



# **Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters (Biblical Refigurations)**

*Louise J. Lawrence*

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The senses are used within New Testament texts as instruments of knowledge and power and thus constitute important mediators of cultural knowledge and experience. Likewise, those instances where sensory faculty is perceived to be 'disabled' in some way also become key sites for ideological commentary and critique. However, often biblical scholarship, itself 'disabled' by eye-centric and textocentric 'norms', has read sensory-disabled characters as nothing more than inert sites of healing; their agency, including their alternative sensory modes of communication and resistance to oppression, remain largely unaddressed.

In response, Louise J. Lawrence seeks to initiate a variety of interdisciplinary dialogues with disability studies and sensory anthropology in a quest to refigure characters with sensory disabilities featured in the gospels and provide alternative interpretations of their conditions and social interactions. In each instance the identity of those stigmatised as 'other' (according to particular physiological, social and cultural 'norms') are recovered by exploring ethnographic accounts which document the stories of those experiencing similar rejection on account of perceived sensory 'difference' in diverse cross-cultural settings. Through this process these 'disabled' characters are recast as individuals capable of employing certain strategies which destabilize the stigma imposed upon them and tactical performers who can subversively achieve their social goals.

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