

# Ordinary People

## Reading the TransCanadian Terry Fox

In 1980 Canada's economy and political future were both on rocky courses. Never before had Canadians been so cynical and jaded about society. And suddenly, there was this young guy in front of a microphone who was everything you wanted the world to be.  
—Douglas Coupland, *Terry*

In late September each year, Canadians across the country and people around the world<sup>1</sup> gather to run, walk, ride and/or roll in memory of Terry Fox. When asked what motivates people to participate, most refer to Terry Fox as a contemporary Canadian hero. In 2006, Maureen Koziel told *Toronto Star* reporters, “Canadians really need a modern day hero . . . He was an *ordinary* Canadian who did an *extraordinary* thing” (qtd. in Wilkes). In 2005, Terry Fox became the first Canadian ever featured on a circulating coin. Speaking on the occasion of the coin's introduction, David C. Dingwall, President and CEO of the Royal Canadian Mint, conveys indecision about whether Fox is ordinary or extraordinary:

His achievements are a testament to the belief that *ordinary* Canadians, armed with courage, conviction, and a dream, can accomplish truly *extraordinary* things . . . In that spirit, the one dollar coin will help us all remember how an *extraordinary* man came to embody the Canadian spirit. (qtd. in “Royal Canadian”)

This quintessential Canadian hero is revered for many reasons and particularly because he appears to be an everyman attempting an exceptional feat. His accomplishment—to run partway across Canada on one prosthetic and one flesh leg—becomes synonymous with what people want to believe are *Canadian* values of reason, generosity, grit in the face of adversity, and noble independence: in other words, everything Canadians are supposed to want Canada to be.

Whether they witnessed the original run, learned about it in school, participated in a local annual Terry Fox run, saw coverage of the latter, or more

recently heard of the return of the restored support van,<sup>2</sup> most Canadians are familiar with the story: Terry Fox was a remarkably athletic eighteen-year-old when his leg was amputated fifteen centimetres above the knee after it had been ravaged by cancer (osteogenic sarcoma). About two years later, he embarked on what came to be known as the Marathon of Hope—a run across Canada—in order to raise money for a cure for cancer. He made it from St. John's to Thunder Bay where medical tests revealed a recurrence of cancer—this time in his lungs—that forced him to stop. In addition to footage of his swaying gait, what Douglas Coupland calls his “strange hop click thunk step,” across Ontario (the press paid little attention before he reached that province), the Canadian public is familiar with unquestionably touching images of Fox on a stretcher admitting defeat as he leaves his run in an ambulance, but not before openly handing over the torch saying, “I hope that what I've done will be an inspiration and I hope I'll see it now that people will take off and continue where I left off here” (146; “End of the Road”).<sup>3</sup> His invocation has led to these ongoing commemorative fundraising events that not only procure money for cancer research, but also include Canadians across generations in what has turned out to be a figurative relay race.

The typical story of Fox focuses on his illness rather than on his disability, and so I examine in this paper how, in order to build up the myth of his heroism, the widely circulated various forms of the Terry Fox story elide his prosthesis, except to illustrate it as something to be overcome. I place the lionization of Terry Fox in the context of disability studies, a field that seeks to make prostheses highly visible and to refigure the role of disabled people in contemporary society. With disability as a frame, I compile representations of Fox in newspapers and commemorative sites, as well as his appearances in Maxine Trottier's children's picture book *Terry Fox: A Story of Hope* and Douglas Coupland's coffee table book *Terry*. In doing so, I illuminate the ways Fox has been celebrated in Canadian culture and highlight some very clear gaps by revealing what Fox is *not* credited for. This critical perspective also allows for analysis of how the Terry Fox story invites spectators—ordinary Canadians—to feel like participants in his quest, regardless of what theorist of nationalism Benedict Anderson calls “actual inequality and exploitation” (7). That is, through their joint interpretation of this narrative of hope, Canadians feel more tied to an ideal Canadianness even though, in fact, disabled Canadians face innumerable barriers to social inclusion.

Similar to women's studies work on gender, disability studies takes as a basic premise that disabled people share a culture and history of oppression,

resistance, contribution, and creativity. Disability scholars working in humanities disciplines turn to the cultural record to track, record, analyze, and resist pervasive patterns depicting disability as the domain of medical and other helping professions, as a personal deficit, and as an individual problem. Within disability discourse, Terry Fox is a clear though not often cited example of a phenomenon called *super-crip*.<sup>4</sup> That is, he takes on the super-human qualities of impressive athletic achievements—and it would be very difficult to deny that a sequence of daily marathons registers as impressive. Further, he is figured not simply as a remarkable athlete, but as remarkable because he ran on one biological leg. There is little mention of his prosthesis; instead he is most frequently referred to as a “one-legged” runner as though the synthetic limb did not exist.

Super-crip representation, while inspiring, causes harm to circulating conceptions of lived disability in that it reinforces the idea that disabled people can only achieve *despite* their differences and also in that it sets an unreasonably high standard for usual activity on the part of disabled people. In order to win the Terry Fox Humanitarian award (available to secondary and post-secondary students in Canada) one must have

demonstrated the highest ideals and qualities of citizenship and humanitarian service while in pursuit of excellence in academic, amateur sport, fitness, health and voluntary community service [and] reflected those ideals of courage, humanitarianism, service and compassion, which Terry Fox embodied. (“About the Program”)

According to this official description, the award is not given to someone who lacks Fox’s athleticism but faces the barriers he conquered and so requires some humanitarian support. Instead, the recipient must be (super)-normative and beneficent to receive recognition. They do not have to be disabled, but if they are, they need to be a *super-crip*.

Anderson explains that nationalism arose in part after the decline of religions that had provided “imaginative responses” to questions such as “Why was I born blind? Why is my best friend paralyzed? Why is my daughter retarded?” He argues that the “progressive styles of thought” taking the place of religious belief answer such questions with “impatient silence” (10). Intriguingly, all of his examples entail disability, and characterize disability as an unquestionable negative. By providing what Anderson might call a “secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning,” the Fox story—in particular its consistent mode of address—gathers people together through an understanding of what the nation Canada can do and be, in part by offering an imaginative response to the questions that gawkers impose on

disabled bodies (11). Fox's disability, ignored though it is, gains purpose as his story is repeated. His sidelined prosthesis signifies a united Canada.

By reading the Terry Fox legend from the perspective of disability, I do not intend to undermine Fox himself nor his prodigious athleticism, made more poignant by his youth and his early death. Rather than single out Fox, I interrogate a narrative that has latched on to his quest and call into question the ways of reading it as though it is inclusive, when it in fact deliberately excludes most relevant aspects of disability. In particular, I draw attention to the ways in which the super-crip narrative includes a device—asking for a dollar from each Canadian—that invites people to feel like participants in Terry's journey. Terry *was* an ordinary nondisabled (or more accurately, “temporarily-able-bodied” or TAB, as the disability movement puts it) young man, but when he became disabled, he had to become extraordinary. The appeal of the story is Terry's extraordinariness masked by a discourse of ordinariness, and this strategy ironically sidesteps ordinary disabled people. Gathered together into what Anderson would call “horizontal comradeship,” “ordinary people” join forces by collectively cheering Fox on, donating to his charity, and participating in the annual run held in his honour (7). At least once a year, countless Canadians “meet” by re-reading the Fox story, fundraising, running, and/or discovering another book version of his tale and, at least for a time, set aside the “actual inequality and exploitation” that disabled people in Canada ordinarily experience. In doing so, they imagine their part in something extraordinary: namely, fighting illness.

The few book-length accounts of Fox's quest work together to further draw Canadians into a sense of participation, inviting readers to cheer for Terry and collectively feel hope. I will focus here on two picture books about his quest, Maxine Trottier's children's book *Terry Fox: A Story of Hope* (also available in French as *Le courage de Terry Fox*) and Douglas Coupland's adult book *Terry*. By purchasing the books, readers donate to the Terry Fox Foundation, adding to their modest dollar contribution. These books both rely on scrapbook-style images with minimal narrative. This form serves readers who already know the basic story: these readers are invited to make a more intimate connection to the event by flipping through the family photo album. Trottier offers an inspiring narrative that stitches together the pastiche of maps, quotations, and photographs that elaborate on Fox's story. Coupland similarly weaves together photographs but only to convey, support, and flesh out the official story of Fox's run. Readers join the Fox family on a nostalgic journey to the making of a Canadian hero. The works hold

Fox up as the quintessential Canadian, suffering and victorious before adversity, working tirelessly for a cure, and born with the traits that motivated his run. They endorse Terry Fox as the ultimate citizen.

Both Coupland's and Trottier's books are sanctioned and introduced by Terry's brother Darrell Fox who, since 1990, has carefully managed Terry's legacy, limiting access to archival material to those who he feels will do it justice. He has maintained Terry's vision by ensuring that fundraising efforts benefit cancer research rather than offer meagre rewards to those who participate. There are no pink ribbons for Terry Fox. Canadians do not need a lapel pin to connect them because they are united in their joint understanding of a desire to be an everyday Canadian making a difference.

After the prefaces, each book begins by setting up Fox's normative family and childhood. Trottier includes the requisite family photos, a 1964 letter to Santa Claus in which Fox also makes a request for his brother (a detail that the photo caption also notes), team photos from peewee soccer and high school basketball, Fox with a little league trophy, and references to Fox's childhood food preferences (bread and jam). In sum, Fox's childhood is set up as "ordinary": it includes a work-at-home mother who later takes on part-time work outside the home while his father takes on the primary burden of providing for the family. Fox is characterized as generous in his thinking of his brother when compiling his wish list. He is established as having always been athletic. He is recognized as a typical child over whom one's parents shake their heads wondering whether they'll be able to get him to eat a reasonable dinner tonight.

Like Trottier's, Coupland's book portrays the Fox family as a "typical Canadian family of the era" (8) and Fox as "this guy from a typical Canadian suburb" (125). Cancer interrupts the "quiet Canadian middle-class dream, the sort of calm good life that makes us homesick when we're far away" (8). Coupland's book is longer and has more time to refer to Fox as "just an ordinary Canadian guy" (15). Although there is less focus on his childhood, Coupland pushes readers to identify through ordinariness with Fox's extraordinariness. With multiple marketing references to "never-before-seen" photographs, such as the date book in which Terry's mother recorded his medical appointments and amputation surgery, readers are led to believe that they receive an inside view of Terry, a view that helps them to continue investing in his Marathon of Hope. Coupland continually talks about the emotional impact the materials for the book had on him: "I thought that after I'd spent a few hours of sifting [through get-well cards] I'd

become immune to the sentiments expressed inside them, but no, I never did and I doubt I ever will,” and readers are coerced to be equally moved or feel hard-hearted (3).

Coupland captures the sense of Terry’s story as vital to energizing the ordinary citizen and imaginarily uniting the nation, speaking of

names and names and names of everyday Canadians, walls of them—all of them yearning to count, to mean something . . . Collectively, those names testify to something divine—our nation, our home and our soul. (3)

His picture book is aimed at those Canadians who want to reminisce about times of high nationalism, youthful vigour, and bell-bottoms. As the passage demonstrates, Coupland brings the reader into a collectivity of “everyday Canadians,” evoking Fox’s strategy of inviting Canadians to feel like participants by donating a dollar each. Coupland draws on a shared sense of Terry’s united Canada by directly addressing the reading audience as unified in their sentiment, joined through the first person plural possessive “our” as well as the second person and the first person singular. He tells the reader, “there are cards to Terry from *your* mother—*my* mother—so many mothers wrote to Terry” (3, emphasis added).

Trottier and Coupland’s books differ most in the ways in which they fail to capture the disability narrative of Fox’s life. Trottier’s book includes a few details that often stay out of mainstream press coverage and that, only if a reader looks closely enough, hint at the transformation that becoming disabled brings about within family life. She mentions that Fox had to *learn* to walk with the prosthesis. In this throwaway line, knowledgeable readers will recognize what they already had assumed: that rather than miraculously taking up a new physicality, Fox had to struggle through the rehabilitation familiar to the disability community in a process that may separate him from everyday Canadians but distinguishes him as an extraordinary athlete, given what he went on to accomplish. Trottier also notes that he took up a new sport after his amputation: wheelchair basketball. Again, this detail nods to the fact that Fox had to learn a new way of being in the world, having, prior to his cancer, worked hard at improving himself from a mediocre temporarily-able-bodied basketball player to one who was chosen to play on his school team. While she does at least mention the transformations imposed upon newly disabled people, these narrative details are set up as mere “steps” on the way from walking again to running, and especially running across Canada. As a photo caption emphasizes, Fox’s reliance on the tools of rehabilitation was fleeting: “He wouldn’t need those crutches for long” (10).

Coupland ups the ante, speaking of Terry's first foray into road racing post operation:

It's important to remember that in 1979, people with disabilities—or people who were merely different in some way—didn't participate in the everyday world the way they do now. For someone with one leg to enter a race of this length was quite shocking. (29)

Coupland's optimism about the present-day situation of disabled Canadians adds a stress for those contemporary amputees who may still be prevented from participating in the "everyday world," let alone registering for a local fun run. These books that barely call Fox disabled in passing still manage to set up a super-crip normativity that leaves little room for a person who takes more than a month to return home post-amputation and even longer to walk on crutches, and/or does not "progress" to walking without the crutches. They celebrate the contradictory ordinary extraordinariness that makes Terry Fox the ideal Canadian hero in his modesty, determination, and "normal" beginnings.

Fox has not quite achieved the status of "the Greatest Canadian Hero" in that he placed second to Tommy Douglas in the CBC's Greatest Canadian Hero contest, which weakly attempted to fill the gap left by the NHL strike in 2004-05. However, Fox is widely commemorated: notably, in a postmodern reconstruction of Roman arches in Vancouver at BC Place Stadium, which includes a map of Canada and Terry Fox's full-body image etched into polished steel; in a statue at his alma mater, Simon Fraser University; in another statue in quartz and feldspar at the Port Coquitlam Terry Fox library; in a recently vandalized statue in Prince George; in a statue at a Thunder Bay memorial accompanied by a plaque connecting him to stereotypical Canadian symbolism; in a statue on the *Path of Heroes* in Ottawa; and to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the run, in St. John's, a monument made of local slate resembling sails. The youngest recipient of the Companion of the Order of Canada, Fox received British Columbia's highest civilian award, The Order of the Dogwood, the American Cancer Society's highest honour, The Sword of Hope, and was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame. Voted by the Canadian Press Canadian of the Year in 1980 and 1981 and by the Dominion Institute and the Council for Canadian Unity Canada's Greatest Hero in 1999, Fox also appears in *Time* magazine's "Canada's Best." A mountain and a large section of the TransCanada highway are named after him, and he appears on two stamps and two coins. Fox has also had twelve schools named after him.

The commemoration of Terry Fox as a hero in part recreates the very normative ideal that made his disability a problem. Close to the spot where Fox had to stop his run, the statue of Fox in Thunder Bay on the “Terry Fox Courage Highway” depicts a ten-foot tall young runner gazing up to the sky, sweat running down his face, very much an active athletic young man making great strides *in spite of* his disability. This pattern of representation, also displayed on the commemorative coin, puts pressure on disabled people who can rarely convince the general public that their achievements might occur *because of* or even *regardless of* their disabilities. Fox’s accomplishments were monumental as athletic feats, and they were possible *because of* his disability.

Fox explains that he set out to run across Canada motivated by the image of an amputee runner given to him by his coach:

The night before my amputation, my former basketball coach brought me a magazine with an article on an amputee who ran in the New York Marathon. It was then I decided to meet this new challenge head on and not only overcome my disability, but conquer it in such a way that I could never look back and say it disabled me. (Fox)

His quest astonished many because he, like the athlete in the magazine article, was an amputee. While fundraising to eradicate disease became the outcome of his efforts, he claims to have dreamed up the run in order to “conquer” disability, using the language of “overcoming” that disability rights activists resist. He was motivated both by becoming an amputee and also by what he understood disability to mean socially. That is, he wanted to accomplish an unusual physical task in order to show that despite his newfound reliance on a prosthesis, he was not physically hampered and therefore not, in his terms, disabled by his disability. Indeed, it was not his disability but his illness, in his lungs, that stopped his run.

While stories of Fox emphasize his athleticism, his illness, his courage, his youth, and his heroism, they typically only mention his prosthetic leg in passing as part of the cancer that stopped his journey. Fox himself was clear about his goals and that he did not want to be perceived as disabled. He said, “I was not going to let myself be used. There was only one thing I wanted to publicize and that was fundraising for cancer research” (qtd. in “Foundation Policies”). In his own insistent language, his leg functions as a mark of disease more than as a mark of disability; and when it does function as a mark of disability, it is mentioned as a material obstacle to overcome—no different symbolically from the thousands of miles Fox meant to cover (or overcome) in his Marathon of Hope. Even if Fox had succeeded, not just



in crossing Canada but in finding a cure for cancer, he would have lived his life a disabled man, yet this identity is oddly missing from—or abbreviated within—the cultural record.

Instead, in his widespread appearances, Fox is repeatedly hailed as an exemplar of the whole nation and often of the Canadian commitment to a questionable unity. His image is superimposed on maps of the country; assertions of the young man's relationship to a broader polity abound. For example, the St. John's memorial reads, "This slate marks the spot where one man's dream began and where a nation's hope lives on." In this inscription, Fox's idea becomes the nation's salvation. In Thunder Bay, the dedication reads, "Terry Fox inspired an entire generation of Canadians with his determination and devotion, and it was through his strength and commitment that they were united as they had never been united before." Importantly, Fox assumes the role of the inspiring cripple who manages against all odds to take on temporarily the physical attribute of "strength" in order to make Canada whole. Fox is figured as overcoming all odds to fulfill normative ideals of citizenship. The Terry Fox Visitor Centre write-up continues: "It is for such a reason, this monument was designed, joining east with west, depicting all provincial and territorial coats-of-arms and the Canadian emblems of the maple leaf and beaver." Although Fox's journey did not reach the so-called west, that is he had to stop in Ontario, it is significant that his disrupted path symbolizes unity (mentioned twice) and the "joining" of east and west. Most Canadians are so committed to national unity that what could have become a symbol of schism—a clear border between "eastern" and "western" Canada—instead becomes a symbol of national unity. This confirms the power of Fox's own vision of Canada, the degree to which many Canadians want to participate in it, and the necessity to avoid other narratives of Canada as exclusionary and divided.

The same commemoration and patriotism do not cling to the legacy of the most notable figure to take up Terry's torch. In fact, few honour Steve Fonyo, who completed his east- to west-coast Journey for Lives relying on one prosthetic leg. Those who do remember him do not claim him as their hero, and those who did not witness his run are unlikely to learn of it.<sup>5</sup> Not the golden boy that Fox managed to remain, Fonyo is rarely cited and certainly no longer claimed as symbolic of Canadian values. Whereas Fox first received national attention when he reached Ontario, Fonyo was largely ignored in that province, but his run provoked attention once he crossed into Manitoba. It took his successful navigation of the formidable Rogers Pass

to win genuine respect from the Canadian public. The mayor of Revelstoke, Tony Coeuffin, was particularly excited when he exclaimed upon Fonyo's appearance, "This is the greatest day for Canada and Revelstoke since man first walked on the moon" (qtd. in Tierney B5). This presumably exaggerated excitement was soon to fade.

A couple of beaches and running tracks are named after Fonyo, but his impressive run was immediately followed by a number of equally impressive run-ins with the law, including theft, drunk driving, and failing to stop for police. These violations remove him from the pedestal next to Terry Fox and call into question his claim to the "strength and commitment" through which Fox united Canadians. An article in *Maclean's* does compare Fonyo to Fox, but not favourably. The piece describes Fox as "a gifted athlete, university-educated and articulate man of easy charm" while describing young Fonyo as a grade ten dropout who has difficulty expressing himself (qtd. in Tierney B5).

When Fonyo overtook Fox, he unfortunately was quick to make the comparison, providing an example of his difficulties in expressing himself. He began generously, "I just want to say I don't want to beat anybody. I'm just sorry he only got this far." But he concluded with neither Fox's grace nor his eloquence, saying bombastically, "I did a lot of work to get this far. I did a lot of suffering. The other half of the country is mine. Now I'm really making my own path from here." Fonyo's father tries to play down this imperious language, instead pointing out similarities between his son and Fox, using the rhetoric mentioned in my introduction of normalcy tied to achievement, saying, "Steve is just a common boy doing an uncommon thing" (qtd. in Tierney B5). However, the Canadian public focuses more on Fonyo's ordinariness, especially his mundane criminal convictions and middling speaking skills, than on his extraordinary ability to run across the country. To them, no part of the country is Fonyo's, regardless of his accomplishments.

This rejection of Fonyo as extraordinary, despite his achievement of a feat similar to Fox's, highlights what Canadians value most or what values are most commonly associated with being a good Canadian. That is, Canadians forget or set aside Fonyo not because he came second, not because he did not die young, but because as he ages he demonstrates that he is an ordinary guy rather than an ideal citizen. Fox's super-crip image is more readily co-opted into that of an ideal citizen than Fonyo's imperfect cripple image. In *Discourses of Denial*, Yasmin Jiwani explains one ideal type of Canadian citizen:

As a *reasonable person*, especially within the context of law, the ideal typical Canadian is the law-abiding, rational, White, middle-class person who speaks the dominant language and embodies national mythologies that are then performed accordingly. (emphasis added xiii)

Terry Fox, especially in contrast with Fonyo, projects an untarnished image of a law-abiding, rational, White, English-speaking and particularly eloquent citizen who, because of his prostheticization, embodied Canadian fantasies of struggle against adversity and pluck under pressure, as well as national mythologies of unity and strength. As journalist Leslie Scrivener puts it, “Wrapped up in one young man were the qualities of nationhood we [Canadians] love: decency, hardiness, modesty and care for others” (A3). Rather than his athleticism, which Fonyo also clearly had in spades, Fox is admired for his generosity and politeness. Lloyd Robertson also comments upon the connection between Fox and Canadians’ desired sense of self:

What was it that made Terry Fox so very important to us? Well to me, he embodied the best of the Canadian spirit. We are a generous people, fair-minded, not stridently patriotic, but deeply proud of our country. And we’re courageous, when we have to be—just like him. (CTV News)

To Robertson, Fox’s appeal lies in his measured accomplishment; that is, he was not excessive: his nationalism was contained and so was his bravery. Further, Fox’s request, “one dollar for every Canadian,” was perfectly reasonable. By asking each person to donate one dollar, and thereby to participate moderately, Fox created a means by which each citizen could join in what he was attempting to accomplish. As Fox put it, “If you’ve given a dollar, you are part of the Marathon of Hope” (qtd in Trottier 21).

Despite strong pressure, including numerous K-12 lesson plans designed around Fox’s heroism,<sup>6</sup> some Canadians resist the awe Fox’s legacy often inspires and go beyond refusing to participate. A number of the impressive Fox monuments have been vandalized and defaced, including his gravesite in Port Coquitlam. Intriguingly, this backlash often consists of vandals attempting to remove a part of Fox’s graven body, but not his replicated prosthetic leg. In 1996, vandals sawed off the hand of the Thunder Bay Fox memorial and tried to decapitate the statue (“Terry Fox Monument” A2). Despite restricted access implemented in 1996 to protect what Mayor David Hamilton described as “an international shrine,” in the first three years of the site’s public presence, vandals inflicted damages amounting to \$20,000, including littering the site with hypodermic needles, empty liquor bottles, and a cigarette artfully draped in Fox’s sculpted mouth (“Vandals force” A3).

Some vandalism seems motivated by assumed value: stealing the amethyst pieces from the Thunder Bay monument's stone base and removing the back of Fox's plastic and fibreglass head in Prince George, mistakenly believing it to be pure bronze, a metal that was worth an impressive amount of money at that time. This damage also included adding swastikas and a moustache to Fox's figure, so robbery was likely not the only motive ("Terry Fox statue"). Other vandalism involves clear malice, especially the desecration of Fox's grave. Intriguingly, Fox's father who discovered it, and others who helped in unsuccessful attempts to erase it, will not reveal what the graffiti written at the site said besides the word "acid" ("They'll pay" A1). As a result, it is difficult to determine whether this backlash relates directly to Fox's legacy or is an expected consequence of public exposure.

While some may view my work here as in the same vein as these disrespectful acts, I maintain that these attacks do injustice to Terry Fox who deserves admiration for his determined athleticism, his youthful resolve, and his dogged dedication. As one journalist explains, "it's impossible to look at those grainy images of Fox running through wind and rain and sleet and sun without being moved by his selfless determination" (Menon H2). His commitment has benefited countless Canadians, not to mention cancer survivors worldwide. However, Fox's image and the influence of his story have a flipside. Iconoclastic as it may be, it is necessary—without vandalizing monuments or desecrating graves—to articulate the significance of that flipside, particularly in its implications for understanding disability.

As James K. Bartleman, former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, put it in his 2004 Terry Fox Hall of Fame Induction speech, "Although he was unable to complete his marathon, he ran straight into the history books, and into the hearts and minds of Canadians." Fair enough, but we need to consider the reasons why such stature was possible for this particular figure, and not for others. Curiously, this "strange hop click thunk" stepping figure remains the iconographic image of a "whole" Canada (Coupland 146). Despite Coupland's optimism about the political situation of disabled people today, Laura Bonnet explains, "substantive citizenship has not yet been realized for people with disabilities; rather, they are still struggling to maintain the existing hard-won rights, state support, and resources necessary to live a full life" (159). Fox, read as an ailing hero rather than as a disabled athlete, reflects qualities of an ideal citizen, particularly in Mark Kingwell's sense of "a way of meeting one of our deepest needs, the need to belong; [giving] voice and structure to the yearning to be part of something larger than ourselves" (5).

However, there is little room for a Fox minus his fundraising marathons, let alone an aging Fox, in the current economic structure, within the institution of health care, in Canadian classrooms, or in children's books.

In order to dominate the Canadian imagination, Fox had to start out as seemingly ordinary—in the “before” picture he had to appear as a “normal” healthy young man—but become extraordinary in his courage, goals, and athletic ability. As Shawn Ashmore, who plays Fox in the fiction film *Terry*, puts it,

I didn't approach it like I had to play somebody who was heroic," he says. "I think the really amazing thing about Terry—and why people connected with him—was that he was a really normal guy. He was a regular young guy who happened to be more driven than most people can ever imagine. (qtd. in Menon H02)

Fox equals Canada precisely because he fits this disquieting image of Canadian normalcy—he could be young Joe in the “I am Canadian” beer ads—but because of his rarely mentioned disability he had to be grittier than others. That is, he becomes a representative of the ultimate Canadian good *because of* his disability. What Fox has come to represent does little to reflect the lived experience of disability in contemporary Canada and has everything to do with uniting Canadians around a little-engine-that-could motivation to be the ordinary nation capable of extraordinary good. Ashmore—in keeping with how Canadians represent Terry Fox—attributes Fox's athletic ability to the cancer patient being “driven,” rather than accomplished. The actor describes the athlete as “a really normal guy,” and implies that any “normal” person could have made such a run, as long as the person had the “drive.” That Fox had it, that he was a phenomenal athlete, that he kept at his goal, even when his cancer returned, even when his prosthesis didn't fit, *that* is worth celebrating, as long as his disability is part of the celebration. Fox was extraordinary, and his disability created the conditions for his extraordinariness to become a matter of public concern and commemoration. Indeed, it is because of his disability that Fox “was everything you wanted the world to be” (Coupland 62).

#### NOTES

- 1 Including Australia, Zimbabwe, Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City, the Czech Republic, Cuba, Shanghai, Southern India, and more.
- 2 In 2008, the Terry Fox Foundation took the restored E250 Econoline on a commemorative fundraising “Tour of Hope” across Canada, following a route similar to, but longer than, Terry's.

- 3 By choosing the term “torch,” I invoke here a line from the emblematic Canadian war poem, “In Flanders Fields”: “To you from failing hands we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high.” The line was displayed in the Montreal Canadiens dressing room in the Forum, indicating its importance for Canadian sports heroism and its evocation of the responsibility team members take on when donning the mantle of those who have come before.
- 4 Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell explain this term in reference to Christopher Reeve saying, “In many Western cultures, disability is predominantly understood as a tragedy, something that comes from the defects and lack of our bodies, whether through accidents of birth or life. Those ‘suffering’ with disability, according to this cultural myth, need to come to terms with this bitter tragedy, and show courage in heroically overcoming their lot while they bide their time for the cure that will come. The protagonist for this script is typically the ‘brave’ person with disability; or, as this figure is colloquially known in critical disability studies and the disability movement—the super-crip (par. 9).” In *The Body Silent*, Robert F. Murphy explains the term: “Just as ‘super-moms’ supposedly go off to work every morning, cook Cordon Bleu dinners at night, play with the kids, and then become red-hot lovers after the children are put to bed, the super-crip works harder than other people, travels extensively, goes to everything, and takes part in anything that comes along. This is how he shows the world that he is just like everyone else, only better (95).”
- 5 When I teach about these two Canadian athletes in my first year Canadian Studies course, it is remarkable how many students have been socialized to understand Terry Fox as a hero and how few (usually none who were not alive when he ran) even know of Fonyo.
- 6 The CBC online archives provide a set of examples of such plans for students from K-12, teaching them to commemorate, mourn, write to, write the life of, celebrate, and get to know Terry Fox. Fox is also part of the British Columbia grade 2-3 social studies curriculum in which students learn what a hero is.

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