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Re-embodied poetics: recognising bodily difference in poetry

Abstract:

This paper proposes that bodily difference is a central aesthetic value within modern and contemporary poetry, and that the presence of historical figures in poems can enlarge our sense of human embodiment.

The paper begins with a survey of essays by four key twentieth-century poets – TS Eliot, Robert Frost, Charles Olson and Adrienne Rich. It examines how bodily difference is ignored, denigrated or affirmed, and suggests that this negotiation with difference is a powerful shaping force in modern poetics.

The paper then proposes a theoretical framework which takes adequate account of bodily difference. In his book *Disability Aesthetics*, Tobin Siebers argues that modern and contemporary art is defined by its relationship to bodily difference. This figure – deformed, wounded, cognitively impaired or otherwise “abnormal” – has become a uniquely potent resource for artists seeking to articulate contemporary life.

This paper transposes this approach into the field of poetics, arguing that poetry is fundamentally shaped by bodily difference. It examines physical appearance; line-breaks and enjambment; punctuating details; rhythm and sound; and, finally, how embodied subjectivity, particularly of historical figures, is re-imagined within poems. It argues that all these poetic elements achieve their power through bodily difference.

As an example, this paper examines a suite of poems written by the author – *Marfan Lives*, seven biographical poems in the voice of people with the genetic condition Marfan Syndrome. The historical figures in this project cast light on how contemporary poetry expresses embodied subjectivity, and how the past can be reinterpreted through critical disability theory.

Biographical note:

Andy Jackson was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Prize for *Among the regulars* (papertiger 2010), won the 2013 Whitmore Press Manuscript Prize with *the thin bridge*, and his latest collection *Immune Systems* (Transit Lounge 2015) explores India and medical tourism. He has performed at literary events and arts festivals in Australia, India, USA and Ireland. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Adelaide, on poetry and bodily otherness.

Keywords:

Poetry – bodily difference – disability – Marfan Syndrome – historical figures

The body is involved in poetry, essential to it – involved literally in the processes of writing and of reading, fingers at the keys, eyes scanning the page. But how else? Beyond body as theme, how does poetry incorporate the body in its creation, form and reception? And what sort of bodies is poetry concerned with?

The traditional Western attempt to extract the mind from its body, in denial of our shared fleshly condition, relegates embodiment to either an optional topic or a contingency to be transcended through literary poetic means. Against that tendency, this paper aims to support a 're-embodiment' of poetry. This is not an argument for a particular kind of poetry, as if bodies needed to be inserted into poems, but a recognition that all poetics rely upon embodiment, and that recognising this can expand our understanding of how poems work.

The paper will begin with an examination of the essays of four key twentieth-century poets, demonstrating that regardless of their opinions about embodiment, and even where they turned away from bodily difference, it played a crucial energising role within their aesthetics. The paper will then propose a way of conceptualising contemporary poetry which adapts the perspective of theorist Tobin Siebers in his book *Disability Aesthetics*. This will lead into an exploration of how the central dynamics and techniques of poetry work by utilising the resources of bodily difference. The paper will conclude by discussing a suite of biographical poems, written by the author, some of which are written in the voices of historical figures. Through all this, I hope to make clear that a focus on bodily difference which is informed by critical disability theory can revitalise how we perceive both history and poetry.

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In one sense, the great obsession of twentieth-century poetics is how individual poets might crystallise their sensations and preoccupations into an art that respects and affects the readership of their particular era. This process has been negotiated by poets in numerous ways, with wildly varying terms and definitions. Some have argued that their experience ought to be discarded or transcended; others, that their experience is essential to the formation of new poetry. Through all this, the body itself is rarely explicitly mentioned – their own, the reader's or a body within the poem. If it is mentioned, it is usually some kind of assumed universal body. Within the four essays I focus on here, sometimes the body is knowingly affirmed and integrated into poetics; but, more often, there are persistent attempts to ignore the body. I will suggest that these arguments over poetic form and language are also, even if unconsciously, about bodies – in particular, bodies of difference.

One of the most influential poetics of the past century is expressed most clearly in the wake of the First World War, where the 'image of Europe as a wasteland, a culture of fragments with no cementing center, predominated' (West 1990: 97). TS Eliot argued that the European tradition could be maintained and renewed through poets transcending their own emotion and experience. In *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, he says 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' (Herbert & Hollis 2000: 34), and that a poet's best work is often where the influence of the past is most prominent. In this view, poets are not so

much conduits for a pre-existing tradition, but they present new configurations of existing elements. They dissolve their individuality into the ongoing and evolving poetic tradition.

The body of the poet does not appear to play a role in the creation of this poetry; it is meant to disappear. Ezra Pound, in his essay *A Retrospect*, asserts this approach particularly stridently, haranguing his reader towards an aesthetic of directness, imagism and musicality. The essay culminates in a prediction that the poetry of the near future will be '*harder and saner... as much like granite as it can be*' (Herbert & Hollis 2000: 24, emphasis mine). Eliot is more restrained in his tone, but he agrees with Pound that poets ought to sacrifice their individual selves through attention to the pressures of poetic tradition and contemporary language. Arguably, this could be considered a kind of 'use' of the body – nevertheless, the aim is still to ensure that the real, particular body of the poet shows no trace in the poem.

Eliot's sole explicit reference to the body comes at an unexpected moment and demonstrates how difficult it is to exclude embodiment. He argues that each new poem changes the whole canon of poetry, that not only is the new poem considered in the light of the past, but that poetry is reassessed in the light of the new work. In making this argument, he says the poet 'will be aware... that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, *not amputated*, by them' (33, emphasis mine). While this reference to the body is metaphorical and tangential, it is revealing. Eliot is at pains to ensure the poet's body is transcended, but insists that the body in question remain complete and undamaged. Given that he is writing at a time when many soldiers were returning from the war with missing limbs, this metaphor implies a profound aversion to woundedness, a desire to shield poetry and the broader culture from vulnerability.

Similarly concerned with the process of writing, yet its polar opposite in terms of openness to the particularity of embodied subjectivity, is Robert Frost's essay *The Figure a Poem Makes*. Frost asserts that the resources of language and meter are limited, and that what gives a poem its uniqueness is its context, or its subject, which comes from the poet. Hence, his famous quote, 'No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader' (Herbert & Hollis 2000: 44). Here, the poem carries the affective force of the process of its creation, which is not an exact translation of experience into language, but a dynamic process of discovery and invention. Frost aligns this process with the experience of love, inherently subjective rather than abstract, and certainly more bodily than cerebral.

W. H. Auden would later describe the poem as 'a natural organism, not an inorganic thing' (Herbert & Hollis 2000: 68), employing rhythm only asymmetrically, as the human face does. Similarly, here Frost describes the poem as 'a figure'. He makes the connection between embodiment and poetry even more explicit and intriguing when he says 'we enjoy the straight crookedness of a good walking stick' (45-6). Even though the stick here is a metaphor for the poetic line, metaphors are rarely accidental. Frost takes the body's vulnerability and need for support as a given, and sees prosthetics as providing pleasure as well as function. This perspective, if extrapolated or elaborated, could offer a model for an embodied poetics that takes bodily difference

seriously, as part of the creative process and as aesthetic value.

In his essay, Frost emphasises the mystery of poetic creativity, leaving aside how exactly these forces might influence the shape and language of contemporary poems. In the middle of the century, Charles Olson provides one of the most influential accounts of this new poetry – including the processes behind it, and the forms it might take. *Projective Verse* is also the essay in which bodily processes are most fully integrated into an account of poetic creativity. Olson sees the composition of poetry outside of the inherited forms as a kind of improvised score, a transcription into language of the poet's breath and ear. The breath is associated with the heart, and determines the poetic line; while the ear is associated with the head and is attentive to the syllable. This is not as binary as it may at first appear. For Olson, the head is not a detached intellect; it 'dances' on the floor set up by the heart (Herbert & Hollis 2000: 95-6). Indeed, rather than speak of abstracted capacities of feeling or thinking, he consistently focuses on 'breath' and 'ear', actual body parts taking part in complex processes.

The writing of this poetry is characterised by movement, where one perception immediately leads to another; Olson urges the poet to 'get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts' (93). This approach requires intense attentiveness, where the poet is attuned to embodied consciousness as much as to language, in each moment of the writing. Or, more accurately, to the ways in which language is threaded into the body's sense of being. And this attunement is not to a body of fixed identity, but a body caught up in processes, interacting with the world and being changed by it.

As with almost all essays considered influential in the twentieth century (even Denise Levertov's *Some Notes on Organic Form*), Olson uses the masculine pronoun for the poet. This linguistic tendency deserves further attention, but here I want to focus on the fact that the essay's argument by definition implies that the poet utilise the energies not of some abstract universal body, but of their own particular body, whatever gender, culture or ability. Critic Michael Davidson speculates as to how an aesthetic theory of poetry might look if we explicitly applied *Projective Verse* to particular, impaired bodies – 'What would it mean to think of Charles Olson's 'breath' line as coming from someone with chronic emphysema exacerbated by heavy smoking?' (119). *Projective Verse* implies particular bodies, making them the foundation and shaping force of poetic creation, even though Olson is apparently uninterested in explicitly discussing them, including his own.

While Olson is concerned with clarifying the mechanics of poetic creation, Adrienne Rich's *Someone is Writing a Poem* is much more focused on the broader context, articulating what exactly is at stake in the writing and the reading of poetry. This subtle and nuanced account of poetic creation and reception foregrounds both embodiment and political context. She quotes Guy Debord's assertion that society, once it enters the era of 'integrated spectacle' (Rich 1994: 83), removes agency from the public, who can only watch and wait for the events that will determine their lives. Poetry, though, is inherently opposed to spectacle, an exception to it, because poems, she says, can only be experienced through an active engagement by the reader. They

‘travel from the nervous system of the poet, preverbal, to the nervous system of the one who listens, who reads’ (84).

This draws our attention to the open and collaborative nature of the poem, which prior to reading is unfinished. Rich writes of words having a charge or a force which is determined by the sheer affective quality of their sound (‘swan, kettle, icicle, ashes, scab...’ [87]), but also by the history of their employment, how they have operated as support, obstacle or weapon. It could be said that poetry re-charges language, although Rich would add that the *poet* re-charges language, because she affirms the embodied and gendered history of the writer as integral to poetry’s potential. She writes of the dark allure of the power epitomised by the atom bomb, and juxtaposes that with the ambiguous and complex power of the language available to the poet, whose ‘handling... of that destructiveness, in language, is how she takes on her true power’ (89). The poet is referred to as female here deliberately; Rich’s essays and poetry consistently refer to the disruptive power of subjectivities outside the dominant mode or worldview – female, Latino, African-American, lesbian, and others.

Rich returns us to the political responsibilities of the poet, which are negotiated in the domain of their physical body; and to the social dimension of the poem, which the reader completes with the response of their body. What is missing in this account, however, is a sense of how the specifics of the poet’s embodiment might shape the specifics of the poem. Rich admits the particular body into her depiction of poetic creation, but neglects in this essay to suggest how this body might affect the poem’s voice, lineation, rhythm, affect or sound.

Modern and contemporary poetics is incredibly diverse, and these four essays – from Eliot, Frost, Olson and Rich – illustrate the complicated and ongoing tension between the personal and the impersonal. Eliot argued that the poet’s individual self ought to be set aside or dissolved within the poem. Here, however, the body makes itself known despite the poet’s efforts, emerging in Eliot’s reference to amputation (Herbert & Hollis 2000: 33), and in Pound’s insistence on hardness (24). Frost and Rich represent a counter-position, affirming that poetry itself can only be enriched by the incorporation of the uniqueness of individual, embodied subjectivities. Here, bodies are given space to express its unique energies and history, and the poet is encouraged to deploy the visceral and social power of language. Olson’s writing, too, implicitly affirms this.

Nevertheless, the varying particulars of the human condition as we embody it – unruly, unorthodox, wounded, vulnerable, as well as the currently-able-bodied – do not fully appear in these influential voices of poetry. Even where the body is foregrounded, each poet seems to pull back from the specific body, their essays settling on a generalisation of the creative process. This silence haunts modern and contemporary poetics, suggesting a profound ambivalence, and warrants further research, in order to tease out its sources and implications.

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It should not surprise us, though, that ambivalence, even or especially when it is coupled with fervent denial, invariably leads to some kind of reinforcement or amplification. So it should be possible to take poems which superficially appear

'disembodied', and examine them from the perspective of embodiment. In this paper, though, I will focus on poems where the resources of poetic language – rhythm and sound, line-breaks and enjambment, striking imagistic or linguistic detail, as well as the physical shape of poems – are deliberately informed by bodily difference. Before this, I would like to suggest a theoretical framework for considering the centrality of bodily difference in contemporary poetry.

Tobin Siebers in his book *Disability Aesthetics* (2010) claims that the figure of disability has become the key to understanding the aesthetics of modern visual art. Not only is disability found within artworks as a theme and entwined within the life and practice of many influential artists, but it is 'an aesthetic value, which is to say, it participates in a system of knowledge that provides materials for and increases critical consciousness about the way that some bodies make other bodies feel' (20). In other words, he says, artists (knowingly and otherwise) are increasingly drawing on disabled bodies in diverse ways – as emblematic of the human experience, as uniquely capable of generating visceral affect, as embodiment of the distortion and refraction of subjectivity in the contemporary era, and so on. Could a parallel development be occurring in poetry? If it is, how would we recognise this, beyond overt themes? How might the disabled body appear in poetic line, sound, voice and form?

We might first need to ask, what is disability? Siebers writes of 'wounded or disabled bodies, representations of irrationality or cognitive disability, or effects of warfare, disease or accidents'; in short, all the 'misshapen and twisted bodies, [the] stunning variety of human forms' (4). This is certainly imprecise. But that is precisely the point. The Australian Bureau of Statistics states that around one in five people currently fit their definition of disabled (ABS 2009). In fact, all of us are born wholly dependent on others, often growing into a relative autonomy and able-bodiedness which is always at risk of being unexpectedly taken away from us. Not only are we vulnerable to becoming disabled, even those of us who do not fit the administrative definition of disability may appear physically different. We may be scarred, deformed, or unorthodox in our movement or speech. For this reason, this paper uses the term 'bodily difference', to acknowledge and foreground this fluidity of definition.

While contemporary poetry is similarly diverse and fluid, some of its key technical and linguistic devices can be identified. They include language which is fragmented, interrupted or multiple; physical shapes on the page which compel the eye and unsettle the sensibility; and images and phrases which carry visceral impact, while retreating from definitive clarity. What is the relationship between these aesthetic values and the bodily experience of difference and woundedness – movement disorders, depression, missing limbs, the use of wheelchairs, schizophrenia, facial scarring, spinal curvature, even stuttering and dyslexia? While much more research and discussion is necessary in order to illuminate the complexity of this relationship, I suspect that bodily difference is a critical resource in contemporary poetry, a central aesthetic value.

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In this paper, I will be looking in particular at poems where bodily difference forms an overt element in their production and reception. I will use, as an example, a suite of

seven poems I have written, entitled *Marfan Lives*. I will examine physical appearance; line-breaks and enjambment; punctuating details; rhythm and sound; and, finally, how embodied subjectivity, particularly of historical figures, is re-imagined within poems. Throughout this, I will suggest that all these poetic elements achieve their power through bodily difference.

The poems that make up *Marfan Lives* present themselves as seven distinct voices, each speaking in the first person. Each of them have (or had) Marfan Syndrome, a heritable disorder of connective tissue, with varying manifestations.¹ This is the genetic condition I have, so while the poems are overtly and consciously in other voices, they emerge from a very personal sense of affinity and solidarity.

The poems are arranged chronologically, each titled by year and given name, each taking a different shape on the page. One appears in regular couplets, another in long lines that drift across the page, another in block-like six-line stanzas. The diversity of these visual forms speaks of the diversity of embodiment – which ranges from subtle divergence from the norm to radical and unsettling deformities. I aimed to make each poem its own body, almost unremarkably consistent with itself, the voice within the poem creating its physical shape, biology enfolded together with biography. What I discovered was that when the poems are placed together, the overall effect is to emphasise how difference emerges not only out of the particularity of each poem, but also out of the implied comparison with other poems, other bodies.

The first and last poems, *1890, Antoine* and *2012, John*, are both composed of couplets, yet they are distinctly different in appearance. The former, in the voice of a paediatrician and medical researcher, uses regular line lengths of little variation, reflecting his composure and deliberation. The latter, in the voice of a contemporary composer of sacred music, employs a great deal of white space, poetry's silence. Some, though not all, of its couplets are separated by double spaces, even where enjambment exists, and the last line – 'I'd not change a note. But I could have said less' – ends the poem abruptly, floating by itself on the contingency of the page.

The most unusual page layout is in *1986, Flo*, a poem in the voice of the American volleyball player. The lines vary greatly in length and position – the voice tracks back and forward across the page with unpredictable speed and change, as if the reader were watching a volleyball game translated into speech. The language is confident, almost laconic, while its appearance on the page speaks of contingency, an almost breathless attentiveness to the physical demands of the game. There is a kind of deformity to the poem – appropriate to the game and the voice, yet in the context of the suite of poems, implying vulnerability. The poem's last two lines shift into italics and the third person – it ends suddenly, as a life can – '*They rush her out. Her right arm / slides off the stretcher, limp.*'

A person with Marfan Syndrome often has a greatly increased risk of sudden aortic dissection. The spectre of death hangs over these poems, the possibility that a life can be cut short. This is, I would argue, one of the key under-acknowledged energies behind the line-break in contemporary poetry. The line-break, especially with enjambment, signifies a breathtaking pause in the midst of speech. Certainly this allows the poet to amplify the ambiguities of language, allowing for multiple

meanings, suspension and irony, but the line-break also suggests a problem of breath or of cognition – a disruption of the rhythms of life. Where the sentence implies the continuity and completion we assume for our lives, in contemporary poetry the line-break forces us to acknowledge that the voice can at any time be suddenly stopped.

So, in *2005, Jon*, there are the lines, ‘I made friends with the real / punk rockers around town’. The sentence is straightforward, asserting a documentary-style authenticity, yet the line-break allows the poem to speak simultaneously of a reconciliation with that which is beyond language and the symbolic. Later, Jon says, ‘As for the future, I don't think about it / too much anymore’. Again, the pause which the poem introduces into the voice is a kind of opening through which mortality can enter.

Contemporary poetry also relies upon the dissonant moment. Individual words or phrases themselves leap off the page, disrupting the narrative or rhythmic flow with their shock or ambiguity. Speaking of photographs, Roland Barthes refers to the particularly sensitive and potent detail as ‘punctum’, ‘to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument’ (26). The details in the images and language of the most successful contemporary poems cause, in varying ways, this kind of wounding for the reader.

Within *Marfan Lives, 1953, Edith* is perhaps the most prominent example of the disruptive image. Each of its four sections describes a scene or opinion matter-of-factly, and is unsettled by an ambiguous moment of violence. Edith tells of her childhood orthopaedic treatment, experienced as ‘a prison of iron’ by ‘an immensely fat gentleman’. She sees a World War Two veteran with his scarring, ‘his face a terrible blankness’, and considers no woman ‘worthy to love him’. Her poetic theories are expounded, where ‘deformation or / distortion in art is a necessary quality’. Finally, a dog leaps in front of her car, is hit, and must be put down. In each section, the speaker's confidence is undermined by the inevitability of suffering, attempted to be shored up by poetry, yet must concede to silence and to the blurring of physical boundaries. The poem ends with the image of an owl presiding over Edith's courtyard, ‘one huge graveyard of the bones of mice’.

Poetry, of course, is not only about line-breaks and detail, but relies upon the amplification of sound and rhythm effects within language. Interestingly, even the history of poetic meter emerges out of human bodily difference. Shapiro and Beum's *A Prosody Handbook* states ‘the Latin iambus derives from a Greek word meaning ‘a cripple’. The short syllable represents the lame foot, the long one the foot descending with normal strength, perhaps with the added strength of a cane’ (35). It is not exaggerating to say, then, that poetry is disabled – it limps, idiosyncratic, asymmetrical and vulnerable.²

Rhythm plays a key role in each of these seven poems, as architectural support for the voice. This is particularly evident in *1986, Flo* and *2010, Simon*. *1986, Flo* is in constant movement, the meter syncopated and shifting – ‘they'd have me / shooting hoops. Blend in? Sure! / Anyway, who'd want to? *Let them talk* / Mom said, just once – all I needed’. The assonance of repeated vowel sounds and consonants propels the poem forward with energy and flow, while the short phrases provide a tense

staccato.

2010, *Simon* moves across the page similarly, yet with more fluidity, the voice apparently more insulated from its circumstances. Simon, who is working at a charity beer festival, says ‘barely a drop’ll pass your own lips, / the old Formby Hall packed with folk // having a whale of a time, you / winding through it all, a tidy ghost’. Subtle half-rhymes are placed in the midst of long, vernacular, conversational sentences. I have arranged and written Simon as a persuasive storyteller, who is not static or disembodied but moving through a crowded and noisy room, squeezing between revellers with poise and attention. The poem slows as the description of the night winds up, where finally the worker can savour a drink of their own – ‘Hold this one in your mouth for a good short while’, the line’s two calm adjectives easing to its end. The poem itself ends, though, as others do, with a subtle and knowing nod towards the inevitability of death, the ‘last drink’.

2010, *Simon* is the poem which, on one level, is the most silent on the particular embodiment of the speaker. There is nothing explicit in the poem which suggests Simon has Marfan Syndrome, or is physically compromised at all, apart from its placement in this suite. I consider this an important element to the suite. It alludes to the fact that difference is never absolute, but always relative and ascriptive. *Marfan Lives* consists of a disparate group of people made different within their cultures, and made into a genetic family within poetic practice.

The voice in each poem takes its form from a subjectivity which emerges out of its own particular embodiment, whether harmoniously or out of a tense negotiation. I have aimed to make the manner of speaking, sentence construction, vocabulary and rhythms congruent with the historical and social context from which they emerge. Yet since they are literary artefacts, I have also wanted them to include a perspective distinct from the speaker. Antoine speaks to ‘you, / a writer’, who could easily be the poet, or even the reader. Flo asserts ‘you have to get used to your bones / against sand or the floor’, the initial line resounding much louder than the conclusion of the phrase. Here, we have numerous embodiments coalescing – the body of the poem on the page, the body of the historical person, my own body, and the collective Marfan body.

In this sense, *Marfan Lives* is a two-way mirror. It allows us to see ourselves and the current era reflected back, and also to see through the poems into a new version of historical subjectivity. The poem *1865, Abraham* is composed of the retelling of a series of events in the life of Abraham Lincoln, dwelling more on the subjective than the public persona – or, more precisely, drawing out the subjective from all events, whether private or public. The young Abraham is mocked for his unusual, lanky physique. Later, he observes a group of slaves, treated as captured animals. He remembers the death of his father, for whom he feels great ambivalence. He asserts the rightness of dispossessing Native American tribes. While his son suffers a great sickness, he ‘persists with [his] constitutionals, always walking’. Near the end of the poem, he dreams his own assassination.

The poem foregrounds suffering bodies and physical otherness not only in its overt themes, but in the visual shape of the poem. Most of the poem is composed of couplets of long lines which regularly threaten to push beyond the edge of the page;

the final couplet spilling into prose form. Woven through these couplets are individual lines, right-justified and also quite long, which cumulatively build an image of Lincoln's life mask being created. The body of the poem, and the loping movement of the lines across the page, evokes Lincoln's notoriously thin and tall body, as well as his great eagerness to be accepted through his speech. I used words of Lincoln's which showed a formality, with a slight undertow of painfulness; mostly long phrases which are then cut short, as if the scenes were being evoked through a bodily self-consciousness and with a visceral tension. Always audible behind the voice of the orator is the reticence of a vulnerable man.

King Log, they said, washed up by accident on the shores of the Potomac,
buckskin trousers too short for his legs, standing collars to hide his scrawny neck.

...

I remember them. Walking with their head bowed, a chained line of men,
like so many fish upon a trot-line. Coins heavy in my pocket, as our boat sailed on.

The poem suggests that the historical and political significance of Lincoln cannot be separated from his physical difference, his unusual body. Lincoln's sense of his embodied self within the world is a crucial aspect of the decisions he made. The poem – especially as seen in the context of this suite, and seen through the lens of disability theory – allows us to recognise that history is the story of how particular, varying bodies relate to each other. Not only this, it reminds us that poetry itself – in its striking physical appearance, its acutely human rhythms and sounds, and its incorporation of woundedness and mortality – is a place where bodily difference is uniquely and powerfully made known.

Endnotes

¹ Since connective tissue is important in so many of the body's structures and processes, in this case the protein fibrillin-1, people with Marfan can be affected in numerous ways. Symptoms can include long limbs, an enlarged aorta or aortic dissection, spinal curvature, high-arched palate, detached retina, dural ectasia, and more. Some people are affected profoundly, others in more minor ways.

² I am indebted to Jim Ferris's 2004 essay 'The enjambed body: a step toward a crippled poetics' for this point.

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