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BODY UNBOUND: POETRY OF ILLNESS, GENDER, AND DISABILITY IN TORRIN A. GREATHOUSE'S *WOUND FROM THE MOUTH OF A WOUND* (2020)

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torrin a. greathouse's debut poetry collection *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound* (2020) articulates the oblique language of pain, trauma, and suffering emanating from the flesh. greathouse's poetry of the wounded body deals with the impact of the gender and ableist biases contained in medical, social, and cultural discourses on her identity as a chronically ill and disabled trans woman. The analysis of a selection of her poems reveals her painstaking deconstruction of the male/female, ability/disability, healthy/ill, and normal/abnormal binaries that govern her world. This poet unbinds a body whose gender and potential are hidden behind the dominant biomedical essentialism, diagnostic terms, and tentative treatments, reflecting on the analogous medicalisation of disability, illness, transgenderism, and trauma. greathouse poetises her reconciliation with a body oppressed by the dominant discourses that regard trans and disabled bodies only in terms of deficiency and imperfection.

KEYWORDS: medicine, gender, disability, ableism, poetry.

El cos desfermat: poesia sobre malaltia, gènere i discapacitat a *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound* (2020), de torrin a. greathouse

La primera col·lecció de poesia de torrin a. greathouse, *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound* (2020), articula el fosc llenguatge del dolor, trauma i patiment que emana del cos. La seva poesia del cos ferit tracta sobre l'impacte dels biaixos capacitistes i de gènere que es troben als discursos mèdics, socials i culturals sobre la seva identitat com a dona trans amb una discapacitat i afeccions cròniques. L'anàlisi d'una selecció dels seus poemes revela una deconstrucció minuciosa dels dualismes mascle/femella, capacitat/discapacitat, salut/malaltia i normal/anormal que governen el seu món. La poeta allibera un cos el gènere i potencial del qual s'amaguen rere l'essencialisme biomèdic dominant, els termes diagnòstics i els tractaments imprecisos, alhora que reflexiona sobre la medicalització anàloga de la discapacitat, la malaltia, el transgenerisme i el trauma. greathouse poetitza la seva reconciliació amb un cos oprimit pels discursos que consideren els cossos trans i amb discapacitats en termes de deficiència i imperfecció.

PARAULES CLAU: medicina, gènere, discapacitat, capacitisme, poesia.

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El cuerpo desatado: poesía sobre enfermedad, género y discapacidad en *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound* (2020), de torrin a. greathouse

La primera colección de poesía de torrin a. greathouse, *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound* (2020), articula el oscuro lenguaje del dolor, trauma y sufrimiento que emana de la carne. Su poesía del cuerpo herido indaga sobre los sesgos capacitistas y de género implícitos en los discursos médicos, sociales y culturales y su impacto en su identidad como mujer trans con discapacidad y afecciones crónicas. El análisis de una selección de sus poemas desvela una minuciosa deconstrucción de los dualismos macho/hembra, capacidad/discapacidad, salud/enfermedad y normal/anormal que gobiernan su mundo. Esta poeta libera un cuerpo cuyo género y capacidad se esconden tras el esencialismo biomédico dominante, los términos diagnósticos y los tratamientos imprecisos, reflexionando sobre la análoga medicalización de la discapacidad, enfermedad, transgenerismo y trauma. greathouse versifica su reconciliación con un cuerpo oprimido por los discursos que consideran los cuerpos trans y con discapacidades en términos de deficiencia e imperfección.

PALABRAS CLAVE: medicina, género, discapacidad, capacitismo, poesía.

Wound from the Mouth of a Wound (2020) is a poetry collection by transgender cripple-punk poet and essayist torrin a. greathouse (she/they).[1, 2] Her debut anthology won the 2022 Kate Tufts Discovery Award and gained critical attention in the LGBTQ literary circles; yet, it has remained unexplored in the academic sphere. The book compiles new and already-published writings and combines different formats of poetry and lyrical prose, including blackout poetry, haibuns, sonnets, free verse, ekphrastic poems, and essay fragments. It can be considered (semi)autobiographical, as most of her poems deal with

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[2] The term "cripple punk" was coined in 2014 by Tumblr user Tyler Trewhella, who posted a picture of themself holding a cane in one hand and a cigarrete in the other with the caption "i'm starting a movement". Trewhella inaugurated a new trend among social media users with disabilities in response to the ableist and healthist backlash the picture received. In the consolidation of their movement, Trewhella outlined some principles: "Cripple punk rejects the 'good cripple' mythos. Cripple punk is here for the bitter cripple, the uninspirational cripple, the smoking cripple, the drinking cripple, the addict cripple, the cripple who hasn't 'tried everything' […]. Cripple punk does not pander to the able bodied" (Trewhella in Sanchez, 2021). By defining herself as a cripple-punk, greathouse emphasises the empowerment of disabled people when they take an active role in deciding how to represent themselves by rejecting the idealistic and optimistic disability rhetoric that dominates mainstream culture.

her embodied experiences as a trans disabled woman with a malformed spine that demands the use of a cane. One of the most remarkable features of greathouse's writing is that it resists the print traditions of poetry, since, as she herself explains, her motivation was the creation of "poetic bodies" that mirrored her own corporeal reality: "I wanted these poems to be unpredictable, fragmentary, and visceral. I wanted these poems, as objects, to be felt, kinesthetic things as much as they are written texts" (greathouse in Vesely, 2021). This collection reflects the intimate relationship between body, language and knowledge, as it captures "the constant processes of writing and rewriting the self, for which poetry acts as a form of knowledge that reaffirms one's existence" (Golovchenko, 2021). Her poetic *oeuvre* echoes the genre of confessional poetry that addresses topics related to mental illness, sexuality, identity, and trauma, connecting societal critique to her personal truth and lived realities with a particular focus on the patriarchal violence against women and trans subjects. greathouse's poems challenge the dominant cultural narratives that promote ableist and cis-centric views of the human body. As the title of the collection indicates, her poetic pieces deal with the pain and suffering of not fitting the normative models and social constructions of sexuality, corporeality, and femininity. *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound* suggests a sense of self-referentiality or iteration, as the "mouth of a wound" implies that psychological and physical trauma are the speakers of greathouse's poetic works, while the "wound from the mouth" represents the painfulness of verbally articulating those experiences and the inability to speak due to the denial of pain and the silence imposed by suffering. This poetry collection can be read as the response to the urge of the wounded body to have a voice, as Arthur Frank claims in his seminal work *The Wounded Storyteller*: "the body is not mute, but it is inarticulate; it does not use speech, yet it begets it" (1995: 27). Amid chaos and pain, bodies communicate their stories through their unique contours and orientations. The telling, therefore, is not the result of the person creating a story, but rather "the body creating a person" (27). greathouse represents this circularity in the relationship between self, body, and language textually and symbolically in her writing, which becomes the expression of her embodied empowerment.

greathouse writes about the pain of intrafamilial and transgenerational trauma and the wounds inflicted by the ableist and cis-normative society — the same deep and open wounds exhibited by the Medusa that illustrates the cover of the book. In this sense, the poem that opens the collection, "Medusa with the Head of Perseus" (2020: 1-2), complements the visual artwork of the cover. Both are clearly inspired by Argentinian artist Luciano Garbati's 2008 sculpture that depicts the mythological female figure holding a blade in one hand and the decapitated head of Perseus in the other —a subversive

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representation that contests the traditional gender roles and challenges the male-dominated narratives that populate Western cultures, which eventually became the symbol of the #MeToo movement. In the version displayed on the cover of greathouse's book, the inclusion of other elements adds more layers of meaning that anticipate the topics she will deal with in her collection. Unlike the original sculpture, Medusa's body surface is presented as fractured and wounded. The golden gashes on her skin reveal amethyst crystals as purple as the wisteria tendrils that wind around her body trying to bind the fissures together. This visual composition opens new spaces for the interpretation of the collection. Every element is symbolically relevant, as the colour purple suggests that Medusa's wounds are not recent and that they are in the process of healing, while the amethyst —etymologically meaning "not drunk" in ancient Greek— is a symbol of sobriety and temperance, something that directly connects with the experience of alcoholism that greathouse mentions in some of her poems. Additionally, the wisteria flowers that dangle from Medusa's hands and legs are also a distinct feminist symbol —like the yellow wallpaper imagined by Charlotte Perkins Gilman— for it epitomises the violent oppression and victimisation of women within patriarchy, as well as the collapse of female mental health under male authority. In this sense, the poem inspired by Garbati's model can be read as a manifesto that announces the strong feminist tone of the collection.

The Medusa evoked by greathouse and sculpted by Garbati represent the genealogy of feminism, which can be traced back to Hélène Cixous' seminal work "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976). Cixous reimagines Medusa, not as a monster or a symbol of horror: "she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (885). Medusa's laugh symbolises the power of women's voices silenced by masculine-centric narratives, like Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Medusa —cursed and transformed into a monster after being raped by Poseidon— has become a modern feminist icon that epitomises the end of a history of blaming victims of rape. For greathouse, the truth is not in history, crafted by male voices and dominant discourses, but in the body and its lived experiences, as she declares "I do not want to speak about the beginning / of this story. […] Instead begin with the body—itself a kind / of ending" (2020: 1). greathouse, in this regard, reaffirms Cixous' advocacy for women's writing (her celebrated concept of *écriture feminine*) as inextricably articulated on the female body and bodily experience. This body is the axis of the collection, not because it is a wounded body, but because the body itself is the mouthing wound, as the site of trauma, disability, and pain, and because the language the female body speaks challenges the patriarchal order, beyond the limits of ableism, transphobia, and sexism. Yet, the author also acknowledges that the body speaks a language that is not always coherent and unambiguous. When she states, "[t]he body is a fickle / language" in "Still Life with Bedsores" (47), she metaphorically suggests that the

body communicates in erratic, unpredictable and inconsistent languages, that is, the language of pain and trauma. This linguistic volatility is not only expressed verbally but also visually in greathouse's fractured verses, reinforcing the correlation between form and content that characterises poetry writing. The unmaking and remaking of language is even more explicit in the use of erasure in the prose poems "Burning Haibun" (15) and "The Queer Trans Girl Writes Her Estranged Mother a Letter About the Word Faggot & It Is the First Word to Burn" (31). These two blackout pieces represent the creation of art through destruction, simultaneously symbolising the violent erasure of language and its re-birth, for the brokenness of one text originates a different one with new meanings and textures.

"Medusa with the Head of Perseus" prefaces a collection divided into five sections and concluded with a postscript. In the first section, dominated by poems related to the experience of being under the medical gaze, greathouse is particularly concerned with medicine as an institution of power and the ways the medical authority can exert violence against non-normative bodies. Thus, in "Metaphors for My Body on the Examination Table" (6), the poetic persona feels like the "wasp['s] burrowed fruit", implying the invasive nature of some medical procedures, as the term "burrow" emphasises the sense of intrusion, or even violation. Medical examination —based on sex-specific biological models— forces the speaker to perceive her body in terms of absences or incompleteness, expressed in several metaphors: "The hunger / dispossessing where womb could have been; The field / fallow in every season" (6). The speaker describes the experience of undergoing gender-affirming surgery and hormone therapy to revive "the stillborn of her body": "The diagram of the procedure; / The body turned in on itself / like a bloody glove; The pill that births / this body into woman; The pill that murders / the potential of a child" (6). The poem implicitly plays with the ambiguity of biology and contests the category of "woman", contrasting biology with lived experience. Although this piece has recurrent metaphors of emptiness and hollowness related to female fertility, the lyrical voice reaffirms her capacity to give birth to herself: "The mother of ouroboros giving birth to herself / & herself & herself &" (6). Again, greathouse evokes images of self-referentiality to emphasise the process of creation-destruction-recreation of the body. Yet, the omission of the last "herself" in the above-quoted verse indicates that the cultural expectation regarding women is to give birth to other beings, leading to the assumption that trans women are incomplete or half-formed. In this poem, greathouse challenges both the biological and cultural conceptions of femaleness and undoes the myths that surround medical procedures of gender affirmation.

Other poems in this section deal with the biological sex binarism that governs medicine and the ways it is translated into language. Her feminist stance

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aims at deconstructing the biological essentialism of medicine to embrace the ambiguity of her embodied experience as a trans, disabled and chronically ill subject. The fourth poem of the first section, titled "When my Doctor First Tells Me I Am a Woman" (8), deals with the expectations regarding the medical legitimation or validation of gender and the cold and impersonal language of medicine. Gender seems to be medically confirmed, but in a negative way, for her doctor relates the patient's femaleness to illnesses suffered by other women of her family:

> Says my breasts are just another place
> for sickness to grow
> & I'm reminded of the cyst
> in my aunt's chest my mother's
> womb spider-webbed with scar
> (2020: 8)

Under the doctor's eye, the potentiality of disease is what makes this trans patient a woman, as she is also confirmed that her "hormones have reached / *biological female levels*" (8; emphasis in the original). greathouse denounces the medical tendency of reducing womanness to a quantitative biological trait. The poem's persona, therefore, is not medically regarded as a woman in the strict sense of the word, but as a subject with enough oestrogens to be considered female: "I am the body's closest approximation / a fraction rounded up. Woman / by inverse proportion" (8). Both men and women need oestrogens and androgens, but in opposite proportions —one always dominating the other (Hammes and Levin, 2019: 1818). This medical approach to sex is based on a binarism —or, as greathouse puts it, the male/female fraction— that leads to the conclusion that transgenderism is based upon achieving a "normal" male *or* female hormonal constitution. The lyrical voice, thus, expresses a sense of dispassion for she is only considered female because of the results of a blood test, a supposedly objective medical fact that does not capture her actual subjective experience as a trans woman.

"Hydrocele" (10), in contrast, expresses the embodied experience of distress of a subject moving from one point of the sex binarism to the other. This poem epitomises the sense of bodily "dys-appearance", a concept developed by Drew Leder in *The Absent Body* (1990) and that could be summarised as the interruption of the body's transparency or absence in experience due to dysfunction or illness. greathouse's lyric persona undergoes a double experience of disappearance related to disease and gender, as she suffers a typically male disease called hydrocele —the swelling in the scrotum due to accumulation of serous fluid (Carton, Daly and Ramani 2007: 247). In this case,

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dysfunction causes the explicit awareness of the male sexual organs, which is reinforced by medical examination and palpation. The speaker's response is alienation from her sense of embodiment, which she expresses by detaching from the situation where a nurse examines her. The poem, in this sense, starts with the patient trying to dissociate from her body by naming some of the "twenty-two distinct variations of the color white":

> & I am trying
> to identify the walls of the emergency room.
> To ignore the cold snatching at my naked legs.
> Ignore the nurse in between them.
>
> (2020: 10)

The colour white is a recurrent symbol in greathouse's collection. In this specific poem it can be read as a metaphor for the diversity of sex and gender identities, for there is not just one type of white, in the same way that there are not only two sexes, an implicit criticism to the categorical gender binarism in the medical sciences. The experience of a testicular disease in a transgender body dismantles this dualism, proving the multidimensionality and diversity of gendered embodiment. The sense of dissociation this dichotomy provokes is visually represented in the fragmented nature of the poem and the use of blank spaces to express the persona's problematic sense of corporeality. The verses are scattered all over the page with no logical order, interrupted by unnecessary and forced pauses that make this poetic piece hard to read. The chaotic nature of this poem's structure mirrors the chaotic nature of the embodied experience of the patient. For the poetic persona, however, dys-appearance is not permanent, as the end of physical examination brings the re-embodiment of her femaleness: "So soon after I reenter the world, / newborn girl". Even illness acquires a new level of meaning, as it is interpreted by the lyrical voice as the manifestation of her body's aversive response to alienating maleness: "my flesh too rejects the male of me". The speaker embodies the tension between maleness and femaleness that is translated into her corporeality:

> The nurse explains this: my body's indecision.
> The mouth of muscle that could have become a doorway
> to the womb—failed to close.
>
> (2020: 10)

This anatomical parallelism between male and female (foetal) sex (mal)formation is regarded in positive terms. It seems to legitimise the patient's identity, as her anatomy keeps inside something genuinely female,

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which empowers her to show resistance to be identified as male. The closing verse of the poem emphasises the re-birth of the speaker with a sex different from the one assigned by a medical standard when first born: "Silently, I praise this body's reluctance to be named son" (10).

Throughout her collection, greathouse's emphasis on the intertwining relationship between language, medicine, and power echoes Emi Koyama's words in "The Transfeminist Manifesto" (2003), a political declaration that critiques the pathologisation of the transgender identity and demands the recognition of the transgender subject's agency and self-determination. In this proclamation inspired by the women's health movement, Koyama expounds that trans women have been doubly marginalised by the medical institution for deviating from both the male and the female biomedical standards:

> Before the feminist critiques of modern medicine, female bodies are considered "abnormal" by the male-centered standard of the medical establishment, which resulted in the pathologization of such ordinary experiences of women as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause; it was the women's health movement that forced the medical community to accept that they are part of ordinary human experiences. *Transfeminism* insists that transsexuality is not an illness or a disorder, but as much a part of the wide spectrum of ordinary human experiences as pregnancy. It is thus not contradictory to demand medical treatment for trans people to be made more accessible, while de-pathologizing "gender identity disorder". (256)

Koyama *trans*cends the principles of feminism, demanding free access to medical care for trans subjects and, at the same time, denouncing the medical view of transsexualism as a disorder or gender anomaly that medicine can "fix" or "correct" according to the essentialist model of sex/gender correspondence. The medicalisation of transsexualism is the core theme in "When My Gender is First Named Disorder" (2020: 46), which can be also read as greathouse's personal transfeminist manifesto that urges the de-pathologisation of the diagnosis of "gender identity disorder". The syntactically incomplete sentence in the poem's title is followed by two verses where the lyrical voice's gender is considered in terms of physical defect: "Do they mean this is a synonym of disorganization? / Machine with excess parts? […] / Or perhaps they mean it as disruption in the neat / arrangement of a system?" (46). The term "disorder" used in the medical context disrupts the speaker's sense of identity as a trans woman, as her being is regarded as a deviation from the "normal" course of human sexual development. This ideological normativism regarding gender and sex in biomedicine is translated into language, which

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defines transsexuality in terms of a deficiency that requires medical intervention to be amended: "Our language unable to speak my gender / out of illness" (46). The persona even establishes a parallelism between her malformed spine—described as "a chaos of misplaced bone"—and the malformation of her gender as a "[m]isplaced chromosome" (46). This poem captures the depersonalising nature of medicine, which does not treat patients, but rather dysfunctional machine-bodies that need to be repaired to become "normal".

greathouse's critique to the medical institution and its influence on the individual's experience is fully developed in the poem "Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination Before a Diagnosis Can Be Determined" (51), which deconstructs the myth of objectivism in the biomedical sciences. The first letter of each line follows alphabetical order, derisively reflecting the systematic and sequential methods intrinsic to the diagnostic processes. The speaker opens the poem contesting biomedical knowledge as the absolute truth in antithetical opposition to the ambiguous and uncertain subjective experience:

> Antonym for me a medical
> book. Replace all the punctuation—
> commas, periods, semicolons—with question marks.
> Diagnosis is just apotheosis with sharper
> edges. New name for a myth already lived in.
>
> (2020: 51)

The sense of scientific uncertainty greathouse expresses in this poem may be inspired by the epigraph of George Abraham's poem (titled "binary") quoted in the title page of the first section of the collection: "i only know how to love the body in [fragments/categories] … i am all of the question marks in your medical books … even in its purest form, the body was still a mistranslation of itself" (greathouse, 2020: 3).[3] In modern medicine, diagnostic categories that label diseases are based on the criterion of specificity, and generally abstracted from individual patients, who become "entities existing outside the unique manifestations of illness" (Rosenberg, 2002: 237). Diagnosis reflects the typical and predictable patterns or mechanisms of a disease that can be universally used to describe any individual case. The medical professionals, consequently, are conferred upon the power to determine "what is, and what is not, 'true' about disease" (Bury, 2005: 20), implying that the medical meaning of disease does not fully consider the embodied experience of illness. Diseases are not natural categories for, as Michel Foucault argued,

[3] George Abraham is a queer Palestinian-American poet, writer, performance artist, and author of two poetry collections: *Birthright* (2020) and *the specimen's apology* (2019).

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they are fabricated by medical knowledge: "The sign no longer speaks the natural language of disease; it assumes shape and value only within the questions posed by medical investigation. There is nothing, therefore, to prevent it being solicited and almost fabricated by medical investigation" (2003: 162). Evidence-based medicine is often reductionist, as it only accounts for conditions that can be unambiguously categorised as diseases, while other affections that do not provide definite answers to the medical interrogation of the body enter the realm of syndromes, like fibromyalgia or other forms of chronic pain. The poetic persona, in this respect, exposes the cultural myth about the infallibility of medicine by arguing that the biomedical science cannot always offer a categorical interpretation or explanation to patients with conditions that elude diagnosis. Although she yearns "I just want to be a question this body can answer" (2020: 51), her body is beyond the scope of medical knowledge. She, nevertheless, asserts that even if doctors find the onset or origin of her conditions, a diagnosis will never fully reflect the extent of her suffering: "We search for a beginning to this story & find only a history of breakage / x-rays cannot explain" (51).

Apart from conferring the patient with credibility and legitimation, greathouse also notes a different social function of diagnosis in "Essay Fragment: Preexisting Conditions" (49), which, as she explains in the endnotes of her book, was "written in reaction to the list of fifty preexisting conditions included in the text of the 2017 American Health Care Act, which would allow insurance companies to charge customers a higher premium" (62). In this piece, the author brings to light the social disadvantage of people with preexistent conditions —which are not necessarily illnesses, for being transgender (listed as "transsexualism") is considered one of those fifty health issues. The medicalisation of "deviance", in this regard, is transferred to the legal sphere to marginalise subjects that do not conform the social norms. Thus, in the same way that medicine fabricates diagnoses and an ideal anatomical model, laws can also impose a prescriptive model of health: "It's so simple really. / A pen invents the anatomy / of a law & the body / becomes an excuse. Collection of reasons / for its own abandonment" (49). Once again, the speaker depicts the marginalisation of the deviant body as the victim of social and institutional violence.

greathouse also deals with the oppressive nature of the concept of "normality" not only regarding sex and gender, but also disability. In this sense, she introduces four poems that deal with the different models of disability and the ableist misconceptions regarding bodily functionality and their influence on the subject's identity, sense of embodiment, and social roles. These pieces are presented as lyrical essay fragments in different verse formats shaped with white spaces, footnotes, and crossed out words. The four poems

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address the socio-cultural constructions behind the concepts of impairment and disability. It is important to note that, although these two terms are used interchangeably, both refer to different stages in the social construction of physical and psychological "deficiencies" or "abnormalities". Thus, while impairment is "a negatively construed, cultural perception of a bodily, cognitive, or behavioral anomaly", disability is "the negative social response or social exclusion that may come into play because of perceived impairments" (Shuttleworth and Kasnitz, 2006: 330). In other words, disability is not a natural category, but a social product imposed on people with impairments. It is not the person that is disabled. Instead, the societal and cultural barriers are the actual responsible actors for *disabling* individuals with impairments. Western dominant cultural discourses that promote the concept of "normality" are marginalising and disablist in essence. These narratives permeate the social, political, and medical institutions that consider disabled subjects in terms of their degree of dependency on others or on the welfare system. greathouse, therefore, presents four models that conceptualise disability as a medical, social, personal, and economic problem, unmasking these disempowering, stigmatising, and oppressive disablist discourses. In the four poems, the author crosses out the word "disabled" to challenge the use of this term to denote imperfection, deficiency, or defect, suggesting that the subject is not inherently abnormal, but an individual that does not conform to the norm and expectations. The strikethrough line disrupts the reading, inciting the questioning of the validity of the concept of "disabled" and the assumptions that underlie it. Additionally, it is important to note the asymmetrical placement of the horizontal line that crosses out this term in all the poems, a visual representation of the imbalance in the power dynamics that intervene in the construction of disability, for the long tails of the letters "d", "b", and "l" may symbolise those who are upright or "normal", and therefore supposedly superior, while the letters that are below the strikethrough line stand for the inferior impaired.

"Essay Fragment: Medical Model of Disability" (2020: 7) deals with the medicalisation of disability and the task of medicine in correcting physiological, anatomical, and behavioural anomalies that do not conform to the social prescription of normality —an approach to disability that dominated medical practice in the twentieth century, linking disability to pathology and disease. The poem stands as a criticism of the simplistic principle that governs the medical model of disability based on the depersonalising view of the body as a reparable machine: "If a clock is broken do you repair it or / ask the world to conform to its sense of time" (7). greathouse breaks with the figurative tone of the poem with the footnote she inserts with the straightforward answer to this rhetorical question, which reflects the social expectations

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regarding the disabled body: "You must fix what is holding you back" (7). The indirect question and the direct answer reflect Paul K. Longmore's critique of the medical model, which regards disability as "a social problem, but it makes deviant individual bodies the site and source of that problem" (2000: 36). According to this approach, subjects with impairments have the individual responsibility to accommodate to the world dominated by able-bodied norms. People with disabilities, therefore, feel forced to accept the prescription of "medical or quasi-medical treatments to cure or correct deviant bodies and deviant behavior" (36). Impairment is medically regarded as something that can be amended, ignoring the cultural, political, and social factors that work in the construction of disabilities. Consequently, subjects are expected to fight against their own disabilities, rather than conquering the barriers imposed by the ableist society. As greathouse declares:

> Medical Model speaks
> says people [with disabilities] need to work harder
> to overcome [themselves]. The cure is to make them
> more normal.
>
> (2020: 7; emphasis in the original)

The poet adds other two clarifying footnotes attached to this piece: one for the term "Medical Model", that she notes was formerly named "Functional-Limitation Model" and "Biological-Inferiority Model", which denote incapacity and defect, and another one for the expression "more normal", which the author requests to be read as "less disabled" (7). Medical intervention relieves society of the burden or "weight", as greathouse puts it, of dependent disabled subjects whose bodies are regarded as "price tags" for not being productive for the capitalist system. In essence, the medical model equates disability to an infirmity that medical sciences can heal:

> The Medical Model says: my ~~disabled~~ body
> is like any disease. If we discover a new & hungry
> sickness is it our duty to cure it or to let it be?
>
> (2020: 7)

The last verse reflects medicine's endeavour to erase dysfunction, and in this case, disability, ignoring the environmental factors that create the barriers that disable subjects with impairments. greathouse also suggests the connection between the medical model of disability and charity, normally materialised in philanthropic initiatives that seek to encourage a collective effort that assumes that disability can be fought or defeated. In this intersection

between the medical and the charity models, "[i]f a disability cannot be eliminated, or significantly ameliorated, people with disabilities often are viewed as pitiful or helpless" (Roush and Sharby, 2011: 1717). The medical view of disability, therefore, hides a moral component that justifies the socially assumed inferiority of disabled people.

In "Essay Fragment: Moral Model of Disability" (2020: 20) greathouse represents an approach that is older than the medical model but that still has a strong ideological presence in most cultures and religions. According to this model, disability is regarded as "the reification of sin, failure of faith, moral lapse, or evil" of an individual or family (Olkin, 1999: 25). From this perspective, disability is associated to shame and stigma, as it symbolises the punishment for not following the moral code imposed by religious doctrine, forcing the social exile of the disabled person. In the poem, the speaker discerns the moral judgement of disability as intra-familial, embodied by parental canonical roles. The mother of the poetic persona, who represents procreation, wants to expel her blame for disability: "My mother / will not admit to our / history heirloom of disease" (2020: 20). The father —the provider— represents the brutal purgation of the shame of having a disabled child: "My father tells me that a wolf will eat / their own young those too weak to survive" (20). In this context, the image of the dead pigeons described at the beginning of the poem gains full meaning: the unwanted animals that invade the urban environment are left wingless without possibility of survival. The poetic persona is regarded as a burden to her bloodline, as the images evoked in the poem insist on erasing disability from the family history. In this sense, religion proclaims its power to expunge abnormality through the "blessing palms" that a stranger offers to the speaker "to pull this shattered bone into church's sharp-edged mercy" (20). The last five verses of the poem vividly manifest the impression that this moral judgement of disability has left on the persona's sense of identity:

> This ~~disabled~~ body is always product or vessel
> [of sin/for mercy]. Always this body of crooked back
> & sidestepped gender. Body of apple-taker
> & rib-giver. This body of ungiftings
> worth praying away.
> (2020: 20)

The distribution of the verses of this poem is meaning-full: divided into two columns aligned to the left and right, leaving irregular blank spaces in the middle of the page, a pattern that clearly mirrors the shape of the poet's spine and reinforces the relationship between the textual and the corporal. This

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visual dualism suggests the opposition between the religious notions of righteousness and evil upon which the moral model of disability is based. It also may symbolise the fissures in the familial relationships provoked by disability, or the fissures in the speaker's sense of self due to the moral judgment not only of their deformed spine, but also of gender, as it is suggested that deviating from the assigned sex is the sin that was punished with disability. The biblical reference to Adam and Eve in the last verses also emphasizes the gender component of moral judgments, as femaleness is inherently linked to sinfulness, while maleness is commended a superior purpose. The disabled body, however, is a vessel not only of immorality, but also for clemency, as it is often object of prayers for healing and redemption, as well as a product of the cautionary tales about the punishment for sinfulness.

The third essay fragment, titled "Tragedy Model of Disability" (43), extends this perspective on impairment as inherently negative, reinforcing the stigmatisation, discrimination, and exclusion of disabled people. This approach is the result of the influence of the medical model of disability that focuses on "functional impairments and individual adjustment to them", encouraging the depiction of disability as the product of an unfortunate personal event, rather than as the consequence of institutional forms of exclusion, highlighting a broader socio-political context into which the disabled body is inscribed (Sullivan, 1991: 255). Disability as well as the inability to cope with impairments or adapt to society are generally regarded as individual failures by the ableist discourses. Disabled people are consequently socially annulled and silenced and become object of pity for the able-bodied. greathouse, in this sense, contests this dominant narrative, emphasising the idea that disability is only measured in terms of losses:

> Consider: the ~~disabled~~ body as city.
> How its potential energy [a near-living thing]
> cannot be measured until it is burned.
> The body quantified by the tragedies it can contain.
> (2020: 43)

In the personal tragedy model, the potentiality of the disabled body is not in its power to overcome social and environmental barriers, but in the body it would have been if tragedy had never happened, that is, if it was a "normal" body. After a catastrophe, science, or in this case medicine, measures the damage, and society shows pity. The value of the broken body, thus, is quantified in terms of its deficiencies: the more functions it loses, the less valuable and the more stigmatised it becomes. The poem evokes images that "[r]eframe the ~~disabled~~ body as disaster", suggesting that disability,

understood as bodily damage, can be repaired. The potential energy, therefore, reflects the social expectations regarding the disabled to conform the ableist models of body and behaviour, and accommodate to the established socio-economic order. This indicates that in the same manner that the value of the disabled body can be medically measured, it can also be monetarily quantified, as the poetic persona asserts in the last verse of the poem: "Consider price tag stamped upon the wreckage" (greathouse, 2020: 43).

In this regard, "Essay Fragment: Economic Model of Disability" (56) extends the scope of the tragedy model to discuss the commodification of the disabled body. Similarly to the biomedical model of disability that defines the disabled body in terms of imperfection, the economic model is based on the individual's ability to work and to be productive, as "the values of personal, moral, and social worth are closely related to the ability and willingness to work, and further, a great deal of American legislation is based upon these principles" (Smart, 2004: 38). greathouse emphasises this socio-economic pressure related to the values of productivity and autonomy in the two rhetorical questions that open her poem:

> How do you calculate in hard mathematics
> the value of a disabled body? The body which reduces
> like a fraction to an object/icon of pity?
> (2020: 56)

The poet reflects on the value of the disabled subject as a body that consumes rather than produces resources, and the dehumanising price of pity, as she explicates in the footnote attached to the word "fraction" in the above-quoted excerpt: "some portion < human" (greathouse, 2020: 56). From an economic perspective, subjects are socially stigmatised since, as disability scholar Paul Higgins argues, if disabled individuals "cannot produce a 'profit' […], then they have little or no value", and are therefore not considered fully subjects (1992: 199). From the perspective of the disabled individual, the stigma and pity generated by this model have no value, as they do not encourage a social change to abolish the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in society but rather perpetuate the image of impaired people as helpless, incapable victims of their own tragedies, a burden for the rest of society. In this sense, greathouse establishes an analogy with physics to illustrate the crushing and victimising power of the socioeconomic system over the disabled body, implicitly contrasting the principles of the natural world contained in Newton's laws of motion and the *man*made laws that govern the ableist world:

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Consider the ~~disabled~~ body. Consider its potential
for work: if *force* is defined [in part] by *mass*
how much weight can the ~~disabled~~ body exert
[on society] before the net worth is zero?
(2020: 56; emphasis in the original)

The "net worth" refers to the legitimate value of disabled people, without considering their debts or deficiencies in terms of capabilities and profit. Zero, thus, means that the assets (that is, the abilities) equal the liabilities (that is, disabilities), resulting in the null economic and social power of the disabled subject. greathouse's poem already answers the last rhetorical question posed in the last verses, for ableism, in its economic, biomedical, or sociocultural form, always turns subjects into zero worth.

With the use of footnotes, strikethrough lines, and blank or black spaces, greathouse's poetry embodies the elasticity and plasticity of language to write the wounded body. The broken and fragmented lyrical pieces not only represent the violence exerted on the subject, but the resilience of the broken body that can recompose itself through language. The poem included in the postscript, titled "Ars Poetica *or* Sonnet to Be Written Across My Chest & Read in a Mirror, Beginning with a Line from Kimiko Hahn" (2020: 61), goes even further in the linguistic restoration of the sense of embodiment by presenting an original format that invites readers to interact with the text. As the title announces, this sonnet is illegible unless it is read in a mirror. greathouse involves readers in the construction of the poem as a way to point out the value of their role in the processes of interpretation of the thoughts, experiences, and feelings of the speaker. Deciphering the content of the text in the mirror becomes a fully intentional act that discloses the poetic persona's body, insofar as it is an act of self-discovery. This mirror-image poem, therefore, outstandingly illustrates Marcel Proust's statement that "[i]n reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self" (in Felski, 2008: 26). By emphasising the materiality of a poem that can only be read if placed in front of a mirror, greathouse reminds readers of the materiality of their own bodies in the act of reading, as well as the materiality of the body in the act of writing. The wounded body is not simply a topic of her poetry, but its *raison d'être*. By introducing her sonnet with Kimiko Hahn's statement "I could not return to the body that / contained only the literal world",[4] greathouse announces her intention of using language in her own terms to write about her body, which in poetry does not become an abstract, ethereal, and

[4] Kimiko Hahn is a Japanese-American poet, author of ten poetry collections, including *Foreign Bodies* (2020), *Brain Fever* (2014), and *Toxic Flora* (2010).

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desubjectified entity, but rather is reinforced as "real & / irrefutable" (2020: 61). Text and body cannot be dissociated in poetry since, as the speaker asserts "Beneath the sonnet's / dark calligraphy, [there is] a body—*mine*" (61; emphasis in the original). The two final lines of this piece are a celebration of this communion: "& at last a poem that can't be read without / it: crippled, trans, woman, & still alive" (61). These words reinforce the sense of embodiment of the writer, as the poem —to be written across her chest— is attached to her body, which not only embraces each word but also inhabits them.

Wound from the Mouth of a Wound captures the tension between language and the body, reflecting the potential of poetry to dismantle reality and repair one's wounded flesh. greathouse's poetic recreation of Medusa announces her commitment in contesting and dismantling the patriarchal and ableist myths and fictions regarding the trans and disabled body, and particularly the socio-cultural mythmaking of medicine as an objective science and the owner of absolute truths. More specifically, using Medusa in this feminist context inevitably evokes Cixous and the importance of women's writing not only to challenge the male and cis-dominated cultural norms, but also the ableist discourses that construct disability as the absence of value, agency and potential. As Cixous claims, a "[w]oman must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (1976: 875). greathouse uses poetry to denounce this same violence against the trans and disabled body, which has been silenced and ignored. With her collection she starts her own movement, writing from the place of vulnerability, frailty and ugliness as a way to empower herself by reappropriating and reshaping language. In this sense, "Ars poetica" closes a volume that is the expression of the rejection of the violent oppression against disabled, ill, trans women. This poem is the closure to a story about reconciliation with the wounded body and the re-birth of a woman who, despite trauma and pain, finds a way to live on.

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