

From Moral to Social:  
Adapting Models of Disability in *How to Train Your Dragon*

Since DreamWorks released the first *How to Train Your Dragon* film in 2010, Hiccup and Toothless, both amputees, have been lauded as some of the first heroes with disabilities in mainstream children's film. However, Hiccup and Toothless come from a book series of the same name by Cressida Cowell (2003-2015). In the book, Hiccup and Toothless never lose their limbs, and the sole disabled character is Alvin the Treacherous, the series' villain. At the end of each book, Alvin loses a body part, leading to the observation that "Alvin's greed and malevolence have led to him becoming smaller and smaller over the years" (*A Hero's Guide to Deadly Dragons*). In other words, in the book series, disability is equated with evil, engaging in the moral model of disability which sees disability as punishment for bad behavior. In DreamWorks' adaptations, on the other hand, Hiccup and Toothless are just two within a cast of Vikings with disabilities. The three films and two television series construct a world of violence and little healthcare in which many of the characters have some kind of disability or expect to soon. This series fully demonstrates the implications of the social model of disability: disability is not a problem when society is designed for those with disability in mind. This paper will trace the shift *How to Train Your Dragon* makes from a moral model of disability to a social one, examining how this unique case of adaptation has moved away from an extremely harmful portrayal of disability to a powerfully empathetic one.