

## BOOK REVIEW

### Deaf Characters in Literature

*By Paul Dakin*

Hardback, 180 pages  
Cambridge Scholars Publishing  
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This book has been written by a London general practitioner whose wife was becoming increasingly deaf. Deaf persons were accommodated in this practice with the use of British sign language.

Initially the author reviewed twenty six novels written in English for a Masters Degree in Literature and Medicine at Kings College London. For this book, he then increased the scope to sixty four novels written over 300 years. He notes the 'Granny character' who is shouted at as opposed to being spoken to at higher volume, and discusses the 'Goldilocks' and the 'Gifted' characters. Daniel Defoe is considered to be the first author to include a deaf character in a book ( in 1720 ).

The small hardback is easy to navigate due to proper running headings on each page and the inclusion of numbered references at the foot of each page. Furthermore, the accurate punctuation is pleasing and enables easy reading and comprehension.

The quotes are poignant too. Alison Rowland: 'If blind he would get all of everybody's sympathy ... But the deaf! Are they not completely overlooked and ignored?' and Helen Keller: 'Blindness cuts us off from things but deafness cuts us off from people' and in 2019 Kaminsky: 'the deaf don't believe in silence. Silence is regarded as the invention of the hearing'.

Comics, verse, video, television, drama, film and subtitles all have their space in this major review of deaf characters in literature. The analysis of poetry and examples given are of particular delight for this reviewer. One example is that of John Burnet in 1834:

Yet we were more unfortunate,  
Than ever were the blind!  
Your darkness is but of the eye  
But ours was of the mind.

So is deafness a disability, a handicap? Does it deliver certain advantages for the individual? This theme is explored extensively by the author of this engaging work and readers will assess his evidence and form their own views. Could deafness even represent the beginning of an evolutionary process? And where would that leave music?

**Christopher Gardner-Thorpe**  
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