

Books in Review**Edited by Kathryn Allan and Djibril Al-Ayad***Accessing the Future: A Disability-Themed Anthology of Speculative Fiction.*

Futurefire.net Publishing, 2015, 233 pp, \$16.00

ISBN (print) 978-0-9573975-4-5

Reviewed by **Nahuel Zamponi**

“He told me that before that rainy afternoon when the blue-gray horse threw him, he had been what all humans are: blind, deaf, addlebrained, absent-minded. (I tried to remind him of his exact perception of time, his memory for proper names; he paid no attention to me.) For nineteen years he had lived as one in a dream: he looked without seeing, listened without hearing, forgetting everything, almost everything. When he fell, he became unconscious; when he came to, the present was almost intolerable in its richness and sharpness, as were his most distant and trivial memories. Somewhat later he learned that he was paralyzed. The fact scarcely interested him. He reasoned (he felt) that his immobility was a minimum price to pay. Now his perception and his memory were infallible.”

The fragment belongs to Jorge Luis Borges' *Funes the Memorious* [1], a story about an Uruguayan gaucho, Ireneo Funes, who, after falling off his horse and receiving a bad head injury, was unable to forget even the most insignificant detail about reality (hence became incapable of general, platonic ideas).

Like in Ireneo's tale, in *Accessing the Future* the very concept of disability is put into question: while this anthology places disabled characters at the center of the scene, neither falls into the temptation of reducing the subject to a mere celebration of the moral value in overcoming a physical or mental challenge nor to an ode to advanced prosthetics. Very much on the contrary, the stories portrait self-determined personalities, built upon some disabled dimension of the body or the mind that have forged their own destiny by pushing the limits and weaving alliances.

Among the diversity in *Accessing the Future*,

readers will find stories about subjects that bear physical impairments, like the teenager in “Pirate Songs”, who wakes up in a pirate ship without her wheelchair but still finds a way to gain control of the situation, or the character in “Sense all its Own”, who wants to become the best droid pilot, and in the trying, makes us forget that she's blind. Other stories, instead, will portrait characters with mind disabilities, like the enhanced war veteran from “Pay Attention”, that struggles to find life purpose among the civilians, or the protagonists in “Screens”, whose emotional statuses are no longer a secret. A third category of stories remind us that some life experiences can make us momentarily disabled, like what happens to Sophie in “Better to Have Loved”, after the loss of her life partner. The somewhat basic realization that, under certain circumstances, any person could be considered (by itself or others) disabled in some particular aspect, is an additional insight from some of the stories in *Accessing the Future*.

In this anthology, the future is the excuse to explore diverse scenarios where disabilities could play a role in shaping the very nature of the human body and mind. Contrary to the obvious idea that some future technology will help us overcome any obstacles imposed by our own bodies, *Accessing the Future* brings about narratives of characters whose identities emerge from disabilities. Disabled characters play they central role in the stories, not as survivors of their own destinies, but as identities built upon them. The transversal idea in the anthology is that a “disabled” subject is not just the same subject minus a body part or an ability (physical or mental); on the contrary, it entails a different identity. We (humans) are embodied minds and our bodies (and abilities), far from being simple extensions



Books in Review, continued

of it, are inherent components and producers of it. The identity of the characters is not built before the disability, but as a projection of it onto the universe of possibilities. And here is when it becomes clear that a disability may constitute a disadvantage or a possibility, but it is always an opportunity.

[1] Borges, J L (1944). Ficciones.