“AN INEXHAUSTIBLE OCEAN OF LIKENESSES”: REEVALUATING THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN HELEN KELLER’S *THE WORLD I LIVE IN*

by

DANIEL BRESNAHAN

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of English
and the Division of Graduate Studies of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2021

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Daniel Bresnahan

Title: “An Inexhaustible Ocean of Likenesses”: Reevaluating the Role of Language in Helen Keller’s *The World I Live In*

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of English by:

Mary Wood	Thesis Advisor
James Crosswhite	Reader
Paul Peppis	Reader

and

Andrew Karduna	Interim Vice Provost for Graduate Studies

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Division of Graduate Studies.

Degree awarded June 2021

© 2021 Daniel Bresnahan

THESIS ABSTRACT

Daniel Bresnahan

Master of Arts

Department of English

June 2021

Title: "An Inexhaustible Ocean of Likenesses": Reevaluating the Role of Language in Helen Keller's *The World I Live In*

From a young age, Helen Keller was accused of plagiarism over her ability to write about the material world. Such critiques were founded on an understanding of language as an abstraction meant to signify a material reality which many believed Keller was closed off from due to her deafblindness. In this paper, I argue that Keller's *The World I Live In* rethinks and reclaims the role of language, metaphor, and materiality in response to such criticism, showing metaphor to be hermeneutic and co-constructive of knowledge. As such, I contend that *World* challenges purely rhetorical readings of metaphor pervasive in current Disabilities Studies scholarship. Drawing upon Paul Ricoeur's discussions of metaphor and the hermeneutic quality of figurative language, I implore Disability Studies scholars to reconsider metaphor non-rhetorically and argue that Keller's *World* demonstrates that the use of metaphorical language can be an empowering means for acquiring knowledge.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Daniel Bresnahan

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
San Francisco State University, San Francisco

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, English Literature, 2021, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, English Literature, 2017, San Francisco State University

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Composition Instructor, Department of English, University of Oregon, 2020-2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Helen Keller and a Disability Approach to Metaphor 5

II. KELLER'S PLAGIARISM CONTROVERSY, PHILOSOPHY, AND EDUCATION 12

Keller's Turn Toward American Idealism and "Correspondence" 17

"Girl is in Wardrobe": Keller's Early Education and Her "Object Sentences" 23

III. "NO GULF OF MUTE SPACE WHICH I MAY NOT BRIDGE": BEYOND A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO METAPHOR 26

"Half Finished Phrases, Mutilated Sentences, Parodied Sentiments, and Brilliant Metaphors": Rethinking Metaphor and Disability 30

REFERENCES CITED 34

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a deep sense of ambivalence toward Helen Keller in current Disability Studies scholarship. As Georgina Kleege explains, many consider her role as a "symbol of cheerful stoicism in the face of adversity" (109) problematic, an emblem of complacency and conformity to the status quo responsible in part for reactionary backlash to disability rights throughout the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For "if one disabled person can succeed in the current system, nothing needs to be changed"—or so the myth has been propagated, with Keller held up as the prime example. Yet this formulation of Keller as an obstacle to disability rights neglects the deeper historical context within which she lived; for at the time, "there were no other prominent disabled Americans living in the world whose example she could follow, and no organized disability rights movement to lend her support, much less any legal mandate designating access as a civil right rather than an act of charity" (110). Beyond this ahistorical treatment, scholars' ambivalent attitude toward Keller fails to account for the subtler subversions and triumphs of her writing career—that Keller was an accomplished idealist thinker and philosopher of language, as evidenced by her book of essays *The World I Live In* (1908). In *World*, Keller challenges empirical-materialist conceptions of language and reality aimed against her and her writing by critics—those very same enforcers of the status quo she is so often charged with placating. Furthermore, her essays possess tremendous value for scholars in light of the general trend toward materialism in recent literary criticism. Keller's *World* pushes back against and complicates this trend, with Keller advocating for immaterial ideas as the basis of reality.

From a young age, Keller was confronted by accusations of plagiarism and skepticism over her ability to convey, let alone know, empirical truths about the material world. Such critiques are based upon an understanding of language as an abstract representation meant to signify material reality—a material reality which many critics during Keller's time believed she was largely closed off from due to her deafblindness. Defining her access to the world as limited largely to books in braille, this empirical-materialist perspective emboldened many to assert that Keller could neither know nor explicate anything "firsthand"—that the basis of all her worldly knowledge was always mediated by others who could personally observe visual and aural phenomena. Keller's book *World* largely operates in response to these accusations. A phenomenological meditation on the sensory experiences that comprised much of Keller's day-to-day living, this collection of essays offers at times a very much explicit rebuke of her critics' empirical-materialist position which had asserted that true knowledge of the world may only be absorbed through eyes and ears. Touch, argues Keller throughout *World*, is obviously as reliable a guide as seeing and hearing.

Yet beyond calling for a deeper understanding of the many ways in which the body can "know," *World* also reads as a philosophical treatise on American idealism, with Keller contesting her critics' account of language as merely representational and seeking to place language and material objects together on the same symbolic plane. Following in the tradition of idealist thinkers like Emanuel Swedenborg, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Josiah Royce, Keller argues in *World* for a reality that language and material objects signify together, a network of ideas shared by all human minds. It is through a belief in this network of minds that Keller asserts her right to knowledge—not

just information perceived through the bodily senses available to her, but through those senses unavailable as well. This is why, she argues, she can describe visual and aural phenomena, like the color of clouds and the sun receding over the horizon, or the beautiful sounds of organ music—because beyond their material (and, in Keller's mind, superficial) distinctions, such phenomena share underlying ideas which Keller claims each of us, whether we are able to see and hear or not, have access to knowing.

Keller was deeply invested in the symbolic potency not only of words and language, but of material objects, and considered them equal to language on the symbolic plane. Understood in this way, Keller's relationship to language, and, as I argue, her use of metaphor, compel a comprehensive critical analysis that both accounts for and goes beyond a reading of language as a unidirectional signifier of material realities and lived, embodied experience; instead, the reading must be extended to encompass a view of language as co-constructive of reality. Reality, for Keller, becomes hermeneutic, something always in need of interpretation through the medium of language and material objects together. Such interpretation can be understood as epistemological, as the act plays a vital role for Keller in the construction of knowledge. In line with narrative theorist Paul Ricoeur, Keller's belief about metaphor in *World* alludes always to its "implicit ontology" (Kort 51)—a primordial and teleological relation of language to being (grounded in the verb "to be") "which Western thought since the early Greeks has conspired to neglect." As Keller's story and her essays in *World* show, a reading of metaphor solely at the level of rhetoric obscures this more profoundly and deeply-rooted ontological presence.

This conception of language, metaphor, and materiality which I trace through Keller's writing complicates some critical approaches to these topics within current Disability Studies scholarship. Amy Vidali's "disability approach to metaphor" (34) from her article "Seeing What We Know: Disability and Theories of Metaphor," calls for wider metaphorical diversity in our speech and rhetorical writing, one that more accurately represents the lived, embodied experiences of people with disabilities. Her work offers readings of metaphor as a rhetorical trope, examining how certain able-bodied metaphors are culturally pervasive and how their over-representation can distort the true material realities of lived, embodied experience for people with disabilities. Though some of Keller's assertions in *World* run parallel to Vidali's thinking, I argue that Keller nevertheless complicates what such a "disability approach" to metaphor can really look like for her as a deafblind person (if it is even achievable at all). I also point out shared resonances between Keller's and Tanya Titchkosky's respective views of metaphor, as expressed in Titchkosky's article, "Life with Dead Metaphors: Impairment Rhetoric in Social Justice Praxis." Drawing upon Ricoeur's discussions of metaphor and the mimetic quality of language, Titchkosky calls on Disability Studies scholars to consider a non-rhetorical approach to metaphor, recognizing its creative aspects and the *poiesis* always contained within metaphor's function as *mimesis*—the act of "making new through the use of what already exists" (11). Like Titchkosky, I implore scholars to reconsider metaphor non-rhetorically and, furthermore, to reevaluate the role that materiality and abstraction can play beyond their standard rhetorical frameworks. I cite Keller's use of language as exemplifying this view of metaphor being profoundly

constructive, arguing that she is not merely making comparisons between two things but creating new understandings through them.

I trace Keller's adoption of this constructive approach to language back to plagiarism controversies and criticism surrounding her early writing. I also suggest that her early education in learning language with her teacher Anne Sullivan uniquely helped form her view in *World* of language and material objects as working together on the same symbolic plane. Turning back to more recent Disability Studies scholarship in Vidali and Titchkosky, I illustrate how Keller both works with and against these approaches, contending that Keller's writing shows that the use of metaphorical language can be an empowering mode of expression and means for acquiring knowledge of the world, a world which is always in need of interpretation by the individual who exists within it and is thus always profoundly metaphorical.

Helen Keller and a Disability Approach to Metaphor

In contemporary Disability Studies scholarship, the materiality of certain metaphors—their "organic fidelity" (Titchkosky 3) to lived, embodied experience—has been highlighted as central to criticism of metaphor theory that posits certain ableist metaphors as "natural" or "universal" over others. In her article "Seeing What We Know: Disability and Theories of Metaphor," Amy Vidali advocates for a "disability approach to metaphor" in light of the prevalence of able-bodied conceptual metaphors reflecting "a refusal to recognize and include disability, both as human experience and metaphoric phenomenon" (41). While these metaphors' common usage cannot be denied, Vidali rejects any claim that this widespread adoption indicates their universality. It is not that

able-bodied experiences do not profoundly affect metaphor usage—there is no disputing this—but that, as Vidali believes, their influence on language is not transferred only one way onto those with disabilities, as if people with disabilities adopt these phrases by way of "contagious contact" (39); rather, people with disabilities *also* inform and impact how metaphors are created and used. The problem, for Vidali, is representational: What stories are told about ways of being through metaphor-acquisition and metaphor-making? What stories are left out? Centering her study around the conceptual metaphor *knowing is seeing* (which symbolizes sight as knowledge and blindness as ignorance), Vidali argues that this trope negatively affects how we think about people with visual impairments and simultaneously devalues other ways in which a human being can "know" things (44). She offers as examples some alternative metaphors to substitute these common idiomatic expressions for framing knowledge, alternatives which she believes encapsulate a disability approach:

> We can ask students to find the "scents" of previous course ideas while reading a new article, as an exciting alternative to asking them to "see" the main point. We might suggest that colleagues taste and digest a new subject, in order to encourage bodily ways of knowing and interacting that go beyond "witnessing" texts. Changing the verb from see/highlight/envision to a new sensory experience not only recognizes, but creates, new ways of knowing. (47)

A turn toward a Disability Studies approach to metaphor, then, while not involving the complete disavowal of prevalent, able-bodied constructions, encourages more metaphorical diversity to extend the range of conceptual metaphors across a wider body of experience. The problematic pattern which Vidali seeks to address reveals itself to come from a violence of abstraction—by relying too heavily on their abstract sense, the figurative meanings of these metaphors overshadow a more complex and varied material reality. As such, a pattern of common and popular sight-based idioms and

colloquialisms proliferate and end up constituting what knowledge and coherence "look like" for many people. This is a problem because, of course, someone who is literally blind is not literally ignorant, yet common ways of speaking and thinking reinforce this symbolic understanding, framing how we conceptualize knowledge. To combat this, Vidali's approach prioritizes the "organic fidelity" of metaphor. The more faithful the figurative language is to the material and lived experiences it alludes to, the more accurate its representation.

This kind of rhetorical critique and analysis of language as a form of social justice praxis is critical, but it also leaves us with a narrow understanding of metaphor—the emphasis being on how metaphor characterizes the material, and how we can reframe it. The embedded analytical framework is, at its heart, rhetorical. Yet it is important to consider how metaphor can function *non*-rhetorically. At the rhetorical level, metaphors are analyzed in terms of semantics—how faithfully they communicate the idea of the implied literal equivalent that the metaphor is meant to substitute (saying, for example, "I see," instead of "I know"). Under this substitution model, a metaphor is treated as always theoretically able to be replaced with the more literal word or phrase it substitutes, even if, in reality, there is no such construction available in our language. This is all to say that metaphors are not conventionally understood as constructing new information, but rather stylizing old information in new ways, to more effectively or evocatively communicate their ideas. By contrast, a *hermeneutic* reading of metaphor involves both the comparison of two things (the substitution of something literal for something figurative) and furthermore the construction of a *new meaning* revealed by their comparison. This is a

fundamentally creative act, as the interpretation constructs something new out of the understanding of the two things together.

Given these distinctions, the proliferation of able-bodied metaphors like "I see" can be considered problematic largely because of two assumptions. First, we assume there must be a viable alternative for such metaphors, an assumption Vidali certainly makes a strong and compelling case for in her article. Second, we take for granted metaphor's predominant place within the realm of rhetorical trope. Couched in scholarship's criticism of conceptual metaphor is the steadfast belief that metaphor substitutes for its more literal counterpart of embodied experience, that its role is ornamental, to flourish, reframe, and stylize some core kernel of information, rather than constitute it. Hence, when someone announces they "see" something, the scholar rigorously analyzes and deconstructs how the use of the metaphor functions, how well it faithfully places meaning onto the object it describes *unidirectionally*. Such a view, which implicitly always sets up a separation between language and what it aims to represent, emphasizes the violence of abstraction when it misrepresents true, lived, embodied experience. This unidirectional understanding of metaphor and of language is one in which the onus is on the abstraction to match and to represent the literal. But Keller's use of language compels a reconsideration of the ability of language to constitute knowledge on its own—to create new information, rather than merely reframe it.

Even within a rhetorical framework, calling attention to the problematic elements of able-bodied metaphorical representation and advocating for more metaphorical diversity can raise other questions of legibility. What would it look like, for instance, if Keller tried to remain as literal as possible in relaying her own lived, embodied

experiences in her writing? Can such deafblind metaphors to represent her material reality even exist? Keller addresses these questions in her essays, lamenting on the limitations of language and the possible perceived fraudulence that comes with her using sight and sound metaphors that are rooted in a "normal" able-bodied ontology and derived from physical senses she does not have access to. Yet for Keller, there is still no other choice but to use these metaphors:

> It is not a convention of language, but a forcible feeling of the reality, that at times makes me start when I say, "Oh, I see my mistake!" or "How dark, cheerless is his life!" I know these are metaphors. Still, I must prove with them, since there is nothing in our language to replace them. Deaf-blind metaphors to correspond do not exist and are not necessary. (80)

The "organic fidelity" of a language which accurately represents her lived experience and material circumstances proves to be of less significance for Keller, who conceives of the able-bodied person's experience as, if not universal, an evolutionary baseline that she is working off of and always returning back to. Of course, we need to keep in mind the historical moment from within which she wrote and what was available to her at the beginning of the twentieth century. That Keller's ideas here come from a pre-Disability Rights context obviously informs and limits the discussion we can have around her explicit engagement with Vidali's ideas. At the same time, her role as a philosopher of metaphor and of language has been sorely overlooked, and deserves critical treatment for the unique contributions she offers on the subject today. It is significant to our contemporary understanding of language that she feels compelled to employ such able-bodied metaphors naturally, "by a forcible feeling of reality," that their meaning is accessible to her because she, like all other deafblind people, "has inherited the mind of seeing and hearing" (77). She mentions elsewhere:

> I naturally tend to think, reason, draw inferences as if I had five senses instead of three. This tendency is beyond my control; it is involuntary, habitual, instinctive. I cannot compel my mind to say "I feel" instead of "I see" or "I hear." The word "feel" proves on examination to be no less a convention than "see" and "hear" when I seek for words accurately to describe the outward things that affect my three bodily senses. When a man loses a leg, his brain persists in impelling him to use what he has not and yet feels to be there. Can it be that the brain is so constituted that it will continue the activity which animates the sight and the hearing, after the eye and the ear have been destroyed? (57-58)

It is clear that the imperative to diversify and expand our uses of language to more accurately reflect and represent lived, embodied experience, and the potential violence of an overdetermining abstraction, mean little to Keller. For one, she assumes a "five-sensed mind" that, while not accurate to her true lived experience in a material sense, compels an intuitive emulation of that reality. Whether her adherence to a "normal" or universal five-sensed bodily state might sound problematic by contemporary understandings of lived experience and what it means, for example, to *literally* have a prosthetic limb, there is another level at which Keller is using the language which goes beyond reading metaphor solely at the level of rhetoric and representation. When Keller insists that aural and visual metaphors belong to her as much as to any seeing or hearing-abled person, she is staking a claim in language and contesting its primary function as representation. She argues that she can use such language not because it accurately reflects her lived and embodied experience but because, despite it being unable to do so, *she can communicate and understand the world through it*. Not only are such figures of speech practically utilized for the sake of making Keller's writing read as legibly as possible to a largely seeing and hearing audience, but, furthermore, no sense of irony or disingenuousness need be read into their usage, because they communicate a fundamental idea Keller considers to be true. As she states, all figurative language—whether its formulation be "see," "feel," or

"hear"—is equally a "convention"; the difference in what metaphor she chooses is largely inconsequential. What matters is what the metaphor *communicates*, the fundamental and immaterial idea, which is abstract and difficult to articulate directly, that is shared by all three words.

CHAPTER II

HELEN KELLER'S PLAGIARISM CONTROVERSY, EDUCATION, AND PHILOSOPHY

There are two major events in Keller's early life which serve as the foundation for her move toward a non-rhetorical approach to metaphor: the critical reception around the publication of her first autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (1903), and the accusations of plagiarism she experienced over a short story she wrote when she was a child, ten years prior to the publication of *Story*. The plagiarism controversy, which Georgina Kleege argues "threatened to end Keller's literary career before it had begun" (102-103), was based on a short story Keller wrote after her teacher Anne Sullivan described the fall foliage outside one day. Inspired, Keller wrote a fairy tale entitled "The Frost King," which she would later present as a gift for her school director Michael Anagnos at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. Anagnos was so pleased with "yet another example of her startling progress" (103) that he had the story published in the school's annual report, upon which it was quickly discovered to be nearly identical to Margaret Canby's story "The Frost Fairies." Keller had claimed, in earnest, that she had never read the story, but after a more thorough investigation and trial was conducted, Anagnos and other members of the school determined that Keller had retained the faint memory of Canby's work after it had been read to her a few years prior by a friend of Sullivan's, before Keller had developed a more sophisticated understanding of language. As such, "the gist of the plot and a familiar pattern of imagery stayed with her," to be revived by Sullivan's vivid description of the trees outside. Though she was eventually fully exonerated, the accusations of fraud and doubts about the authenticity of her own ideas—

concerns which had never occurred to Keller before—left her feeling devastated and confused about her own autonomy. For one, as Mark Freeman writes, she began to fear she "could never really know for sure which of her ideas truly deserved to be called her own…. because nearly everything she learned came to her either through Annie Sullivan or through numerous books she read" (137). Though Sullivan would eventually manage to convince Keller to write again, after the "Frost King" incident had become public knowledge readers would repeatedly raise questions regarding Keller's autonomy. Indeed, even ten years later, after she had gone to Radcliffe College, graduated, and published her first autobiography, critics would continue to challenge her access to knowledge, her ability to communicate, and the authority and originality of her ideas.

Of course, all writers and artists draw on previous work, and Keller's experience is no exception. What these accusations of plagiarism show is an unorthodox scrutiny that would be continually leveled at her precisely because her work was so unexpected. Many readers of her first autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, display this same incredulity, finding Keller's use of visual or auditory descriptions, metaphors, and idioms, to be similarly disingenuous, believing she "essentially plagiarized her report of her own experience" (Cressman 114) by copying seeing and hearing-abled language which could not have been truly representative. Referring to passages like one where Keller describes a body of water as calm and beautiful and a cloud changing colors under the setting sun, critics declared that Keller was unable to actually "know" these things and thus her descriptions were secondhand—experiences that in actuality she perceived vicariously through the words of seeing and hearing authors whom she read. Thomas Cutsforth, a psychologist who had been blind since the age of eleven and who was one of Keller's

most scathing critics, used the phrase "word-mindedness" to describe her condition. Word-mindedness, believed to be an affliction which targets "those populations that use books for their primary source of knowledge" (116), was typically considered the result of blind people being taught to communicate "not as they themselves experience [the world] but as sighted people know it and speak about it" (Freeman 140). It is true that Keller's education and, as a result, her primary means for articulating her own experiences, were fundamentally literary. Furthermore, there were few braille books available during Keller's early life, which forced her to receive both her knowledge of her surroundings and any translations of literary and academic texts through more or less a singular medium: her teacher Anne Sullivan, who communicated all of these things by spelling into Keller's hand. Because of this, secondhand communication in some ways indeed constructed firsthand experience for Keller, to the extent that it supplemented or even substituted sense-perception and knowledge of the outside world. Cutsforth saw this condition as fundamentally pathological—that "liv[ing] through the experience of an author … relies on another to do the work of translating concrete experience into abstract concepts," and therefore word-minded people "build their consciousness out of the finished product—pure abstraction—and are weaker for it" (Cressman 116). He believed Keller's education at the hands of Sullivan was "a tragedy" (qtd. in Freeman 141)—that she necessarily capitulated all that she was to her teacher, that she absorbed and parroted Sullivan's beliefs, likes, dislikes, "whatever emotional activity her teacher experienced … a birthright sold for a mess of verbiage." Numerous critics would echo this sentiment, calling her "book[ish]," "a dupe of words" (139), "a living lie" (141); similarly, her writing was "an illegitimate use of the imagination" (qtd. in Cressman 114) and "so

mingled with her imaginings in regard to the perceptions of others as to be worthless" (115). Many of Keller's notable friends, including Mark Twain and Alexander Graham Bell, would later come to her defense by pointing out the impossibility of any person, be they able to see and hear or not, writing "firsthand" ideas—that all compositions are in one way or another the product of others' compositions.

Keller never denied her fundamentally "literary experience" of the world, though she would object to claims that her writing was consequently illegitimate, that she could not write of visual and auditory experiences because she could not know them firsthand. On the contrary, Keller found in literature a legitimate means for procuring true knowledge of the world and justified her continued use of aural and visual language in *The World I Live In*, her follow up to *Story* and a response to these critics. She did not argue, like her defenders Twain and Bell, that universal traces of "plagiarism" may be found in all creative, human endeavors, but rather stepped back to address her critics' original point that all of her knowledge was vicarious in the first place—that because she couldn't see or hear, she was completely, epistemologically shut off from the world:

> Critics delight to tell us what we cannot do. They assume that blindness and deafness sever us completely from the things which the seeing and the hearing enjoy, and hence they assert we have no moral right to talk about beauty, the skies, mountains, the song of birds, and colours. They declare that the very sensations we have from the sense of touch are "vicarious," as though our friends felt the sun for us! They deny a priori what they have not seen and I have felt….
>
> Necessity gives to the eye a precious power of seeing, and in the same way it gives a precious power of feeling to the whole body. Sometimes it seems as if the very substance of my flesh were so many eyes looking out at will upon a world new created every day. The silence and darkness which are said to shut me in, open my door most hospitably to countless sensations that distract, inform, admonish, and amuse. With my three trusty guides, touch, smell, and taste, I make many excursions into the borderland of experience which is in sight of the city of Light. (29-30)

In her response to critics regarding the authenticity of her own words, Keller cites her "three trusty guides, touch, smell, and taste," as plainly legitimate means for gathering sensory knowledge about the material world. Against doubters like Cutsforth, she asserts her right to speak about the world, for there are "myriad sensations" she perceives and can comment upon. In this way, Keller's thinking actually runs parallel to many of Vidali's assertions which acknowledge other embodied ways of knowing that Keller would have considered entirely legitimate, such as "tasting" a new subject or "finding scents" of ideas. At the same time, however, Keller stands apart from Vidali in her much more comfortable embrace of able-bodied metaphors. This embrace does not come out of a complacency or complicitness in their implicit denial of other lived experiences that fall outside of normative and ableist standards, but from the logical belief she carried regarding what constitutes an evolutionary baseline of human thought (the "five-sensed mind" discussed earlier). Hence, to further address accusations that she should not use figurative language which alludes to sensory knowledge she could not possess firsthand, she argues that she has inherited the mind of her seeing and hearing ancestors, a mind which "is so permeated with color that it dyes even the speech of the blind" (78). She argues,

> It might seem that the five senses would work intelligently together only when resident in the same body. Yet when two or three are left unaided, they reach out for their complements in another body, and find that they yoke easily with the borrowed team….
>
> [The deafblind person] grasp[s] the priceless truth that his mind is not crippled, not limited to the infirmity of his senses. The world of the eye and the ear becomes to him a subject of fateful interest. He seizes every word of sight and hearing because his sensations compel it. Light and colour, of which he has no tactual evidence, he studies fearlessly, believing that all humanly knowable truth is open to him. (58)

Her claim, that there is a shared foundation of sensory knowledge based on all five senses in the human brain that can be intuited by the deafblind person, allowing them to naturally employ common sight and hearing-based idioms, is not one that can be easily proven. Interestingly, her ideas do point toward some contemporary conceptions of neurodiversity, foreshadowing theories in cognitive neuroscience regarding how sighted experience of the world is mediated by the brain (that we, in essence, make sense of the world through the brain's engagement with light). Nonetheless, Keller's position is much more idealistic here, and while not explicitly dismissing more diversified representations of experience encompassing people with disabilities, she could still be read as problematically reinforcing able-bodied language as appropriate or universal. Yet I do not believe Keller understands or uses metaphor unidirectionally in this way. Her point assumes a human reality that makes the adoption practical—the metaphor is not meant to be understood as literally characterizing lived experience; it is primarily utilized as a communicator of ideas.

Keller's Turn Toward American Idealism and "Correspondence"

Keller's characterization of the deafblind person who studies sight and hearing "fearlessly, believing all humanly knowable truth is open to him" alludes to another important reason she believed she could use such idiomatic language—her steadfast American idealist conviction that the mind can access ideas shared between all human minds, ideas which make up a truer reality and through which knowledge of the real world is possible and attainable for anyone, regardless of their sensory faculties. If her assertion of a "five-sensed mind" granted her the right to use visual or aural language on

practical grounds, her American idealist education, which she began cultivating during her time at Radcliffe, reinforced her convictions by advocating for an embedded truth-value in figurative and literal language alike. For Keller, the idea in its abstracted form was the basis of all reality, including the material. This way of thinking extends the function of metaphor beyond substitution, and implies that the violence abstraction potentially carries out is not the only way of reading or understanding the role of figurative language.

After the "Frost King" incident, friends of Keller would introduce her to idealist philosophy in order to help her combat suspicions over her ability to know anything outside of what her limited sensory experience would allow (Klages 205). Inspired one day after reading a book on Greece which Keller felt during reading had actually "moved" her there in mind—"I have been in Athens" (qtd. in Klages 203)—she came to intuitively believe that her own consciousness could perceive a shared reality accessible by all other minds. Thus, reading with her fingers to raised pages, Keller exclaimed that she had "found in touch an eye" (204) that allowed her to "see" the true world. This intuition would later be more formally developed through the readings and writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish theologian and mystic, and Ralph Waldo Emerson—both of whom were great influencers of idealist thought. Keller had been reading Emerson since the earliest days of her education, and many claimed that she even adopted a similar writing style to his "in its precision, orderliness, buoyancy, and vitality" (209). It is likely Keller's Athens "visit" and revelations about consciousness were directly influenced by Emerson's own explanations of one's ability to "know" the outside world through spiritual intuition. These ideas would ultimately serve as the basis for

Keller's refutation of her empirically-skeptical critics who would render her expressions vicarious and secondhand. Mary Klages's summary of Emerson's impact is useful here:

> Keller … found in Emerson a philosophy of language which quelled the doubts raised by "The Frost King" episode and reestablished her faith in her linguistic abilities. The materialist view of language insisted that words are symbols of objects, and that the perceptible qualities of these objects must ultimately determine the meaning of the words that represent them; those who could not perceive the qualities of objects directly, through sensory experience, could not know the meanings of the words associated with these objects, and thus could not employ those words with authority. Emerson reversed this logic. In 'Nature,' he insisted that, though words are signs of natural facts or objects, those objects themselves are signs of spiritual facts, which ultimately determine the meaning of both natural objects and words. (211-212)

Keller believed that her experience reading about Greece, and, likewise, her description of visual and aural phenomena, though "borrowing" from the language of the seeing and hearing, were no less truthful than her seeing and hearing peers' own experiences. This is because the idealist philosophy she adopted "presented the outside world as the inauthentic copy of the idea" (Cressman 117), the idea which was the true basis of reality and accessible through the mind. Keller would go on to say as much in *World*: "I am inclined to believe those philosophers who declare that we know nothing but our own feelings and ideas. With a little ingenious reasoning one may see in the material world simply a mirror, an image of permanent mental sensations" (75-76). Vital to this belief was the necessary subordination of sensory perception which, in the idealist view, was deceptive and unreliable. Josiah Royce, one of the most prominent American idealists of the twentieth century and also Keller's philosophy professor at Radcliffe, would personally reaffirm this rejection of the physical senses for her on the grounds that such faculties were ultimately unreliable sources of information. Royce provided for Keller a philosophical framework for her experiences rooted in Platonic thought (Klages 214),

advocating for a spiritual center or soul, rather than any physical sensory faculty, which informed aesthetic perceptions. The true basis of reality Keller would come to accept was the mind, which, primed by reading in her case, was able to connect to "a circuit of [other] minds in communication with one another and with the central mind of God … in this continuous circuit, to witness an event for another is to reconstruct perceptions into their original form" (Cressman 117). To "witness an event for another" would become fundamental to Keller's philosophical meditations, and would be elaborated upon in *World* particularly through her work with analogy and metaphor.

Though Keller would not go on to publicly detail her spiritual beliefs until almost twenty years after the publication of *World*, this idealist philosophy is unabashedly present across her book's essays. In the opening pages, she remarks: "Ideas make the world we live in" (11). She later elaborates with an emphasis on the role of the mind and the role of imagination in the construction of knowledge:

> The bulk of the world's knowledge is an imaginary construction… some of the most significant discoveries in modern science owe their origin to the imagination of men who had neither accurate knowledge nor exact instruments to demonstrate their beliefs. If astronomy had not kept always in advance of the telescope, no one would ever have thought a telescope worth making. What great invention has not existed in the inventor's mind long before he gave it tangible shape? (59)

Offering an example of the invention of the telescope, here Keller argues that the idea—astronomy—precedes the material object that will reflect it. Knowledge, then, comes from within, to be eventually expressed, materialized, from without. Understood in this view, the controversy over Keller's ability to discuss material realities through visual and aural terms can thus be read as a controversy over Keller's ability to contend with the "finished product" of an immaterial idea. It is a delightful inversion of Cutforth's word-mindedness affliction, which asserts that abstraction is the end result, building off of

material existence. In an idealist framework, it is the other way around: the kernel of meaning is not found on the material plane, but in the mind. In this way, Keller's philosophy not only gave her the grounds to write out her own experience, but also justified her use of visual and aural language. More than just borrowing this able-bodied language, Keller argued that her mind allowed her to *know* the meaning of the true idea behind it, despite not personally being able to perceive the material reality it signifies through sight or hearing.

One way of proving the validity of this concept, she believed, was through metaphor and analogy. She explains in her essay, "Analogies in Sense Perception," that knowledge of a shared reality is possible through the imagination's capacity to make analogical connections and associations between the things that she can sense and those she physically cannot. To demonstrate, she speaks at length about sight and her conception of it as analogized by smell:

> Smell gives me more idea than touch or taste of the manner in which sight and hearing probably discharge their functions. Touch seems to reside in the object touched, because there is a contact of surfaces. In smell there is no notion of relievo, and odour seems to reside not in the object smelt, but in the organ. Since I smell a tree at a distance, it is comprehensible to me that a person sees it without touching it. I am not puzzled over the fact that he receives it as an image on his retina without relievo, since my smell perceives the tree as a thin sphere with no fullness or content. By themselves, odours suggest nothing. I must learn by association to judge from them of distance, of place, and of the actions or the surroundings which are the usual occasions for them, just as I am told people judge from colour, light, and sound. (48)

Elsewhere, she elaborates further:

> I understand how scarlet can differ from crimson because I know that the smell of an orange is not the smell of a grape-fruit. I can also conceive that colours have shades, and guess what shades are. In smell and taste there are varieties not broad enough to be fundamental; so I call them shades. There are half a dozen roses near me. They all have the unmistakable rose scent; yet my nose tells me that they are

> not the same…. I make use of analogies like these to enlarge my conceptions of colours….
>
> So I think of the varieties of light that touch the eye, cold and warm, vivid and dim, soft and glaring, but always light, and I imagine their passage through the air to an extensive sense, instead of to a narrow one like touch. From the experience I have had with voices I guess how the eye distinguishes shades in the midst of light…. I have talked so much and read so much about colours that through no will of my own I attach meanings to them, just as all people attach certain meanings to abstract terms like hope, idealism, monotheism, intellect, which cannot be represented truly by visible objects, but which are understood from analogies between immaterial concepts and the ideas they awaken of external things. (67-69)

In both of these passages, Keller argues for an "inner law of completeness" which "the brain with its five-sensed construction" establishes and which her "soul sense" can account for intellectually through metaphor and analogy. She reasons that odors fade like colors; eyes distinguish between shades like how the ear or the hand (through feeling vibrations) distinguishes between tones of voice. She "guesses, divines, puzzles out their meaning by analogies drawn from the senses [she] has" (57), interpreting the meaning of color and light through hidden shared connections discovered in their likeness to smell and touch. This process, which she goes on to formally call "correspondence" (78), is described at times almost like a puzzle to be solved: "it must perceive a likeness between things outward and things inward…no matter how far I pursue it to things I cannot see, it does not break under the test" (79-80). She goes on to hypothesize that such analogic "tests" are "adequate to … the whole range of phenomena" (80), and that there is "an inexhaustible ocean of likenesses" (82) she can uncover through her method. Correspondence is, of course, contingent on a synergistic relationship between Keller's imagination and the sensations and impressions she accesses through touch, smell, and taste. Coupling these together, she is able to construct a truer, more complete picture of the world.

“Girl is in Wardrobe”: Keller’s Early Education and Her “Object Sentences”

Traces of Keller’s affinity for idealist thought and beliefs about correspondence can be found in her upbringing and education by Anne Sullivan, who offered her a less traditional means of learning language. Sullivan saw fatal flaws in the education of Laura Bridgman, the first deafblind American child to gain a significant education in English by way of Samuel Howe, Bridgman’s teacher, who based her learning upon an abstract “taxonomic approach” (Cressman 112). This approach involved heavy vocabulary memorization and a mechanical understanding of the subject-predicate-object sentence structure, divorced from real life experience. The results of this method were mixed (with Bridgman, for example, sometimes finishing her reading of a sentence once she found its first object). Keeping Howe and Bridgman in mind, Sullivan designed her lessons to follow a more natural pattern of language development—Keller would learn vocabulary “as experience called for new words.” It was a method “hinged on shared experience of the present moment.” More than just being spontaneous and impromptu, Sullivan’s lessons would often involve having Keller construct “object sentences” (Fuss 48) out of furniture in her home. Some of her earliest lessons in symbolic language involved the literal referring of words to objects, with Sullivan printing individual words on cards and attaching them to furniture in the room which they designated. Thus, material “sentences” could be constructed, arranged, and rearranged. These sentences were sometimes comprised of objects alone, sometimes with words attached, and other times a mix of both. This “tactile linguistics,” Diana Fuss argues, “never presupposes the alienation of subject and object that both Saussure and Lacan identify as the central feature of the birth of ‘the speaking subject.’ Instead, Keller’s subject and object occupy the same

epistemological frame … in which the very terms subject and object refer to both the world of matter and the world of grammar" (48). This blending of subject and object into "the same epistemological frame" resonates with Emersonian thought, which, as stated previously, conceives of both words and objects as signs with the former representing the latter and the latter representing some unseen "spiritual facts, which ultimately determine the meaning of both natural objects and words." Helpfully close reading one of Keller's "object sentences," in which Keller herself is included as an object with the word "girl" pinned to her pinafore as she stands inside a wardrobe ("girl is in wardrobe"), Diana Fuss affirms this link to Emerson with an elaboration on how Keller's lessons fundamentally shaped her relationship with language in a unique way, readily conducive to idealist thought:

> Keller is at once the subject of the sentence and an object amongst other objects. Keller perceives her own body as a linguistic sign, analogous to the doll, bed, and wardrobe that comprise the adjacent nouns in her simple object sentences. In the now standard account of subject formation, the act of naming a thing blocks our imaginary identification with that thing, separating subject from object…. But, if Keller's autobiographies are any indication, words do not so much kill as convey the immediate presence of things. For Keller words are not completely opposed to things, precisely to the degree that things are themselves words, variously sequenced syntactical units waiting to be read. (49)

It is likely this education, which also possibly led Keller to develop the "bad habit" of writing about herself in the third person in her letters (often as "Helen" or "Phantom"), allowed her to develop a fundamentally unique relationship to language and to words, whose meanings would often ease and slip with the objects they were meant to solely represent. We cannot know for sure how great of an influence this education had on her, but it is worth considering in the context of how the literal and the figurative get traditionally distinguished by the hearing and sighted, how that subordination trickles

down into mainstream conceptions of metaphor, and how Keller uproots all of this in her writing.

CHAPTER III

"NO GULF OF MUTE SPACE WHICH I MAY NOT BRIDGE": BEYOND A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE

As previously discussed, metaphors analyzed at the rhetorical level are often weighed in terms of their quality of substitution, or fidelity to a material reality—how faithfully they communicate a more literal equivalent in language, even if no such equivalent exists, "like hope, idealism, monotheism, intellect." The emphasis is on style and characterization, rather than the creation of new meaning. Conversely, metaphors read at the hermeneutic level indicate both substitution and construction, with the act of interpretation allowing for new understandings between the two compared things to be made. Keller certainly uses metaphors that can be read on the rhetorical level alone (how different scents can be *like* different shades of color), but because she employs such figurative language first and foremost out of a deeply personal desire to "divine" the greater world beyond her own physical perception, her metaphors serve a more profoundly hermeneutic function and should also be assessed in this respect. In her article, "Life with Dead Metaphors: Impairment Rhetoric in Social Justice Praxis," Tanya Titchkosky advocates for a similar non-rhetorical understanding of metaphor, emphasizing its creative potential. Drawing from Ricoeur, she explains how the *mimesis* in metaphor—its function as replicating or representing reality—involves an oft-neglected, embedded *poiesis*—the creation of something new which previously did not exist:

> [Metaphor] gives meaning to people and events by expressing them in relation to each other through a comparison. With the use of metaphor we open up a social arena where words come to mean what they do through referencing their common

> meanings, but in relation to something other or unexpected, potentially releasing new meanings (*poiesis*). (10)

Here, metaphor does not merely shape information, it constitutes it; Titchkosky recovers within the act of comparing for the sake of reflecting—*mimesis*—an independent act of construction—*poiesis*. Beyond substituting the literal, the figurative allows us to "re-see" through the creation of something new. Titchkosky elaborates that Ricoeur shares this sentiment, and further that he, like Keller, considers the imagination crucial to this metaphorical process of interpretation, "no longer as the faculty of deriving 'images' from sensory experiences, but as the capacity to let new worlds build our self-understanding" (qtd. in Titchkosky 11). Titchkosky explains that Ricoeur conceives of imagination as something far from the material plane detected by the physical senses, "an imaginative world-self relation…which makes possible the 'opening' of something new" (10). This discovery of something new is critical for Ricoeur to an understanding of metaphorical truth, of metaphor's ability to release new meanings not findable within its compared parts alone. He likens metaphor, in this way, to a scientific model:

> The central argument is that, with respect to the relation to reality, metaphor is to poetic language what the model is to scientific language. Now in scientific language, the model is essentially a heuristic instrument that seeks, by means of fiction, to break down an inadequate interpretation and to lay the way for a new, more adequate interpretation … the model is an instrument of rediscription…. The model belongs not to the logic of justification or proof, but to the logic of discovery. Again, it must be understood that this logic of discovery does not reduce to a psychology of invention without authentic epistemological interest but rather involves a cognitive process, a rational method with its own canons and principles. (240)

Ricoeur's model helps to convey metaphor as an entirely new construction which articulates the shared meaning of two separate things. The act of discovery that it entails is not merely a receptive or passive response but an instance of substantial knowing. In

this formulation, metaphorical thinking becomes the basis for knowledge under a view of reality as hermeneutic—a reality always in need of being understood through frames of reference and comparison, interpreted by and through its available parts. Keller's own philosophy and use of metaphor resonate deeply with this. She routinely employs metaphor and analogy not unlike a scientific instrument, a method of measuring the material world beyond what her physical body perceives. This function implies a more existential understanding of metaphor and, in Ricoeur's view, designates an ontology rooted in the verb "to be" and "founded on the subject's capacity for a 'seeing as,' a mode of imaginative thinking that renders reality as subject to a multiple of meanings" (Masong 7).

If we merely read metaphor in terms of rhetoric, not only do we as scholars lose out on the greater creative potentialities of metaphor, but we too narrowly conceptualize its role and impose limits on its creative and epistemological possibilities, failing to grasp what Keller has to say about her own experience. During many points in *World*, she strongly asserts her right to know through the analogical connections she makes between her material experiences, the language of others that she reads, and her own imagination. Her tone of self-assurance in these places is palpable:

> Between my experiences and the experiences of others there is no gulf of mute space which I may not bridge. For I have endlessly varied, instructive contacts with all the world, with life, with the atmosphere whose radiant activity enfolds us all. The thrilling energy of the all-encasing air is warm and rapturous. Heat-waves and sound-waves play upon my face in infinite variety and combination, until I am able to surmise what must be the myriad sounds that my senseless ears have not heard. (40-41)

It is clear that, for Keller, the use-value of metaphor extends well beyond its rhetorical function, that she effectively challenges any analysis of the role of language as a pure

abstraction that signifies material reality. In this strict dichotomy, language functions primarily as representation—not constituting knowledge but reflecting and characterizing it. Thus when we talk about the potential of metaphor in terms of its concreteness versus its abstractness, we are only utilizing a very narrow rhetorical scope that insists on metaphor's use as a means of substitution. Understood through this scope alone, it is no wonder why Vidali calls for a new disability approach—for the individual metaphor is replaceable, subject to standards of empirical accuracy, and can ultimately can be substituted with something that maintains better "organic fidelity" to the material objects it seeks to describe. As a consequence too, abstraction becomes a potential violence enacted upon the material body. This is the kind of reading which Keller felt, however, that she staunchly had to resist, that her very existence and right to knowing depended on the subordination of the material:

> I observe, I feel, I think, I imagine. I associate the countless varied impressions, experiences, concepts. Out of these materials Fancy, the cunning artisan of the brain, welds an image which the sceptic would deny me, because I cannot see with my physical eyes the changeful, lovely face of my thought-child. He would break the mind's mirror. This spirit-vandal would humble my soul and force me to bite the dust of material things. While I champ the bit of circumstance, he scourges and goads me with the spur of fact. If I heeded him, the sweet-visaged earth would vanish into nothing, and I should hold in my hand nought but an aimless, soulless lump of dead matter. (81)

This denial of a prominent material reality, while providing Keller with a means of defining herself against critical readings which emphasized her disability, paradoxically also erases her own body, and suggests the erasure of others' bodies. This problematic reading runs parallel to those criticisms in Disability Studies of her well-known stoical attitude, that she always "treat[ed] obstacles as character-building exercises to be overcome [which do] nothing to clear the path of those following in Keller's footsteps"

(Kleege 109). Many have interpreted Keller's writings and position in society as a show of complacency (though scholars like Kleege have gone to great lengths to deconstruct and provide nuance for this reading), and this is partly why attitudes toward Keller in Disability Studies today are often ambivalent at best. But overemphasizing the rhetorical role of language in an effort to give voice to material realities ironically risks a further abstraction of people, transforming the body into "a sign or code … speaking about a social reality other than itself" (Titchkosky 5). In order to ground our understanding of Keller, we need not only assess how her writing signifies material reality, but also take into account *what* she expressed, that she herself had extremely pertinent beliefs about the same concepts we take for granted in scholarship. We must make efforts to read and understand her work in a non-rhetorical dimension in order to get the most out of her writing, to appreciate that, however she felt about her material body, she was ultimately much more compelled by the life of the mind. This turn allowed her endless, creative possibilities for understanding the world that cannot be ignored.

"Half Finished Phrases, Mutilated Sentences, Parodied Sentiments, and Brilliant Metaphors": Rethinking Metaphor and Disability

In one of the final essays of her book, "A Waking Dream," Keller details an experience she had during the writing of her collection, when she was trying to write a new essay and, feeling distracted, decided to "let [her] mind have its way without inhibition and direction, and idly [note] down the incessant beat of thought upon thought, image upon image" (103). What follows is a controlled relaying of that event, a "literary frolic" during which Keller wrote freely for "three or four hours" whatever succession of

thoughts came into her head, "and the resulting record is much like a dream." She relays that experience, how she was planning to write and had shut herself in her study when she began to feel a certain restlessness:

> My mind had had a long vacation, and I was now coming back to it in an hour that it looked not for me. My situation was similar to that of the master who went into a far country and expected on his home coming to find everything as he left it. But returning he found his servants giving a party. (103)

The manner of this "party," a metaphor for Keller's distracted and wandering mind, is described at length and with great romantic flourish: "The merry frolic went on madly. The dancers were all manner of thoughts … there they went swinging hand-in-hand in corkscrew fashion" (103). One by one, guests arrive at this party: a court jester, knights and ladies, monks, "fairies, goblins, and all the troops just loosed from Noah's storm-tossed ark" (106); Apollo, Venus (108); Homer, Plato, Mother Goose; Jack and Jill, Chaucer, Dante, and Shakespeare (109). The parade of literary and historical figures—brimming no doubt in Keller's "literary" mind which has learned to experience the world primarily through books—continues as the party goes on and each character dances, cheers, changes shape, and plays practical jokes on each other. Near the end, this whimsy cast begins to include some even more abstract characters:

> This was the signal for a rushing swarm of quotations. They surged to and fro, an inchoate throng of half finished phrases, mutilated sentences, parodied sentiments, and brilliant metaphors. I could not distinguish any phrases or ideas of my own making. I saw a poor, ragged, shrunken sentence that might have been mine own catch the wings of a fair idea with the light of genius shining like a halo about its head.
>
> Ever and anon the dancers changed partners without invitation or permission…. Among the wedded couples were certain similes hitherto inviolable in their bachelorhood and spinsterhood, and held in great respect. Their extraordinary proceedings nearly broke up the dance. But the fatuity of their union was evident to them, and they parted. Other similes seemed to have the habit of living in discord. They had been many times married and divorced. They belonged to the notorious society of Mixed Metaphors. (110-111)

Though Keller certainly intended the penultimate essay of her book to be more playful in tone—she admits in retrospect that perhaps her “fancy ran away with [her]” (xxvii)—in my mind there could be no more appropriate culmination of Keller’s thoughts and ideas on idealist philosophy, language, materialism, and the imagination, than this surreal scene she has set before us. Words, sentences, metaphor itself, all become literalized, made corporeal, given tangible shape and imagined as occupying the same plane of reality as all other “real” material bodies. It is a neat inversion of the idealist philosophy she believes in, with its abstractions given a flesh reality. This speaks to Keller’s unique relationship to language and her early education, when words and sentences were literally given a material presence in her room. It is this crucial context of physical reality which at the same time allows her to imagine and redress so many abstractions here—abstractions which she also claimed established her foundation for true knowledge of the real world.

The emphasis on the material can be read within much of current Disability Studies writing on language and metaphor. Though coming at it from different sides, both the critics who originally chastised Keller for her use of aural and visual idioms as being disingenuous and the Disability Studies scholars today who view those same uses of metaphorical language as perpetuating ableist norms share an emphasis on a rhetorical analysis of language and its representational qualities—an immaterial abstraction always signifying, always pointing, but never constructing its own truths. Keller’s book, which was her response to so much critical pushback and skepticism around this topic, rethinks and reclaims the role of language as co-constructive, and the nature of reality as something fundamentally metaphorical and hermeneutic. She provides a basis for

reevaluating metaphor, language, and abstraction as intimately interlinked with reality and capable of providing epistemological access. Because of her writing, she raises questions and concerns for me over how, in our efforts through social justice praxis to highlight the damages of abstraction's misrepresentation of lived, embodied realities, we neglect to consider abstraction's ability to construct, reveal, and constitute other ideas of lived reality that both take into account and extend beyond material existence.

Though in this paper I have intended neither to advocate for nor admonish her staunch anti-materialist sentiments, I do find it worth mentioning that in all my research studying the historical figure of Helen Keller, I've encountered very little which directly analyzes her writing style and the philosophical contributions she has made to the study of language, meaning, metaphor, and the ontological distinctions between the literal and the figurative. There has been far more said in recent scholarship regarding the *materiality* of her writing and her work (its tactile qualities, as well as Keller's "symbiotic" relationship with Sullivan). For these reasons, I have argued that a closer look be given to her writing in *The World I Live In*, which can surely be read as an idealist treatise on the nature of the material world, material experience, and the existence of some interconnected, immaterial conduit of human minds which metaphor, analogy, and likeness can elucidate. If we are to assess Keller as a writer, thinker, and historical icon, it seems crucial, in my mind, that we incorporate more than just the material circumstances which comprise her historical record—that is, we must make it a priority to first read her own writing and understand her own ideas.

REFERENCES CITED

Cressman, Jodi. "Helen Keller and the Mind's Eyewitness." *Western Humanities Review*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2000, pp. 108–123.

Freeman, Mark. "Worded Images, Imaged Words: Helen Keller and the Poetics of Self-Representation." *Interfaces: Image Texte Language*, vol. 18, 2000, pp. 135-145.

Fuss, Diana. "Keller's Hand." *The Sense of an Interior : Four Rooms and the Writers That Shaped Them*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004, pp. 47-64.

Keller, Helen. *The World I Live In*. The New York Review of Books, 2003. Print.

Klages, Mary Krag. "'More Wonderful Than Any Fiction': The Representation of Helen Keller." *Dissertation Abstracts International*, vol. 50, no. 12, ProQuest, June 1990, p. 3953A.

Kleege, Georgina. "The Helen Keller Who Still Matters." *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2004, pp. 100–112.

Kort, Wesley A. "Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Metaphor." *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1979, pp. 49–51.

Masong, Kenneth. "Metaphor, Poiesis and Hermeneutical Ontology: Paul Ricoeur and the Turn to Language." *Pan Pacific Journal of Philosophy, Education and Management*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 2-7.

Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. University of Toronto Press, 2012. Print.

Titchkosky, Tanya. "Life with Dead Metaphors: Impairment Rhetoric in Social Justice Praxis." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 9 no. 1, 2015, pp. 1-18.

Vidali, Amy. "Seeing What We Know: Disability and Theories of Metaphor." *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2010, pp. 33–54.