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In the Yellow Margins: A Tribute for Professor Mosoff

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Abstract: This creative work begins with a poem written to commemorate Professor Judith Mosoff, a colleague who passed away on December 20, 2015. Professor Mosoff’s work in disability law influenced both activists and researchers, and this loss has impoverished the Canadian disability community. The poem is followed by an essay that situates it and reflects on the possibility of knowing and relating to someone affectively through poetic imagination, as well as on the role that poetry can play in sharing mourning and fostering community.

Acknowledgments: I thank Dr. Christopher Little, Ms. Anne-Isabelle Cloutier, and the anonymous reviewers at the CJDS for their helpful comments and editorial support. I also thank Dr Oana Cajal for sharing her work of art and allowing me to reproduce it here. Finally, I am grateful to my former colleagues at the Allard School of Law for having encouraged me to pursue my interest in poetry and prompted me to think about how it intersects with my theoretical research about disability.

In the Yellow Margins

“¿Qué es un fantasma? ...quizá algo muerto que parece por momentos vivo aún, un sentimiento suspendido en el tiempo, como una fotografía borrosa, como un insecto atrapado en ámbar.”¹

Guillermo del Toro

1. Introduction

This creative work consists of a poetic tribute written for Professor Judith Mosoff, my colleague at the University of British Columbia who passed away in December 2015, followed by an interpretive essay. Judy was an expert in the areas of anti-discrimination law and children’s rights and her work displayed a feminist sensibility. Judy’s scholarship and teaching in disability

¹ *El espinazo del diablo* (movie), Guillermo del Toro (Director, Writer), Producers El Deseo, Tequila Gang, 2001 (the English translation reads like this “What is a ghost? ... perhaps something dead that still looks alive for a few moments, a feeling suspended in time, like a blurred photograph, like an insect caught in amber.” [translated by author]).

law has influenced both activists and researchers, and her passing has impoverished the Canadian disability community.

This project began with a desire to gain an alternative perspective into who Judy was through the books she read and marked up. Through her writings and markings, I gained deeper insights into the author peeking through the margins. As such, the reflection in the essay that follows the poem may interest philosophers analyzing what it means to “know someone” and to distinguish the kind of affective process I describe from other ways of knowing someone “in person”.²

In referring to Professor Judith Mosoff as “Professor” and “Judy,” I mirror the multiplicity of ways in which I thought about Judy: as a professor, as a colleague, as an author who inspired my academic research, as a reader and the previous owner of some books that I inherited and that she made notes in, as a poetic subject, and even a poem, if we agree with Carl Sandburg that poetry is

an echo asking a shadow dancer to be a partner.
...a fossil rock-print of a fin and a wing, with an illegible oath between.
...the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during a moment.³

² See David Matheson, “Knowing Persons” (2010) 49:3 Dialogue 435; Katalin Farkas, “Katalin Farkas on Knowing a Person” (6 November 2017) (podcast), online : Philosophy Bites <<http://philosophybites.com/2017/11/katalin-farkas-on-knowing-a-person.html>>.

³ Carl Sandburg, *Complete Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1950) at 317-318 (this chapter is entitled “Tentative (First Model) Definitions Of Poetry”).

2. The Poem

A Poem for Judy

Death touched your flesh, like King Midas, it only stole
what it could turn to gold

it took you to a place, where you now half-reside
sometimes the unseen world, in a drawing, looks like
a cottage by a lake.

Guests eager to please, we sit by your side
peeking with nibs scratching ant-sized escapes

Who built the cottage? who made the lake?
like children we ask, like children we wait

quiet the lake answers, you were never cold
quiet the lake answers, unraveling its fold
like shadows at daybreak

slowly dissipating, like ripples of a breath,
in a mirror so crisp and fearful it reflects
all the love in the world.

The heron's ugly, sickly call
is unbearably beautiful
like a heartbeat, it punctuates
crickets singing like fingers
quiet, the lake's quiet answer, *quiet*, the lake answers.

Embers still glow through you
like through a telescope
no one ever comes back, but no one cannot hope

lead upon lead, a ladder that bled
a life scattered in translation
when I try to find you in the yellow margins
when I fail to find you
fragmented - did you feel this feeling?

Empty hands, heavier than summer as they bring
you along together, death's only offering:
I see you no longer
but I see what you see

I know it sunk only a handful of treasure
and took it to a place, far away, long ago

that blushes and curls like fall

knowing the rest of you would whittle and follow
like fireflies through a wall

what's left, brittle and small, the truth, tiny dancers
you made friends of us all
Quiet, the lake's quiet answer, quiet, the lake answers.

3. The Process

3.1 From Books to Poem

Despite only knowing her for a brief time, Professor Mosoff impacted my life in ways that I continue to grapple with. I first came to know her as a post-doctoral researcher when I asked her for career advice, and later, as her colleague at the University of British Columbia. However, shortly after I was hired, she fell ill and departed the Allard School of Law. Her passing over the 2015 Christmas break affected me personally, perhaps because her office was next to mine, or because we shared teaching interests, or because I was starting to realize that students never age in a university, while professors do.

This poem began as a reflection on mortality focusing on two themes: the way people interact with, or around, death, and the debilitating nature of illness. It imagines Professor Judith Mosoff living in a sort of retreat in-between worlds. The gradual nature of illness occupies a good portion of the poem's semantic fields (e.g. "you half-reside...", "unraveling", "shadows at daybreak", "slowly dissipating", "ripples of a breath", "embers", "the rest of you would whittle and follow like fireflies"). Like an oracle, the living consult Judy for her wisdom, as her presence

reminds them of their own mortality: “Guests eager to please, we sit by your side.” These guests look “through [her] like through a telescope” for answers about the meaning of death.

I used the metaphor of a *lake* for this in-between world. The lake does not answer our questions, any more than nature dissipates the mystery confronting a hiker’s contemplation, other than by being - by existing and naturally pursuing certain ends like we do, suggesting that everything is as it should be. The lake soothingly incites us to go gently into that dark night (“quiet, quiet...”, as though it were saying *hush now...*) throughout the poem. Personifying nature, as a depository for old wisdom meant to bring closure and comfort, might be a naturalistic fallacy, but these kinds of images reverberate deeply in the minds of people who wander in nature. One thinks of the writings of Aldo Leopold, who laid the foundations of environmental ethics: “Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf.”⁴

More specifically, I chose the metaphor of a lake because of its association with death. I used to spend one month every summer by a lake at my grandparents’ cottage when I was a child. My father’s childhood, and the ghosts of his parents, haunt the premises, just like my past selves, who are summoned — each decade a little blurrier — whenever I visit the cottage. A body of water is also a symbol of passage from life to death, as it evokes the Styx, the river separating the living from the world of the dead in Greek mythology. Another reason for me to associate the image of a lake with death is that an important poet from Québec, Hector de Saint-Denys

⁴ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949) at 129.

Garneau, spent the last months of his life close to nature, and died canoeing in the Jacques-Cartier Valley.⁵

Judy's friend, Professor Isabel Grant, invited me and other colleagues sharing Judy's academic interests, to have her books. "Judy cared very much about books", Isabel wrote, "and would have been pleased to have her colleagues use her books". When I acquired her books, I was moved by the fact that they were part of someone's personal collection and told a story about that person - a story that would soon disappear. Upon receiving the call for papers requested for a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Family Law* honouring Professor Mosoff, I leafed through her books in search of the meaning they held for her. My romantic goal was to map the quotes that she had underlined in the hope that it would enable me to read a story that she had not had the time to tell, and in doing so, to become better acquainted with Judy, even posthumously.

There is something intimate in inheriting someone's books and searching for notes in the margins and underlined passages, as one may fantasize the books carry not only the markings and dog ears left by the previous owner, but the presence of the previous owner herself. I was reminded of Guillermo del Toro's definition of a ghost, in the quotation at the opening of the paper, or of Juan José Millás' novel, *La soledad era esto*⁶ ("This was loneliness"), in which the protagonist finds the diary of her mother after she died and sees her in a different light. The mind indulges in a kind of "contagious magic"⁷ and imagines that past bonds (between people and/or objects) include a transfer of identity.

⁵ Fondation de Saint-Denys-Garneau, "Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau (1912-1943): Biographie détaillée", online:<www.saintdenysgarneau.com/biographie/>.

⁶ Juan José Millás, *La soledad era esto* (Destino SA, 1990).

⁷ James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Wallingford: Macmillan Publishers, 1890).

Judy's library contained a number of books on madness and on historical and enduring prejudices about the over-affective "nature" of women, which probably informed Professor Mosoff's thinking as she wrote articles such as *Madness, Motherhood and Law*⁸. The passages that she underlined in Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice*⁹ and Erving Goffman's seminal *Stigma*¹⁰ both mirror the sensitivity she would show in her writing about the insidious and complex workings of discrimination. She had several books that would have interested a feminist disability scholar, including anthologies by women with disabilities¹¹, containing narratives that counter and denounce intersecting ableist and sexist assumptions made about disabled women, as well as Jenny Morris' *Pride Against Prejudice*¹². Those books fleshed out the portrait of a practitioner, scholar, and woman whose formative intellectual years must have been influenced by ideas and authors widespread in academic circles during the 80s, complete with Laing and Marx.

I gradually realized that Judy respected books more than I did (I write entire drafts in margins) and that those books said more about her training than her intellectual output. I therefore turned to her scholarship to find an area of her writing that I could explore in depth (her attention to

⁸ Judith Mosoff, "Madness, Motherhood and Law" (1995) 45:2 UTLJ 107.

⁹ Gordon W Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book,1958).

¹⁰ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*(New Jersey: Prentice-Hall,1963).

¹¹ Susan E Browne, Debra Connors & Nanci Stern, *With the Power of Each Breath: A Disabled Women's Anthology* (San Francisco: Cleis Press,1985);Gwyneth F Matthews, *Voices From the Shadows: Women with Disabilities Speak Out* (Toronto: The Women's Press,1983).

¹² Jenny Morris, *Pride Against Prejudice* (London: The Women's Press,1991).

impairment). I chose the topic rather serendipitously. Professor Mosoff's ideas were in the back of my mind as I read the following passage from Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter*:

“What about the materiality of the body, *Judy*?” I took it that the addition of "Judy" was an effort to dislodge me from the more formal "Judith" and to recall me to a bodily life that could not be theorized away.”¹³

I examined Professor Mosoff's scholarship to articulate an answer to the same question: “What about the materiality of the body, *Judy*?”, and I began writing an article about the relative absence of “the body” as a site of social construction in disability law. The article I published in the special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Family Law*, “The Vanishing Body of Disability Law”¹⁴, deals with the neglect of materiality in disability law.

However, before settling on the topic of the social construction of impairment in disability law, I debated for a long time about presenting a creative work instead. I wrote a few poems about disability at around the same time that were also concerned with embodiment. It is no coincidence that the physicality of Judy's books mattered to me during those academic and creative processes. I completed this creative project after having completed the law article, as I believed that poetry and introspective reflections might be a better medium to express my feelings and ideas than traditional academic scholarship, especially since Judy liked poetry and fiction. Her collection included, for instance, Christopher Nolan's plays and poems. In one of Nolan's plays, a character said “[a] man certainly can scrape momentary freedom from despair,

¹³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) at ix.

¹⁴ Jonas-Sébastien Beaudry, “The Vanishing Body of Disability Law” (2018) 31:1 Can J Fam L 7.

as he nods acquaintance with the musical mastery of the muses”¹⁵. I felt it described the poetic process I was engaged in to respond to Judith’s passing.

3.2 Knowing Through Poetic Imagination

As I revised the poem, I also incorporated a reflection on my relations with Professor Judith Mosoff/Judy and her books, and on the nature of both my poetic tribute and my contribution to the academic Festschrift. I confessed my anxiety in a stanza in order to dissolve it: “I try to find you in the yellow margins... I fail to find you / fragmented - did you feel this feeling?” How was I to write a proper homage for someone I did not know well personally? Similarly, would my contribution to the special issue her colleagues were putting together sufficiently connect with Professor Mosoff’s scholarship, with her personal vision of where disability law should go? What kind of meaningful knowledge of “Professor Mosoff/Judy” can one derive from some articles and from the quotes she highlighted in a few old books? Paul Auster better expressed the kind of malaise that I felt during this process in *The Invention of Solitude*, a memoir in which he describes and reconstructs his recently deceased father and reflects on the themes of solitude and father-son relationships:

“Slowly, I am coming to understand the absurdity of the task I have set for myself. I have a sense of trying to go somewhere, as if I knew what I wanted to say, but the farther I go the more certain I am that the path towards my object does not exist. I have to invent the road with each step, and this means that I can never be sure of where I am.”¹⁶

I was not engaged in the kind of extensive, familial, biographical process that Juan José Millás describes in *La soledad era esto* or that Paul Auster engages in through his memoir. My romantic archeology only had the ambition of understanding Judith Mosoff as a reader of certain books

¹⁵ Christopher Nolan, *Dam-Burst of Dreams* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981) at 79 (it refers to the chapter entitled “Nobody, A Play for Television”).

¹⁶ Paul Auster, *Collected Prose* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003) at 41.

and a writer of certain articles. The subjective and affective methodology driving creative work also allows authors to be a part of the object of research, since the creative outcome emerging from this process is not so much a portrait of Professor Mosoff or of her work, but more of a connection between her mind and mine; an idiosyncratic understanding of someone else; a relation (personal, academic, imaginary).

The effort I expended writing and thinking about Judy's published works, the markings in her books, our few interactions, and my sense of how her professional community responded to her illness, is simply an attempt to genuinely *relate* to (rather than *know*) someone's thoughts/feelings) posthumously. The academic article and the poems I wrote are only symptoms of this. I am also aware that this palpable outcome is an expression of self mediated by a reflection on Judith's works and readings rather than an objective portrait of a third party or of her work. However, it does not matter whether, in the end, my thoughts and poetry are "a mode of autobiography in which the "I" manifests itself in an archeology of the Other"¹⁷ or a description of someone else's thoughts, mediated by my own affects and ideas. This chicken-and-egg distinction becomes thin as it is hard to distinguish feelings mediated by apprehension of others and apprehension of others mediated by feelings.

Oana Maria Cajal, a Romanian artist and playwright, read an earlier version of the poem I wrote for Judith Mosoff and sent me a "picto-impulse" (a computer-generated piece of art) entitled *A poem for Judy: écho visuel*. Let me describe the image, reproduced below, for visually impaired

¹⁷ Gerald Peters, Book Review of *True Relations: Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern* by G Thomas Couser & Joseph Fichtelberg, eds, *Biography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998) at 116 (Peters is referring to Auster's memoirs reflecting on his father and his son).

readers: it is dark blue, like the night, or the water of a lake. There is a cottage on the left side. In the centre, at the bottom, there is an open book, from where a stylized white heart emerges. Within the heart, there is a silhouette, face-up, coloured with cloudy or watery patterns, and itself containing a red heart. There is a seagull flying away, on the upper right side. The white heart itself has wings. In the bottom right, corner, there is a candle. Right in the middle, a luminous dot may be a moon, while another star shines at the bottom of the image, under the book. White lines (hair? water? tears? thoughts?) fall from the silhouette's face into the lake under it, behind the book, and into a white space. A path or a stream of white also bleeds into this white space, flowing from the left side of the image, from behind the cottage.

This piece of art is rich, indeed, bursting at the seams, with symbols. While it is open to interpretation, I read this image, subjectively, as reflecting the kind of mourning expressed in my poem, with the candle evoking a vigil, the stars evoking life or afterlife, the resting position evoking peace or death, the wings evoking travel or passage, the heart within the heart evoking bonding, and the fluid, watery shades and lines evoking continuity. It conveys the poem's association of a quiet body of water with death and peace. The silhouette may evoke pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais' *Ophelia*, Shakespeare's character from Hamlet, drowning in a brook. Of particular relevance to my own connection with Judith Mosoff is the book, in the centre of the image, from where the heart and the silhouette emerges.

I later learned that this image was not only about my poem, but also about Oana's personal mourning, as her mother had passed away six months prior. She wrote to me that this piece reflected the "symbiosis of our respective emotions". This was a further indication that art meant

to commemorate someone else can legitimately be an expression of self, and indeed, that such expressions are at least as fitting tributes as objective renderings of someone’s bibliography and work.



© Oana Cajal, *A Poem for Judy: Écho Visuel* (2018)

Similar to how Cajal’s “picto-impulse” uses a dark hue of blue and *almost* still objects (shining light, shimmering lake) to give the image a quiet character, the poem uses rhymes, meter patterns and musical repetitions, which gives it the soothing rhythm of a lullaby. Earlier versions were in free verse and included more provocative thoughts and more obscure images. However, I was going to read it during the Symposium *Disability, Family & Law*, held by UBC Centre for

Feminist Legal Studies (in March 2018), and I opted for a rhythm and rhymes patterns, as well as ideas and images, that invited closure, hope, peace and friendliness.

I would classify my poem as “disability poetry” insofar as it is a tribute for a disability scholar and because it deals with illnesses and dying, which is characterized by certain fractures in relationships and physical and emotional losses that can occur in the context of disability. It invites readers to see their own vulnerability by empathizing with different ways of being/embodiments, which is a hallmark of disability poetry. Reflections on shared mortality invites empathy and solidarity with all human beings, if not all living things. Disability poetry shares the knowledge of the “crippled” who have “a window into the insanity of the able-bodied”¹⁸ - and it challenges this “insanity”, such as steady beliefs in one’s invincibility, normalcy and independency. As poet Jeniffer Bartlett writes:

to be crippled means to have
access to people’s fear
of their own eroding

Unlike other “disability poetry” I wrote, *A Poem for Judy* is narrated by the author (myself). There is little distance between the narrator and the author, as I address the amorphous figure of Professor/Judith Mosoff/Judy - imaginatively (re)constructed - and try building a connection through our shared mortality, community, and the fragmented knowledge I have of her. In a sense, I have tried befriending a ghost, the one who sat in the office next to my own, the feelings and intuitions imprinted in the physical books Judy marked and left behind, the spirit, the affects, and the hopes underlying her scholarship.

¹⁸ Jeniffer Bartlett, “Autobiography/Anti-Autobiography” in Jennifer Bartlett, Sheila Black & Michael Northen, eds, *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (USA: Cinco Punto Press,2011) at 303.

I concede that I do not “know Judith Mosoff” in the most common senses of knowing someone (e.g. through extensive personal interactions of biographic knowledge) but this practical experience may be used to reflect on the fact that we all construct other people affectively and imaginatively, in our mind, all the time — so that it is hard to categorically deny that subjective constructions of others are not ways of “knowing” others. It is easy to discredit this view by pointing to the obvious risks of projecting one’s own feelings onto others, and supplanting the actual person in front of us with an imagined one. (Infatuation is a prime example of this.) It is much more interesting to reflect on whether (or rather, in what imperfect senses) we can be said to “know” someone *in the absence of affective inputs*, or on the *benefits* of such affective processes, such as the solidarity it builds - with particular others, if not with group identities or within a community as a whole. Indeed, pointing to how downright fictional characters can kindle sympathy for the fate of actual others, Richard Rorty wrote:

We are now in a good position to put aside the last vestiges of the ideas that human beings are distinguished by the capacity to know rather than by the capacities for friendship and intermarriage, distinguished by rigorous rationality rather than by flexible sentimentality. If we do so, we shall have dropped the idea that assured knowledge of a truth about what we have in common is a prerequisite for moral education, as well as the idea of a specifically moral motivation. If we do all these things, we shall see Kant’s *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* as a placeholder for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*...¹⁹

This kind of “affective knowledge” seems particularly fitting when applied to people who passed away. The few objections that could be made against affective knowledge (e.g. it might neglect the reality of someone else’s agency; it may downplay someone’s intervention in putting herself forward) would not hold against knowing affectively/constructively someone who passed away,

¹⁹ Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality” in Aakash Singh Rathore & Alex Cistelecan, eds, *Wronging Rights?: Philosophical Challenges for Human Rights* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011) at 127-128.

especially if this person wished to be known through affective input. Think, for example, of some people constantly lost in books and preferring the company of fictional characters and dead writers. We can find a moving illustration of inter-generational bonding in the work of a Spanish poet from the Generation of '27, Luis Cernuda, who was disappointed in his own contemporaries, and hoped that a future poet would befriend him. That knowledge of his self mattered more to him than being known by the living. I confess that I am skeptical that this kind of knowledge - not being mutual and contemporary - would amount to the inter-personal knowledge expected in friendship, and yet, both Luis Cernuda and my younger self - reading him in my early twenties - must have felt closer to certain ghosts of the future and of the past than we did to many living persons! Below is an excerpt of Cernuda's poem *A un poeta del futuro* (To a Future Poet)²⁰:

No conozco a los hombres.
(...)
Mas no me cuido de ser desconocido
En medio de estos cuerpos casi contemporáneos
(...)
Sólo quiero ...
Que otros ojos compartan lo que miran los míos.
(...)
Si renuncio a la vida es para hallarla luego
Conforme a mi deseo, en tu memoria.
(...)
...en ti mismo mis sueños y deseos
Tendrán razón al fin, y habré vivido.²¹

²⁰ Luis Cernuda, *Como quien espera el alba* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1947).

²¹ The English translation reads like this "I do not know men. (...) But I do not care about being unknown/ In the midst of these almost contemporary bodies (...) I only want... that other eyes share what mine look at. (...) If I give up life is to find it later / According to my desire, in your memory. (...) ... in yourself my dreams and desires / will triumph in the end, and I will have lived" [translated by author].

It is interesting to note that part of Luis Cernuda's "increasing bitterness toward life" came from his struggles with his sexual orientation²², and to read this poem not only as a wish to relate to certain people from a future world - namely, a world with fewer prejudices - but to live in such a world as well.

3.3 Poetry and Community

Given Judy's focus on disability and her own appreciation of poetry, let me connect this idea of creating community through poetic imagination with "disability poetry". Just as certain poems connect people across time, others create communities around shared hopes. In the context of disability poetry, the imaginative leap readers are invited to take not only involves attempting to build affective bridges toward past/future/fictional people, but also includes building solidarity between people who share a desire to live in a better world. Of course, a retreat from the real world into imagination is a form of surrendering that is far from ideal, but imagining a new world is a crucial first step toward materializing it. I think of Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni's movie *L'Avventura*, where two women feel distress, anxiety, boredom, dread, fear and anger, directed both at themselves and at a man with whom they are in a relationship. An unhappiness they seem unable to name gnaws at them, as they keep enacting and reiterating the worries a woman "should" have in their society in relation to a man. The disturbing aspect of this unhappiness is their inability to imagine, or perhaps their impossibility to pursue, an alternative life. There is nowhere to run to: no world without a heterosexist social structure where their hopes and fears must be defined in relation to a man. Perhaps all that is left for the characters in

²² "Luis Cernuda" in *Encyclopædia Britannica* by the Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica (22 August 2007), online: <www.britannica.com/biography/Luis-Cernuda>.

that movie is to disappear (like the first woman) or to befriend, as Luis Cernuda did, poets of the future.

The world in which disabled people and their allies - the “crip community” - live, the world they envision and strive to bring about, provide a similar solidarity: an imagined citizenship, a shared utopian pursuit. Professor Judith Mosoff, like the best disability scholars, activists and artists, was able to detect the obstacles in the way of realizing this vision; to think outside of able-bodied/normalizing boxes. Without this drive — this imaginative, affective drive — to innovate and speak a language not yet invented for a world not yet realized, social movements are liable to stagnate in outmoded languages and impoverished forms of knowing, condemning them to misery, despair, and an underlying angst that there could be a better world if only they had the words for it. The borders of “Disabled Country”, to use the title of Neil Marcus’s famous poem, may best be drawn affectively. Conversely, a clear grasp of negative affective reactions toward disability is crucial to begin dismantling the ableist “magic” that transfigures people with different embodiments into second-class citizens. I think of Lynn Manning’s ingenious metaphor for oppressive impositions of spoiled identities in his poem *The Magic Wand*. This does not support an argument against the role of imagination (of personhood; of humanity; of community) in ethics, but on the contrary, focuses our attention on the important role that imagination plays in knowing/constituting people, and the necessity to closely examine which social group wields enough power to make their imagination trump that of others:

Quick-change artist extraordinaire,
I whip out my folded cane
and change from Black Man to ‘blind man’
with a flick of my wrist.
(...)

My final form is never of my choosing;
I only wield the wand;
You are the magician.

Judith Mosoff was a legal scholar rather than a poet, but her insightful work captured Manning's idea and revealed who the "magicians" are within legal processes rendering certain vulnerable people voiceless.

Let me conclude by explaining the title of this project: "In The Yellow Margins". Literally speaking, it refers to the margins of yellowing, old books. Figuratively, social "margins" are also where disabled people are often relegated, and scholarly research aiming to create a more welcoming world must also look at the "margins" of mainstream legal and political theories.²³ Given Professor Mosoff's feminist sensibility and interest in the social construction of "unfit mothers" and madness, I am also tempted to draw a comparison between my title and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, concerning a woman's descent into mental illness in an oppressive social context. The character sees a "woman stooping down and creeping about behind [the yellow wallpaper's] pattern"²⁴, a metaphor for the prison-like environment Gilman described. The wallpaper, seemingly banal, becomes an object of intense observation, as the character tries to detect a figure hiding behind and to learn something about this figure or about herself (about the fate of women, in the case of Gilman's character). I similarly was trying to discern "Judy" in the yellow margins of her books, as my finger followed the lines that she traced under sentences that resonated with her and as my mind, for a moment, "saw what she saw."

²³ See Beaudry, *supra* note 14..

²⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (USA, 1892) at 77.