. Additionally, his commitment to upholding Justice despite his disability underscores the novel's exploration of moral and ethical principles. His character serves as a form of representation for disabled individuals in literature, offering a portrayal that goes beyond stereotypes and clichés. His intelligence, agency, and accomplishments challenge misconceptions about disability and promote a more inclusive and diverse representation of characters in literature. His blindness contributes to the novel's literary significance by enriching its themes, character development, and narrative perspective. His portrayal as a blind protagonist adds depth, complexity, and authenticity to the story, making it a compelling exploration of Justice, identity, and the human experience.

Fielding's blindness is differentiated from that of an average person in several ways: He compensates for his lack of sight by developing heightened senses of hearing, touch, and smell. He relies on these senses to gather information about his surroundings and the people he interacts with, often noticing details that sighted individuals might overlook. Tobin Siebers emphasizes the ideology of the ability: "The ideology of ability makes able-bodiedness compulsory, enforcing it as the baseline of almost every perception of human intention, action, and condition and tolerating exceptions only with difficulty. Ability appears unmarked and invisible

because it is the norm, while disability, as an affront to ability, feels the full and persistent force of an ideological impulse to erase from view any exception to ability.”

He asserts, “You are right, boy: just a detail. But in matters of Murder, it is good to collect as many details as we can. It’s the weight of evidence that proves guilt, seldom one fact alone.” He has adapted to his blindness by developing alternative techniques and strategies for navigating the world. He may use a walking stick or rely on tactile cues to move around, demonstrating a high level of adaptability and resourcefulness in overcoming obstacles. His blindness does not define him solely as a disabled individual; rather, he is a highly skilled magistrate and investigator who happens to be blind. His expertise in law enforcement and his keen intellect set him apart from the average person, showcasing his abilities and accomplishments despite his disability. Despite facing challenges due to his blindness, Sir John maintains a strong sense of independence and agency. He actively participates in investigations, makes decisions, and exercises authority in his role as a magistrate, demonstrating that blindness does not diminish his ability to lead and make meaningful contributions. Sir John's blindness may lead others to underestimate him or make assumptions about his capabilities based on his disability. However, he consistently proves himself to be capable, competent, and effective in his work, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about blindness and disability in general.

Celebrating historical figures like Sir John Fielding, an 18th-century blind magistrate and social reformer, emphasizes the valuable contributions that people with disabilities can make to society. Scholars like Shani D’Cruze and Louise A. Jackson (2004) note that Fielding’s career exemplifies how creating accessible workplaces can maximize contributions from disabled individuals. His reliance on auditory clues and organized systems demonstrates the value of leveraging diverse abilities in problem-solving and governance. The character of Fielding serves as an inspiring example of how individuals with disabilities can overcome challenges and make significant contributions to society. There are some ways we can encourage and support disabled individuals in our society by highlighting the abilities of characters like Fielding: Sir John's character demonstrates that disabilities do not define a person's capabilities. Critics often highlight Fielding’s story as emblematic of resilience and the capacity to adapt despite physical limitations. Scholar Richard Davenport-Hines describes him as “remarkably astute and observant,” noting that Fielding's sharp intellect and memory compensated for his blindness, enabling him to recognize hundreds of criminals by voice alone. His accomplishments challenge assumptions about disability by showing that individuals can leverage other abilities to excel in demanding roles. By focusing on his intelligence, sharp observation skills, and dedication to Justice, we can emphasize the abilities and strengths of disabled individuals rather than dwelling on their limitations. Critics such as Katherine

Watson (2006) highlight how Fielding's career remains a model for the integration of people with disabilities into high-stakes professions. His adaptations serve as early examples of how societies can include and benefit from diverse capabilities. His success as a magistrate and investigator underscores the importance of creating inclusive and accessible environments for people with disabilities. Historian Norma Landau (1996) argues that Fielding's prominence in the public eye challenged 18th-century stereotypes about the "incompetence" of disabled individuals. His achievements showcased that disability does not preclude leadership or innovation. Fielding's career can be viewed through the lens of modern disability studies, as noted by Tom Shakespeare (2014). His work underscores that systemic changes—such as technological aids, support staff, and modified environments—are critical for enabling the full participation of individuals with disabilities in public and professional spheres. By advocating for accessible infrastructure, accommodations, and assistive technologies, we can ensure that disabled individuals have equal opportunities to participate fully in society and pursue their goals. Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell (2003), in *Digital Disability: The Social Construction of Disability in New Media*, note the transformative role of assistive technologies in reducing barriers. Fielding's methods can be seen as an early example of leveraging available tools to enhance inclusion. His character challenges stereotypes and stigma surrounding disability by portraying a disabled individual who is capable, competent, and respected in his profession. By challenging negative perceptions and promoting positive representations of disability in media and literature, we can help break down barriers and foster greater acceptance and inclusion in society. Fielding's legacy also touches on contemporary disability advocacy. Scholars like Tom Shakespeare emphasize the importance of such historical figures in reshaping public opinion and fostering a culture of acceptance and adaptability. Fielding's life suggests that disabilities need not hinder meaningful societal contributions, underscoring that support and adaptation can empower people with disabilities to pursue their goals fully. Katherine Runswick-Cole and Dan Goodley (2011) highlight the importance of representation in shaping perceptions of disability. Fielding's legacy reinforces the argument for empowering disabled leaders to inspire change. Disabled individuals may face unique challenges in pursuing their aspirations, and it's essential to provide them with the support and resources they need to succeed. This could include access to education, vocational training, employment opportunities, and support networks that offer encouragement, guidance, and assistance. Michael Oliver, a foundational thinker in disability studies, argues that societal attitudes, rather than impairments, are the true obstacles to equality. Fielding's work aligns with this view, as his career reflects how empowerment and opportunity can dismantle stereotypes. Fielding's character exemplifies resilience in the face of adversity, and his story can serve as a source of

inspiration for disabled individuals and the broader community. By celebrating diversity and highlighting stories of triumph over obstacles, we can foster a culture of empathy, understanding, and support for all members of society. By recognizing and celebrating the abilities of characters like Sir John Fielding, we can encourage disabled individuals in our society to embrace their strengths, pursue their passions, and contribute meaningfully to the world around them.

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