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Sheila Black, Michael Northen, Annabelle Hayse (Eds.).
The Right Way To Be Crippled & Naked: The Fiction of Disability
El Paso, Texas: Cinco Puntos Press
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As the title suggests, *The Right Way To Be Crippled & Naked* articulates the lived experiences of the disabled body. Edited by Sheila Black, Michael Northen and Annabelle Hayse, the short fiction anthology presents twenty-seven stories by disabled writers about disability. *The Right Way To Be Crippled & Naked* can be considered a response to *Narrative Prosthesis* by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder; an analysis of disability in literary narrative contending that mainstream culture has deployed disability in literary texts as a prompt to generate character. *The Right Way To Be Crippled & Naked* challenges the narrative framework of non-ableist fiction where literary work uses a disabled character or disability as a kind of *prosthesis* or prompt for the function of narrative. This collection of short fiction seeks to address this imbalance, giving voice to writers who know what it is like to live with a disability themselves.

The Right Way To Be Crippled & Naked places the disabled writer at the centre. In the introduction, the editors note that the anthology is an attempt “to unpack - or open up - rather than resolve the question of what is encompassed or contained within the term ‘disability’” (11). The lacuna in short fiction anthologies by writers with disabilities that feature disabled characters becomes apparent when one considers the editors’ claim that “this is the first anthology of short fiction by writers with disabilities that feature disabled characters” (11). These strong and immaculately crafted stories engage with physical, cognitive and psychological aspects of disability to explore the relationship between body and language.

The short fiction anthology follows the same format as its sister publication, *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*, in that a brief commentary from the author accompanies each story. This pairing structure gives the reader an insight into the author's disability and encourages a deeper understanding of non-normative bodies. The editors of *The Right Way To Be Crippled & Naked* say, "the traditional short story offers three forms of narrative prosthesis: cure, overcoming or epiphany. What they all have in common is the assumption that there is something wrong with disability, that a person with a disability is in a less-than status that must be remediated" (281).

The anthology is full of interesting viewpoints and narratives. Liesl Jobson's "Still Life in the Art Room" is particularly striking with its twists of magic realism. Jobson captures the disabling effects of trauma; "that evening she had tried to paint her mother's hand holding hers, but all she had to show hours later was a blank sheet of paper" (66). Here, the disability narrative is shaped by the experience of invisibility and trauma. Short fiction reflects the disabling effects of silence, trauma and displacement. The writers' engagement with fiction demonstrates the importance of a short story format in communicating the experience of difference.

Overall, the short stories in the anthology work well together to reflect a lived experience of the disabled body. Each short story presents an outright rejection of disability clichés and stereotypical metaphorical thinking. Writers like Dagberto Gilb, Stephen Kuusisto and Floyd Skloot introduce multiple meanings of the lived experience and the non-normative body. Characters take up disability as an experience of psychological, social, and/or physical dimensions. Gilb's short fiction, "please, thank you", engages with aspects of ableism. Gilb was hospitalised for what has become a permanent brain injury. Of "please, thank you", the writer says: "it's fiction and nonfiction because it's not about my small experience" (147). Kuusisto is a poet and writer whose work focuses on disability, education, public policy and diversity. "Plato Again" got its

incitement from a tale Kuusisto heard about a woman who lost her job as she was recovering from cancer surgery, demonstrating how ableism, sexism and racism are utilized within the workplace. Here, short fiction seeks not only to shift understandings of the body but challenge normative perceptions of bodily experiences.

Other short stories stand out because they push prose in new directions. Tantra Bensko's "Virus On Fire" uses rich metaphors to convey the shifting perceptions of the natural world through the lens of disability. Written after Bensko watched a documentary about a man who had a rare wart overgrowth virus that gave him the appearance of a tree. "Virus On Fire" takes the viewpoint of that person who could embrace and celebrate that man's unique beauty. Laura Hershey's "Getting Comfortable" focuses on the disabled body or the 'I' and in the piece the speaker talks with her assistant, Ruth. The speaker concludes, "my simple, seemingly straightforward, first-person sentences conceal the truth of the help I need in order to carry out my daily actions" (14). The narrative highlights the subjectivity of first-person narration. Hershey's work seeks depth and resistance in even the most resistant places.

The Right Way To Be Crippled & Naked illuminates the experience of non-normative bodies living with a range of labels and/or diagnoses including visual impairment, cancer, bipolar disorder, epilepsy and fibromyalgia. The stories are an invitation to the reader to consider the ways that a narrative frame challenges conventional approaches to embodiment. This anthology of short fiction is impressive, compelling and a delight to read.

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