

Word Count: 240  
Works Cited Included

Rachael Mulvihill

Abstract for Segue Conference

March 10, 2017

### Disability Theory in *A Separate Peace*

In the article “Refusing the Queer Potential,” Eric L. Tribunella argues that “the rhetoric of ethics, values, and patriotism” in John Knowles’s *A Separate Peace* “‘appropriates’ gender and sexuality in adolescent males and promotes their normative maturation” (Tribunella 125). Normative in this circumstance is distinguished as straight, white, masculine males. Tribunella argues that Finny must die in order for Gene to abandon his queer tendencies and accept the heteronormative standards of society to mature into manhood. I intend to push this argument even further by claiming that society not only preserves the heteronormative future, but also the able-bodied future. First, I will argue that the vision of society as able-bodied explains why Gene “becomes” Finny gradually throughout the novel. To conclude I will contend that only “super-crips” are welcomed into our society. This will further explain why when Gene fully “absorbs” Finny, as theorist James Holt McGavran states, that Finny dies (McGavran 68). His image as a cripple no longer fits into the heteronormative, abled-bodied future.

I will also interrogate the progression of Finny and Gene from counterparts to a type of parasitic relationship. In the beginning of the novel, Finny and Gene are seen as counterparts to other another. However, after Finny is crippled his body can no longer act as the counterpart to Gene’s body. I’m interested in how this change affects the reading of the novel and how this shift in rapport alters the future for Gene.

Word Count: 240  
Works Cited Included

#### Works Cited

Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace*. New York: Scribner, 1987. Print.

McGavran, James Holt. "Fear's Echo and Unhinged Joy: Crossing Homosocial Boundaries in *A Separate Peace*." *Children's Literature*. 30 (2002): 67-80. *Project MUSE*. Web. 24 February 2017.

Tribunella, Eric L. "Refusing the Queer Potential: John Knowles's *A Separate Peace*." *Children's Literature*. 30 (2002): 81-95. *Project MUSE*. Web. 24 February 2017.