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Tayfur CİHANTİMUR

THE POETIC SYMBOLISM OF DISABILITY FROM A COMPARATIVE-HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE:
AMERICAN PURITAN POETRY AND THE POETRY OF THE AMERICAN
RENAISSANCE

Department of English Language and Literature

Master's Thesis

Antalya, 2026



AKDENİZ UNIVERSITY
THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



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T.C.
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Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne,

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ÖZET

Engellilik, insanlık tarihi boyunca biyolojik bir gerçeklik olarak var olmuş olsa da, ona yüklenen kültürel, tarihsel ve toplumsal anlamlar zaman içinde değişmiştir. Bu nedenle bu tez, Amerikan edebiyatının iki dönemi olan Püriten dönemi ile Amerikan Rönesansı şiirinde engelliliğin şiirsel simgeselliğini kuramsal bir bakış açısıyla incelemektedir. Çalışma, engelliliğin bu iki dönemde yalnızca biyolojik ya da bireysel bir durum olarak değil, aynı zamanda kültürel, teolojik ve estetik bir temsil olarak nasıl inşa edildiğini ve dönemin ideolojik yapısıyla nasıl ilişkilendiğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Püriten dönemde engellilik, Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor ve Michael Wigglesworth gibi şairlerin eserlerinde görüldüğü üzere, çoğu zaman günahın bir sonucu, ilahi cezanın bir işareti ya da ruhsal arınmanın bir aracı olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bu temsil biçimi, bedeni Tanrı'nın sınamalarının ve lütfunun gerçekleştiği bir alan olarak konumlandırmıştır. Buna karşılık, Amerikan Rönesansı şiiri, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville ve Emily Dickinson gibi şairlerin şiirleri aracılığıyla engelliliği bireyin iç dünyası, duygusal kırılganlıkları, varoluşsal sorgulamaları ve toplumun baskın normlarına karşı direnişi bağlamında ele almaktadır. Engelliliğin bu iki dönemde şiirlerde nasıl temsil edildiğine ilişkin tarihsel dönüşümü Engellilik Kuramı çerçevesinde değerlendiren bu çalışma, bedensel farklılığın yalnızca bir metafor olmadığını, şiirsel içeriği yeniden şekillendiren ve dönüştüren bir unsur olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Seçilen şiirler, nitel yöntemler, yakın okuma ve metinlerarası karşılaştırma yoluyla incelenmiştir. Tez, Amerikan edebiyatında bedene ilişkin normatif algıların sorgulanışını görünür kılarak, engelliliğin şiirde tarihsel bağlam içinde çok katmanlı işlevlerini ortaya koyması bakımından alana katkı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikan edebiyatı; Püriten; Amerikan Rönesansı; engellilik; engellilik kuramı

ABSTRACT

**THE POETIC SYMBOLISM OF DISABILITY FROM A COMPARATIVE-
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: AMERICAN PURITAN POETRY AND THE
POETRY OF THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE**

Although disability has always been a biological reality for humans, the cultural, historical, and social meanings associated with it have evolved over time. Therefore, this thesis examines the poetic symbolism of disability in two periods of American literature, the Puritan Age and the American Renaissance, from a theoretical perspective to reveal how disability was constructed not only as a biological or individual condition but also as a cultural, theological, and aesthetic representation during these two periods, and how it related to the ideological structure of the time. During the Puritan period, disability was often viewed as a consequence of sin, a sign of divine punishment, or a means of spiritual purification, as evidenced in the works of poets such as Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, and Michael Wigglesworth. This representation positioned the body as a scene of God's tests and grace. On the other hand, the poetry of the American Renaissance often addresses disability through the poems of such poets as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson who emphasized individuals' inner worlds, their emotional fragilities, existential questionings, and resistances to mainstream societal norms. By evaluating this historical transformation of how disability was depicted in the poems from each period through the lens of Disability Theory, this study argues that bodily difference is not just a metaphor but an element that reshapes and transforms the poetic content. Selected poems were analyzed using qualitative methods, close reading, and intertextual comparison. The thesis contributes by illuminating the challenge to normative perceptions of the body in American literature, revealing the multi-layered roles of disability in poetry within a historical context.

Keywords: American literature; Puritan; American Renaissance; disability; disability theory

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INTRODUCTION

Poetry has been a fundamental part of how people have searched for meaning, identity, and belonging since early times. The way poetry has evolved in America has its own set of moral and ideological facets. For instance, when Crèvecoeur (1981) asked “What is an American?” in his book *Letters from an American Farmer*, he not only defined the American individual but also shaped America's cultural landscape. In his writing, he explains to Europeans how American identity emerged from a melting pot of nationalities, hard work, and faith: “here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men” (51), and he describes the role of religion in America: “as Christians, religion curbs them not in their opinions; the laws inspect our actions, our thoughts are left to God” (53). In this way, American poetry should be seen as an extension of this early American cultural vision, suggesting that Crèvecoeur’s (1981) concept of the “new man” (7) must have inspired a new poetic expression from the very beginning, influencing the development of what has become American literary tradition.

This study argues that American poetry evolved from a reflection of New England Puritan dogmatism and spirituality to a representation of democracy in Whitman’s poetry and an exploration of individual inner worlds in Dickinson’s poetry. During this transition, American poetry developed into a personal art form and a collective mirror of American identity, shaped by faith, freedom, and diversity. Ultimately, it became the voice of various communities, including Native Americans, African Americans, Asian immigrants, and Europeans, each sharing their cultural values, spiritual traditions, and political concerns. For example, African American poetry, despite often being seen as a single category, is actually “vast, diverse, and often brilliant” (Major, 1996, as cited in Bishop and Starkey, 2006: 126). Similarly, Harrington (1996: 497) emphasizes this polyvocal richness by saying that “As a social form, poetry is not simply a value-neutral, universal taxonomic category but an interpretive cue and an evaluative epithet that shapes the uses and judgments of texts.” Therefore, poetry should not be viewed only as a literary genre; its social significance, cultural value, and ideological meaning must also be considered in any analysis.

Historically, the United States did not completely reject Britain's imperial patterns but inherited and transformed them as the nation’s identity was shaped through both imitation and reinvention of its imperial discourse (Go, 2011). However, the United States, from the very beginning, has always been in progress as “The official seal that the United States Congress adopted in 1782 depicted the nation as an unfinished pyramid, divinely blessed and emblazoned

with a Vergilian motto, ‘*Novo Ordo Seclorum*’ a new order of the ages (Higham, 1994: 1292). American culture and, by extension, its poetry became a developing space where political ideology, moral vision, and national identity intersected. The poetic imagination conveyed individual emotion and negotiated collective myths of destiny, democracy, and divine mission. Poetry became a way to express belonging, authority, and moral order.

Pinsky (1996: 19) argues that “Walt Whitman saw that the United States ... would need holding together. He thought it would be held together by poetry.” For him, poetry was a machine made of words that would keep a diverse society united. In essence, although American poetry is often viewed as mainly a physical and individual art form, it also represents collective memory, as “poetry belongs to communities as a form of memory, but to individuals as a form of existence,” hence, until the mid-20th century, many American adults knew some poems by heart, largely because of the influence of John Dewey, whose ideas led public schools to use poetry as a tool for education and social integration (Pinsky, 1996: 23).

Important research shows that American poetry, like the literary genres of any nation, is diverse in both form and content. Theoretical studies of American poems have revealed many different voices and concerns. Among these, the ideological content of such poems emphasizes various clashes of opinion. According to Harrington (1996), “what people in the US now call poetry, like the country itself, encompasses multiple, difficult negotiations between normative standards, equality, community, subjectivity, and competing conceptions of and reactions to the public” (511). Additionally, beyond the effects of the theoretical approaches used in a study, examining different periods and regions naturally encourages discussions that push us to look beyond poetry's form and discursive content.

For Puritans, “literature is and should be valued as a source of moral edification” (Lamarque, 2009: 287). Needless to say, Puritan poetry reflected a God-centered worldview in 17th-century colonial America while emphasizing the individual's spiritual salvation. In the public imagination, poetry from this period, like everything else from that time, was preoccupied with themes such as sin, torment, and divine trials. This is understandable because, as Waggoner (1964: 293) argues, the primary role of the age was to help individuals live well in this world and face death with “a sacred resignation.” Hence, as McWilliams (2017: 434) points out, “Puritans lived only to pursue the radiance of the afterlife.” The most notable poet of the age, Bradstreet, is described by McWilliams (2017: 438) as “almost anti-Puritan” because she emphasizes her emotional experience rather than theological dogma. Therefore, such variety, polyvocality, or richness can, in fact, be seen in all texts written during this period, as research has shown the multitude of ideas, emotions, and experiences inherent in American

Puritan literature, suggesting that American Puritan poetry was not just focused on theology and its appearances in daily life. Research has already accepted this, since in Burr's (1985) words, "Recent critics look at the Puritan literary scene in a more favorable light. Instead of depicting the Puritan as an enemy of art, they see him as a literary creator" (261). Thus, Bradstreet, according to Richardson (1967):

wrote from what might be called the Puritan sensibility, that her best poetry gains rather than loses by being considered as the product of that sensibility, and that her finest work, 'Contemplations,' is a splendid and coherent expression of what was best in New England Puritanism. (317)

In short, various qualities, both religious and secular, coexist in American Puritan poetry, making poets of that time an important area of study. Analyzing related literature shows that Puritan poetry should be seen as an extension of both personal piety and the social belief system, aiding literary historians in identifying common patterns among writers of that period who, overwhelmingly, wrote with a strong influence of God and the Holy Scriptures. However, it is also important to recognize that although New England Puritanism was considered "a monolithic system of doctrines," research suggests there was room for differences. As Morgan (1961: 236) states, "Although seventeenth-century New England Puritans saw no virtue in toleration, although they banished Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson and executed Quakers, they did allow room for differences of opinion in religious matters."

Historical Context

The English first attempted permanent settlement in America with the Jamestown colony in 1607. Even though Sir Walter Raleigh's three expeditions to Roanoke Island two decades earlier had failed, Jamestown laid the lasting foundation for the English presence. Captain Christopher Newport's expedition along the James River in the colony's early days shows the English search for wealth and strategic passages to the New World. However, Jamestown's true importance goes beyond its initial successful settlement; it also served as the "archetype of English colonization" (Horn, 2011: 28), a model for all subsequent colonies. Virginia's survival was therefore a turning point that determined the English future in America and their dominance of the region.

Settling in Virginia during the early 17th century, the Pilgrims and Puritans experienced a foundational myth "characterized by religiosity, idealism, sacrifice, and a utopian vision based on theology" as they came to the Americas "for spiritual reasons and considered themselves religious refugees" (Paul, 2014: 137). Although the terms Pilgrims and Puritans are often used interchangeably in history, there is some difference between them, even though the two groups appear similar at first glance. The Pilgrims, who sailed to America on the Mayflower in 1620

and were led by William Bradford (1590-1657), were religious “separatists” who received funding and land from the Virginia Company. They intentionally landed north of Virginia and established the colony of Plymouth after a legendary encounter with a rock. Within just a few years, the colony's population had grown to over 2,500, and the community seemed very close-knit. Although the term “Puritan” was originally a derogatory label, neither the Pilgrims nor the Puritans used it for themselves. John Winthrop (1588-1649) led the Puritans to America aboard the *Arbella* and other ships in 1630, and, under a charter granted by King Charles I, they established the city of Boston. Boston remained the capital of the Massachusetts Bay Colony until 1691, when Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay merged into the Province of Massachusetts Bay (Paul, 2014).

In this context, Paul (2014: 139) also emphasizes that “the so-called Great Migration (1630–40) brought many newcomers from England to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which soon outnumbered Bradford’s Plymouth Colony by far. By 1640, there were about 10,000 settlers.” The demographic growth of Massachusetts Bay highlights its key role in shaping New England’s colonial identity. As Paul (2014) further explains, “Puritan experience as American experience is characterized by a number of transitions that engendered some paradoxes” (155). First, their physical move from England to North America involved experiences that did not easily fit into the biblical story they aimed to imitate. Second, they changed “from an oppressed minority of non-conformist believers into an oppressive ruling elite,” (155) trying to enforce religious orthodoxy in their new society but often facing resistance. Finally, even among the most devout, doubts remained about whether North America was truly the Promised Land, as daily hardships and conflicts with Native peoples caused anxiety.

“In a limited sense, the term ‘Puritan’ means: one who insisted upon a more thorough Protestant reformation of the English established church” (Burr, 1985: 62), and to understand the values central to Puritan life, it is necessary to first examine how they defined themselves. As Miller and Johnson (2014: 15) indicate:

Puritanism may perhaps best be described as that point of view, that philosophy of life, that code of values, which was carried to New England by the first settlers in the early seventeenth century. Beginning thus, it has become one of the continuous factors in American life and American thought.”

This statement demonstrates that the Puritans were not merely a religious community but also embodied a philosophy of life that shaped the moral order. The Puritans’ religious commitment formed the foundation of their daily lives. As Paul (2014: 151) emphasizes, “Like the Pilgrims, the Puritans were strongly influenced by Calvinism’s doctrine of predestination, which contends that salvation can occur only through the grace of God and that the individual

is responsible to God alone.” This saying reveals how their belief in the impossibility of salvation outside of God’s grace shaped both the Puritans’ individual and social lives.

At the same time, Puritans viewed themselves as a model colony carrying out God's will: “In promotional tracts, sermons, histories, and autobiographical conversion narratives, the Puritans fashioned themselves as the founders of a model colony that realized God's will” (Paul, 2014: 150). Puritans’ religious commitment combined with their social order, uniting them around the ideal of the model colony. John Winthrop’s famous words also reflect this vision: “John Winthrop declared that the Puritans in the ‘new world’ would be A Model of Christian Charity” (150). Winthrop’s statement demonstrates that religious commitment is also the foundation of social solidarity and moral order. Furthermore, Winthrop’s comparison of Puritan society to an organism supports this: “Included in Winthrop’s vision of the holy community is also a kind of social contract. He likens the Puritans’ future civil society to an organism by describing it as “knit together in this worke as one man (153).” However, this strict order and the lack of tolerance for dissent meant that some members, such as Anne Hutchinson, were forced to leave the colony. Winthrop himself described her as “of ready wit and bold spirit,” yet her theological claim that “good works were no sign of God’s blessing” and since the elect were guaranteed salvation, she argued, “the mediating role of the church between God and man became obsolete” directly challenged the Puritan leadership. As a result, “it could hardly be countenanced by them and so, eventually, Hutchinson was banished.” These examples show that the same values that fostered religious unity and moral order could also justify exclusion and intolerance (Gray, 2011: 32). Therefore, the central values of the Puritans can be summarized as religious devotion, predestination, and the moral order established by their view of social life as a sacred contract.

Puritan literature and poetry served as both educational and spiritual tools for individuals and the community. At the beginning of *Of Plymouth Plantation*, William Bradford declares that “he will write in the Puritan ‘plain style, with singular regard to the simple truth in all things,’ as far as his ‘slender judgment’ will permit.” His history is not merely a chronicle of events; rather, “the special work of God’s providence is a subject of constant analysis and meditation.” As he asks, “What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His Grace?” In this sense, “The survival of the Puritans during and after the long voyage to the New World is seen as part of the divine plan. For Bradford, America was no blessed garden originally, but the civilizing mission of himself and his colony was precisely to make it one: to turn it into evidence of their election and God’s infinite power and benevolence” (Gray, 2011: 29). These

reflections show how literature transformed individual experience into spiritual contemplation and a collective search for meaning.

Winthrop's sermon *A Model of Christian Charity* similarly carried a didactic mission. His claim that "We must consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill" and "the care of the public must oversway all private respects" stresses the precedence of public order over individual desire. As Winthrop emphasized, "All true Christians are of one body in Christ, and the ligaments of this body which knitt together are love," reflecting the ideal of solidarity at the core of the Puritan moral order. On the other hand, dissident voices such as Thomas Morton's self-description as *Lord of Misrule* or Roger Williams's assertion that the state cannot interfere in religious matters reveal that Puritan literature was also a site of debate and conflict (Gray, 2011: 31). Thus, literature became a central instrument for interpreting God's will, educating the community, and establishing moral order.

Puritan poetry is regarded as a contested art form, yet it proved to be a powerful medium of faith. Cotton Mather warned against its dangers: "Let not the Circean cup intoxicate you," and Elizabeth Sowle Bradford observed that many dismissed poetry as "profane." Still, Michael Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom" was praised as "the Edification of such Readers, as are for Truth's dressed up in Plaine Meeter," and the Bay Psalm Book was published based on "Conscience rather than elegance, fidelity rather than poetry" (Gray, 2011: 36). These examples illustrate poetry's role as a didactic instrument of Puritan devotion. At the same time, Anne Bradstreet's verses "If ever two were one, then surely we" and "Farewell dear babe, the pleasure of mine eye" offer intimate expressions of love and loss, while Edward Taylor's meditation "Thou Sorrow, venom elfe ... To catch a Fly?" transforms ordinary experiences into spiritual reflection (Gray, 2011: 40). In this way, Puritan poetry is not entirely univocal and carries a dual function, reinforcing communal discipline while also providing a personal space for faith and emotion within God's providential plan.

The American Renaissance, with its multifaceted literary and historical aspects, has been examined from various vantage points. In fact, naming the period roughly between the 1830s and the 1860s "Renaissance" is neither anachronistic nor a misnomer as the period witnessed the publication of some of the most important works of 19th-century American literature, as the major writers of the period created a uniquely American literature that used the vernacular language of the young republic to depict the distinctiveness of its people, cultures, and landscapes (Sax, n.d., para. 1).

Any chronological reading of the development of the American civilization with all its elements can easily see that the land is becoming thoroughly "American" throughout these

years, all the while, artists, historians, scholars, and intellectuals connected various aspects of their evolving civilization by interpreting it with what was before them in Europe and in the rest of the world. Hence, the name of the period stems from the belief that the United States had a special relationship with the Renaissance, which was a product of a rediscovery and reinterpretation of the past” (Wilson, 1983: 69).

As Pease (1991: 37) clarifies, “After formalist explanation lost its power to contain Renaissance texts within an autotelic realm, American Renaissance texts became historicized anew.” As a period of literary awakening in American literature that spanned from the 1830s to the 1860s, the issues intellectuals emphasized were individuality, harmony with nature, and moral freedom. Unlike the New England Puritans, who often served as the voice of God in their literary works, poets of the American Renaissance used poetry to reflect the individual’s spiritual and intellectual depth. According to Kerkering (2005), starting with Matthiessen’s publication of “American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman” (1941), “the phrase ‘American Renaissance’ has provided both an organizing principle for the study of nineteenth-century American literature and a lightning-rod for that study’s critique” (223). Hence, according to Matthiessen (1941), symbolism and possibilities for democracy were the two primary qualities of the period during which the relationship between the body and the mind was explored within the context of the individual’s inner world and their desire for liberation from social norms. However, it is erroneous to conceptualize American Puritanism and the American Renaissance in oppositional terms. Surprisingly, the roots of the major movement of the American Renaissance, Transcendentalism, can be traced back to American Puritanism, although in literary history, it is considered the reflection of Romanticism in Europe.

In Buell’s (1973: 18) words, “Commentators have generally pictured the heritage of Transcendentalism in panoramic terms as a legacy of the Puritans that suddenly resurfaced in reaction to Unitarianism, with the romantic movement as a catalyst”, although it “is best seen not as a repudiation but an outgrowth of trends in Unitarian thought” (19). Thus, the two periods mentioned above share overlapping qualities, while the latter clearly shows the shift from a monolithic theological explanation of the universe to a more pluralistic American Renaissance, in which poetry was used to reflect the individual’s spiritual and intellectual depth, as in European Romanticism.

Buell (1973: 1) labels the American Renaissance as “literary Transcendentalism” and argues that “Most of what the Transcendentalists wrote falls into this category of nonfictional literature, presenting a mixture of piety, poetry, and sententiousness that is neither art nor

argument but a compound of both” (1). A comparison of the American Renaissance and American Puritanism reveals significant differences. As Chai (1987: 6) states, the major difference is that “The American Renaissance manifests more a recovery or renewal than continuation of Puritan modes of thought and expression.” Lastly, the American Renaissance suggests a break from the religious modes of thinking and living associated with Puritanism. Such a break indicates the secularization of religion. In this bifurcation, religion in the hands of Puritans required “absolute dependences.” Meanwhile, the American Renaissance encapsulated a struggle “to find the presence of the divine within itself and its consequent positing of God as external Other” (10). The Transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller, helped found a new national culture rooted in native elements, advocated reforms in church, state, and society, and contributed to the rise of free religion and the abolitionist movement (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998).

The American Renaissance featured developments that set the stage for the future of the United States. This period saw the rise of capitalism and rapid industrial growth, leading to a major overhaul of military infrastructure, including the building of a navy with 671 warships (Leichter, 2023; Noguchi, 2021). Additionally, important progress was made in scientific fields such as ethnography, phrenology, and medical research (Layouni, 2014; Noguchi, 2021). All these changes occurred alongside a notable shift in the nation’s moral and intellectual outlook, marking a move away from the religious austerity of the Puritan mindset toward a more secular, human-centered view of the world. This change is most clearly reflected in the Transcendentalist movement, which highlighted individual freedom, self-reliance, and moral independence as vital to democratic life. As Capper (1998) states, Transcendentalism was historically linked to “liberal religion, individualist democracy, and national identity” (503), redefining the moral foundation of American culture beyond the limits of theological determinism. To the Transcendentalists, the self was not just an isolated ego but a moral core capable of shaping society as “The Transcendentalists’ conceptions of individual freedom intersected with the three major conceptual modes of antebellum reform: moral law, individual rights, and human sympathy” (536). Such a perspective positioned the individual as the moral agent of progress, moving away from the Puritan focus on collective sin and divine dependence.

Matthiessen (1941) defines the American Renaissance as a historical phase in which national identity and democratic consciousness were reborn. He argues:

Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville all wrote literature for democracy in a double sense. They felt that it was incumbent upon their generation to give fulfillment to the potentialities freed by the Revolution, to provide a culture commensurate with America’s political opportunity. (13)

This approach demonstrates that American literature assumed responsibility for creating a refreshing democratic culture amid difficult-to-endure post-industrial social change. In such a process, as Matthiessen (1941) emphasizes, knowledge should not be divorced from the people who need to live in harmony with nature. As such, a writer's "works must prove, in short... that he is a citizen, not a lackey, a true exponent of democracy, not a tool of the most insidious form of anarchy" (13). These statements, combined with the social reform movements of the period, demonstrate that he reshaped American national identity on moral and intellectual foundations. In Whitman's words: "I am large, I contain multitudes" (Whitman, 1904: 69). This essentially summarizes the main features of the American Renaissance and its literary flourishing. Compared to the monotony of the Puritan era, the American Renaissance exhibits both multiplicity and difference. This multiplicity is the emergence of different facets of human experience, which are women, the sick, the disabled, black, the poor, and queer.

There was a transition from the God-centered, fatalistic understanding of the Puritan era to the individual-centered understanding of freedom in the American Renaissance. This transition is attributed to Enlightenment thought, political independence, and social transformations. One of the Enlightenment's fundamental principles was to prioritize reason and human potential over God's will, placing the individual at the center. The American Revolution, however, replaced the idea of divine election with democratic citizenship. In the 19th century, social processes such as slavery, women's rights movements, and the Civil War increased the visibility of marginalized bodies in literature. Hence, literature shifted from a narrative of sin and flaw to a field that glorified the diversity of human experience. Hence, various writers expressed appreciation for the shifting frontier line that defined the American West, including issues of westward expansion, imperialism, foreign affairs, and America's diplomatic standing in the world. Another key phenomenon was the changing understanding of the role of women in society, as one can easily trace a line from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) to Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) to the Seneca Falls women's convention (Sax, n.d., para. 2).

Religious and cultural beliefs throughout history have shaped societies' perspectives on the body, illness, and difference. Michael Oliver (1990), taking into account Evans Pritchard's definition (1937), argues that "the way disability is perceived will be dependent upon the specific content of the magical or religious beliefs of a given society" (19). According to this view, the meaning of disability and its status within society are directly related to that society's religious or magical belief systems. However, Oliver (1990) emphasizes that this approach is too complex to be explained solely by religious beliefs, because "it sees religious or magical

beliefs as autonomous and as the sole determining factor in both defining disability and accounting for the way disabled people are treated in a given society” (20).

In Puritan society, physical differences were also viewed as warnings or punishments from God. Concepts of illness and disability, perceived as sin, infirmity, or a divine test, were linked to the individual's spiritual salvation. In this process, as Altschuler and Silva (2017) state, “deformity, defect, and monstrosity emphasize what we would now call the allegorical, the aesthetic, and the moral dimensions of impairment, each suggesting a distance from God or a threat to the body politic” (6). This understanding, combined with Puritan beliefs in fate, election, and the divine plan, reinforced the idea that physical differences carry theological significance. Therefore, in Puritan society, bodily imperfection was not merely a physical deficiency but was considered a reflection of God’s moral will over man.

With the intellectual transformation that followed the Renaissance, the body became not only a testing ground for God but also an expression of individual experience and national identity. As Altschuler (2014: 35) further emphasized: “The Enlightenment ideals of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods held that men and women could be cultivated to play proscribed, salubrious roles in the new nation.” This claim reveals that Enlightenment thought began to view the body as trainable, malleable, and integral to social progress. Hence, physical difference was no longer only a theological flaw but was redefined as a potential contribution to the nation’s development. In this phase of American history, according to Buell’s (1995) environmental perspective, the major figure of “the so-called American literary renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century is not Ralph Waldo Emerson, as one would expect. It is “Thoreau” and various others, such as James Fenimore Cooper’s daughter, “Susan Fenimore Cooper,” as much as some key non-American texts like Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, that shape American thought (6).

Regardless of who the pioneers of these periods were, this shift from Puritan literature to the works of Renaissance writers was also clearly reflected in literary content, especially in the representation of the human body. Altschuler (2014: 84) argues that “When impaired figures entered US fiction, their bodies were not stigmatized; rather, the crippled body most often signified a legible and laudable history of patriotism.” Here, the disabled body no longer becomes a symbol of sin or indulgence, but of heroism and self-sacrifice. With the individual-centered approach of the American Renaissance, writers such as Whitman and Thoreau began to interpret the body as a means of creativity and experience, grounded not in God’s will but in human free will. Thus, whereas in the Puritan era bodily imperfection represented God’s punishing power, in the American Renaissance the same body became a symbol associated with

national consciousness, ideals of freedom, and humanity. This transformation demonstrates, both culturally and theologically, that even the flawed aspects of the American individual began to be seen as part of the democratic identity.

Disability Theory: Theoretical Framework

Today, disability and the participation of disabled individuals in society have an important place in the agendas of states and their institutions. While new laws and regulations aim to ensure that disabled individuals participate more actively in business life, education, municipal services, and public life in general, governments also make various arrangements so that disabled individuals can benefit from transportation, housing, and health services (Arikan & Cihantimur, 2024: 273). However, despite all these positive developments, disability is not an issue that can be solved only with legal regulations. Sociology and education research also show that disability is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires changes in individual and social thought structures which must also be addressed in our research methods and agendas as well. In essence, disability is a significant area of study that must be approached not only through disciplines like sociology, education, law and theology, but also through literary and cultural studies.

The sociological study of disability is closely associated with Britain, particularly in the disability activism and theoretical debates that gained momentum in the 1970s. For a long time, disability was largely understood through a medical framework that located the “problem” in the individual body. However, this approach was increasingly challenged by disabled people and scholars who began to reinterpret disability in social and political terms. As Mike Oliver (1996: 33) states, “The genesis, development and articulation of the social model of disability by disabled people themselves is a rejection of all of these fundamentals.” In this way, disability can be examined as a form of social exclusion that is created by physical, environmental, institutional, and attitudinal barriers.

Disability, generally speaking, describes individuals who have some sort of reduction of their ability to move or are unable to participate in social activities. This limitation may stem from congenital physical or biological dysfunctions, those experienced at birth, or from a disease or accident that occurs later; however, limited mobility is not considered a disability in itself. It should not be overlooked that every individual in society has things they cannot do or are unable to do in life, and from this perspective, there is nearly no individual in society who does not have a “disability” in some way.

Disability studies utilize several theoretical frameworks, such as the medical, social, and cultural models, to shed light on how disability is depicted in literature and how these representations reflect wider societal meanings. These approaches demonstrate how literature both mirrors and engages with real-world understandings of disability. Among literary techniques, characterization plays a crucial role as a bridge between fictional representations and the social realities they echo. The connection between poetic and real-life characters has been a matter of theoretical debate, although, as Bérubé (2005) stipulates, “It sometimes proceeds as if characters in literary texts could be read simply as representations of real people” (570).

The lack of social support systems for disabled individuals, combined with society’s exclusionary attitudes towards them, creates major barriers to their full participation in society (Karataş, 2001). For example, imagine a person who needs a wheelchair trying to access a building that has stairs but no ramp. This person has a “disability” requiring a wheelchair, but what really blocks their active participation is a physical obstacle created by others: the stairs. Although architects do not intentionally aim to exclude wheelchair users, many designs intended for people’s convenience and safety tend to favor “non-disabled” individuals, those who can climb stairs, see computer screens, and hear directions (Dunn, 2010). While this discussion of the role of disability in other areas can provide context, since this study focuses on literary analysis, further exploration should be conducted within the field of literary studies.

As shown, it is almost impossible to define disability in a single way since it can sometimes be regarded as a medical condition, as social exclusion, as a form of cultural representation, and a political identity. This definitional complexity demonstrates that disability cannot be reduced to a single bodily condition or a purely medical category. In this sense, Siebers (2008: 9) argues that in order to move away from what he calls “the ideology of ability,” we should seek to “bring disability out of the shadows.” Further, he states that disability produces more complex theories of embodiment than the ideology of ability does, thereby placing bodily variations at the center of our understanding of humanity. This multifaceted structure also demonstrates that disability cannot be considered solely as a physical condition. One of the most significant ways of understanding this complex system is through Mike Oliver’s definitions of impairment and disability. For Oliver (1996), impairment is the limitation on an individual’s functioning. Disability occurs when individuals are unable to engage equally in societal activities because of environmental, physical, and social barriers. These definitions do not limit disability to the physical aspect alone. They relate to both the physical and social environments and their structural barriers, as well as to conditions of

inequality in participation. The definition of disability is a political and not just a scientific or linguistic issue, mainly because it ultimately defines how we understand physical difference and how we position it in our society.

At this point, the question may arise: why and how a body is defined as “disabled,” and how this definition relates to the concept of “normality.” Davis’s (1995) approach is illuminating in this regard as he argues that disability is a construct that operates in conjunction with the socially constructed idea of a “normal” body. Indeed, “the concept of disability is a function of a concept of normalcy” and “normalcy and disability are part of the same system” (2). In this respect, disability is not merely the physical difference itself, but a historical and ideological category that arises from evaluating that difference according to specific normative criteria. Davis’s account of the relationship between disability and normality offers an important theoretical foundation for explaining why and how bodily difference acquires meaning. However, Garland-Thomson (2017) explains this framework in more concrete terms by using the concept of “normate” to define the ideal body, which is invisibly centralized in modern society: “Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (8). This perspective shows that normality is an identity constructed through specific bodily characteristics and cultural privileges.

Hence, disability emerges as a form of bodily existence defined, evaluated, and excluded according to this privileged normative understanding of the body. Treating disability as a cultural representation can make its role within the literary text much more apparent. In this context, Mitchell and Snyder (2001: 47), stating that “disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device,” draw attention to the dual function of disability in literature. Accordingly, disability is used as a distinct feature in character formation, while it becomes a metaphorical tool that nourishes the symbolic and ideological structure of the text. This situation reveals that disability is a form of representation in literature that constructs, deepens, and often reproduces normative values within the text's meaning world.

Although studies on disability representations in literature have increased in recent years, it is striking that this issue remains underexamined, particularly in poetry. Poetry has historically been associated with the “sublime,” aesthetics, beauty, and the exaltation of inner feelings. Therefore, it is not expected that negative or “unimportant” realities such as disability, ugliness, flaws, and deficiencies will find a place in poetry, mainly because disability often seems to contradict the idealized aesthetic measures in poetry. While the theme of disability is

acceptable in literary texts, it finds very little space in poetry, and academic studies on the subject are quite limited. It is also understandable that the study of imaginative literature, “to study poetry or any literary work is to engage oneself in an aesthetic experience” (Bressler, 2007, 58), suggests that, because disability implies a corrosion in the givens of “nature,” poets who have always been interested in beauty, perfection, flawlessness, and the sublime may show little interest in mentioning deformed bodies, crooked appearances, and corrupt existence in their work. Such depictions, one can easily assume, bring something to the poem, but that is not something a common reader would enjoy as their eyes search for aesthetic appeal rather than the abnormal.

There is consensus that disabled characters have existed since ancient times, but their appearances remain underexamined in American poetry, particularly in American Puritan and American Renaissance poetry. A closer look at the poetry from these two periods reveals that disability, both physical and mental, was either symbolically elevated within religious frameworks or entirely overlooked because of dominant aesthetic and moral ideals. In Puritan poetry, disability is often intertwined with theological concepts such as sin, divine punishment, moral weakness, or spiritual trial. Rather than being viewed as a bodily condition, it becomes a metaphor for inner corruption or a test of faith. Conversely, poetry from the American Renaissance, while more secular and individualistic, does not place disability at the forefront either. Writers of this era, who focused on transcendence, self-reliance, and the sublime, tended to marginalize bodily imperfection, instead privileging the idealized human form and mental or spiritual strength. This gap in poetic attention to disability is not accidental.

Literary Disability in Both Periods

Poetry, historically linked to beauty, harmony, and heightened emotion, has seldom welcomed themes regarded as disturbing, grotesque, or socially marginalized. Consequently, disability, although a vital aspect of human experience, receives minimal direct representation in poetic discourse. This thesis examines and compares the symbolic and thematic representation of disability in American Puritan and American Renaissance poetry, emphasizing the aesthetic, cultural, and ideological reasons for its marginalization while also uncovering the subtle ways in which it is woven into these poetic traditions. This analysis will highlight the representation of bodily differences, poetic meaning-making, and the relationship with the ethical and aesthetic values specific to the period. Recognizing that traces of disability in American poetry have primarily been addressed through individual or metaphorical lenses, there has been a lack of comparative studies within a historical context. Therefore, this study

aims to fill this gap by evaluating representations of disability in American literature through the central tenets of Disability Theory while adopting a more holistic, historical, and critical perspective.

Models of Disability

The Moral and/or Religious Model

The moral and/or religious model is one of the oldest ways of conceptualizing disability. Within this framework, Retief and Letšosa (2018: 2) refer to disability as “an act of God” and is frequently interpreted as a punishment from God or as a consequence of a specific sin committed, with God intending to punish that person. In some versions of the model, disability is not only linked to the individual’s own sin but also to the sins of parents or ancestors. In other versions, disability is treated as a divine test through which patience, endurance, courage, and piety are measured. God is testing people with disabilities (hereafter PWDs) in terms of their character traits. He prepares a test for PWDs. The test measures their character development, including patience, courage, and perseverance. If they complete their tests successfully, then they will be categorized as blessed. Thus, disability may be read either as a curse or as a trial, but in both cases, it is embedded within a theological economy of judgment and spiritual meaning. From this perspective, the major questions become: Are sinners marked or labelled as disabled? Is disability represented as a divine test for people with disabilities? Are certain individuals imagined as specially selected beforehand for such suffering? The most relevant keywords for this model are punishment, sin, blindness, lameness, deafness, uncleanness, spiritual ineptitude, and cursed.

The Medical Model

Referring to “disability as a disease”, Retief and Letšosa (2018: 2) state that the medical model marks a shift from religious explanation to scientific and biomedical explanation and thus “the medical model of disability began to gradually replace the moral and/or religious model” (2). As disability came to be interpreted through medical discourse from the 19th century onward, it was increasingly located in the individual body as defect, pathology, dysfunction, or abnormality. In this model, disability is treated as a problem that must be cured, corrected, rehabilitated, or managed (Olkin: 2001). As the body is measured against an assumed norm, disabled embodiment appears as a deviation from what is considered healthy, functional, and normal. Accordingly, the central questions of this model are: Does the medical model create a dualistic distinction between normal and abnormal bodies? If so, what exactly counts as

“normal” within this framework? And in the context of Puritan or early American texts, do bodily impairments operate as visible signs that force subjects to interrogate their moral or spiritual condition? The most useful keywords for this model are medical science, defect, abnormal, pathological, personal tragedy, ill-formed, and cured.

The Social Model

The social model of disability emerged in response to the medical model of disability and was shaped by the activism of the British disability movement in the 1970s (UPIAS, 1976). The social model, like the medical model, offers treatment or solutions to individuals with disabilities, but not directly to those individuals. It advocates for change or solutions to occur within society. In other words, the ultimate goal is to bring about fundamental changes within the community. Referred to as “a socially constructed phenomenon” by Retief and Letšosa (2018: 3), the social model was first proposed by Oliver (1981), who focused on both the medical and social aspects of disability, highlighting the societal limitations disabled individuals experience due to their physical impairments (Oliver, 1981, as cited in Retief and Letšosa, 2018). Samaha (2007: 8) defines the social model of disability “as disadvantage caused by the confluence of (1) personal impairment and (2) a social setting comprising architecture, economics, politics, culture, social norms, aesthetic values, and assumptions about ability.” In this context, disability is understood not only as an individual deficiency but as a consequence of social pressure and structural exclusion. From this perspective, the major questions become: In what ways do the poems we are studying represent disability as a social construct, shaped by social and cultural systems and theologies, rather than as something inherently present in the body? The most relevant keywords for this model are social reaction, impairment, socially constructed disadvantage, societal change, barriers to participation, exclusion, ableism, and environmental factors.

The Identity Model

The identity model sees disability not just as a problem or result of exclusion, but also as a positive identity. “It shares the social model’s understanding that disability is socially constructed but differs in that it claims disability as a positive identity” Retief and Letšosa (2018: 5). While emphasizing the close link between the identity model and the social model, it also clearly shows where they diverge. The social model explains disability mainly through social pressure, exclusion, and obstacles, whereas the identity model contends that this socially constructed experience can also foster a sense of belonging, self-awareness, and collective

identity. From this view, the key question becomes: How do literary texts create disability as a meaningful and positive identity shaped by shared social and political experiences? The most important keywords for this model are positive image, positive identity, and experience.

The Human Rights Model

The human rights model not only provides a framework for understanding disability but also directly positions people with disabilities as individuals with rights. The fundamental principle of this model is that disability does not diminish an individual's human dignity, and impairment does not eliminate a person's status as a subject of rights. This is explicitly stated as follows:

The human rights model focuses on the inherent dignity of the human being and subsequently, but only if necessary, on the person's medical characteristics. It places the individual centerstage in all decisions affecting him/her and, most importantly, locates the main 'problem' outside the person and in society" (Bruce et al., 2002: 14).

The above definition highlights the main difference between the human rights model and the medical model. It emphasizes the individual's inherent dignity, meaning their innate human honor, rather than their physical or mental traits. A key argument of this model is that human rights issues are not free from concerns of impairment, as it is clearly stated that "Only the human rights model can explain why human rights do not require the absence of impairment" (Degener: 2016: 6). In other words, a person can have rights even if they do not have a "normal," "healthy," or "complete" body. Furthermore, this perspective raises important questions such as "How do literary texts portray disability as a matter of human dignity and rights, rather than just social exclusion or bodily difference?" The main keywords specific to this model that can help answer such questions include human dignity, rights-bearer, equality, justice, participation, discrimination, civil rights, political rights, economic rights, social rights, and cultural rights.

The Cultural Model

The cultural model sees disability as a phenomenon shaped, represented, and interpreted by culture. As Retief and Letšosa (2018: 6) state, "While the medical model and the social model each focus on only one factor in their approach to disability, the cultural model focuses on a range of cultural factors." Similarly, this approach's core characteristic is described as follows: "Accordingly, the cultural approach does not seek to define disability in any specific way but rather focuses on how different notions of disability and non-disability operate in the context of a specific culture" (6). These discussions show that the cultural model conceptualizes

disability as a system of meaning that is created and constantly evolving within a specific cultural environment. From this viewpoint, key questions include: How do literary texts construct disability through cultural narratives, symbols, and representations within a particular historical setting? The most relevant keywords for this model may include cultural factors, cultural locations of disability, classification, institutional contexts, and disability culture.

The Charity Model

In this model, Retief and Letšosa (2018: 6) refer to “disability as victimhood” because PWDs are regarded as “victims of circumstance who should be pitied.” While the charity model may seem like a benevolent and humane approach at first glance, it actually positions PWDs as individuals in need of others’ help. Thus, disability gains meaning within the framework of pity, dependence, and helplessness. In this model, able-bodied individuals are presented as the active, protective, and giving party, while PWDs become the passive, needy, and those who need protection. Consequently, the charity model represents disability within the framework of compassion and victimhood rather than on the basis of equality or rights. From this perspective, the major questions become: How do literary texts represent disability through narratives of pity, victimhood, and dependency, and what effects do these representations have on agency and equality? The most relevant keywords for this model are victimhood, pity, dependence, helplessness, care, charity, passive suffering, and negative representation.

The Economic Model

The economic model, which is interpreted as a challenge to productivity by Retief and Letšosa (2018: 6), views disability as a condition that hinders an individual’s productivity and economic contribution. Therefore, disability becomes a subject of economic analysis, particularly in terms of workforce, employment, efficiency, and productivity. This model tends to evaluate the human body and individual value through economic criteria. The main issue here is how much an individual can participate in the production process and contribute to the economy. Therefore, disability is often associated with concepts such as loss of working capacity, decreased productivity, or economic burden. In other words, “the economic model's estimation of a disabled person's ability to work and contribute to the economy” (Smart, 2004, as cited in Retief and Letšosa, 2018: 6).

In short, a person's value is directly linked to their productivity. This belief can lead us to consider disability as a deficiency, inadequacy, or a burdensome cost to the system. Hence, the major question associated with this model is: How do literary texts represent disability in

relation to productivity, labor, and economic value, and what are the consequences of such representations for human worth? The most relevant keywords for this model are labor and cost-benefit analysis.

The Limits Model

The limits model positions disability as a natural and inevitable part of human existence. As Creamer explicitly states:

The limits model differs from the medical and minority models in that it does not attempt to divide participants into one of two categories (either disabled or not-disabled) but instead offers a new way to think about what disability is. ...the limits model begins with the notion of limits as a common, indeed quite unsurprising, aspect of being human (Creamer, 2009: 31).

This definition demonstrates that the limitations in the human body are an ordinary and universal dimension of being human. The model considers disability to be an “embodied experience” (Retief and Letšosa, 2018: 6) and one of the fundamental realities of human experience as it considers disability within the limitations of the human body, or “limit-ness.” Here, “limit-ness” refers to the fact that humans always live within certain limits physically, environmentally, and existentially. Hence, the major question for this model is: “What does the text reveal about being human through bodily limits?” and the most relevant keywords for this model are limit-ness, embodiment, and fluidity.

Research Aim and Questions

This thesis aims to contribute to the fields of literature, cultural studies, and disability studies by examining the historical and artistic representations of disability in American poetry. By focusing specifically on the Puritan and American Renaissance periods, the comparative analysis aims to fill a crucial gap in literary-historical awareness and illustrate how representations of disability are constructed in a less-explored genre such as poetry. In this regard, the study provides a new theoretical and analytical framework for researchers and students seeking to understand representations of disability inherent in literary texts.

On a societal level, the thesis tries to illuminate the historical roots of social perceptions of disability by showing how representations have evolved from the past to the present. Consequently, this thesis aims not only to enrich academic knowledge but also to promote cultural diversity and inclusion. Reevaluating representations of disability through poetry can foster a more equitable and inclusive social structure by enhancing awareness at both individual and collective levels. The findings of the study illuminate how disability was perceived by 17th and 19th-century American poets, helping us to identify the development of the problem from a

historical perspective. The method used in the study also assists other researchers in exploring the same issue across various nations' literatures and cultures, as well as in different time periods.

Methodology

This thesis study employs a qualitative research design, and, as Marshall and Rossman (1991) articulate, qualitative design is not a method but an umbrella term encompassing various methods. Document analysis (textual analysis) and close reading procedures are used as the data analysis techniques to identify patterns and emerging themes in the poems under investigation. Hence, a comparative method is employed to record and compare how disability is presented in the analyzed poems in two distinct periods. Finally, results from each cluster, namely, Puritan poetry and the American Renaissance, are compared.

The poems selected for analysis are chosen by examining their canonicity and determining the extent to which their writers are cited in the related literature. The term "literary canon" refers to works of literature regarded as possessing "special authority or literary merit" (Owens, 2010: 209), and anthologies such as Norton's are considered to compile the most obvious canonical lists of literary texts. Hence, by using such anthologies as major references, a strategic choice was made to minimize potential future disputes over the alignment of poems with specific periods, since multiple poems could be considered representative of the periods under study, and some might exhibit overlapping thematic or chronological characteristics.

Since the bibliography was assembled to include both primary and secondary sources applicable to the study, only the canonical poems were selected for analysis. In compiling secondary sources, JSTOR was used primarily to access the most reliable research articles and book chapters available online. As Towheed (2010) articulates, JSTOR is the most convenient venue for such research since it "is both interdisciplinary (only a small percentage of the journals are literary) and entirely full-text; its historical reach is bigger, with some nineteenth-century journals included". In addition to JSTOR, the United States Library of Congress (<http://catalog.loc.gov>) is frequently visited as it is "the world's largest library, holding more than 32 million printed books and some 61 million manuscript items" and because it is the single most important source that "holds at least one copy of every title printed in the USA since 1800" which "has particularly interesting implications in the post-1800 Anglo- American world of print" (22).

In essence, this study employs an inductive approach to literary analysis, where the analysis and interpretation progress from the examination of a singular entity to a more

generalizable conclusion. As such, researchers in this study follows inductive reasoning, also called “reasoning a posteriori” or “reasoning from effect to cause,” mainly because “Induction, the foundation of the modern scientific method, involves reasoning from a body of evidence to more general conclusions” (Nygaard, 1994: 230-231). As the study progresses from one poem to a cluster of poems, using inductive reasoning is the most reliable option for researchers who aim to present a panoramic view of how disability was poetically constructed in the American literary tradition, albeit in two different periods. Thus, this thesis study further employs a comparative methodology that centers on their content as it relates to the concept of disability. In doing so, it adheres closely to Bassnett’s (2006) hopeful postulation that researchers who adopt a comparative method in literary studies “will abandon pointless debates about terminology and definition, to focus more productively on the study of texts themselves, mapping the history of writing and reading across cultural and temporal boundaries” (10).

In this study, the selected poems are initially organized into tables as checklists. Then, in order to determine which disability, model each poem corresponds to, Retief and Letšosa’s (2018) article is used as the main theoretical basis. Specific lines associated with disability are identified in the poems and classified within the framework of the relevant model. These models are then transferred to a table. Each model is defined, major questions related to it are formulated, and keywords to support the analysis are determined. After identifying the dominant disability models in the two literary periods compared in the thesis, a detailed analysis of all poems is not undertaken; instead, poems that most clearly reflect the dominant models of each period are selected and examined in detail. Thus, the poems are analyzed in detail in accordance with their historical context and the disability models to which they correspond. In analyzing the poetic content, the unit of analysis is first established. In this study, the unit of analysis is framed within the main dichotomy of ability/disability encompassing any word chunk that mentions, refers to, or suggests disability or anything or anyone disabled.

In an attempt to explain how to read a poem, Bourbon (2007) states that “The possibilities of poetry, the promise and demand of words that take more than they seem to give, or give more than we can at first understand, exceed the limits of scholarship and academic criticism (43). Despite this tremendous difficulty, this study sought to “understand” what a poem says in relation to a concept now called “disability,” which makes the task even more hazardous. Reading a poem as such, despite the numerous terrifying shortcomings of the researcher, necessitates attention to how it is read in this process. In essence, explanation, or understanding the word meaning; description or formulating the poem’s formal qualities; and explication, or turning these descriptions into meaning, have been argued to be how a poem

makes sense to researchers (Eagleton, 2007; Wimsatt, 1963). Thus, the researcher tried to follow the cycle of explanation, description, and explication while configuring them, keeping in mind what they mean when disability is taken into account. Thus, when something meant something, it had to be a finding for disability to be considered one in this study.



CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND OF PURITAN AND AMERICAN RENAISSANCE POETRY

As the coding results show, 5 categories emerge in PP and 5 in ARP. Breaking down the results in PP, there are 9 moral, 4 medical, 3 limits, 1 charity, and 1 cultural model, while there are 7 social, 3 limits, 2 moral, 2 identity, and 1 cultural model in ARP. Accordingly, there is a sharp difference between these two periods in how disability models are realized. Hence, PP, as expected, relies more heavily on the moral model than on the social model in ARP. What is more, what follows this sharp numerical evidence, based on qualitative analysis of the themes and messages found in these poems, is that the medical model follows the moral in PP. In contrast, the limits model follows the social model in ARP. In short, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the poems written in these two distinct periods, although this difference should further be articulated with the passages from the poems analyzed as follows. Accordingly, poets from each period are given in the following paragraphs in order of the birth year of the poets.

1.1 Puritan Poetry

1.1.1 Thomas Morton

Thomas Morton (1579–1647) stands out as an unconventional and original figure in the early American colonies. Morton, who had severe conflicts with the Puritans' strict religious rule, was deported because of his settlement called "Ma-re Mount," alcohol, dancing, pagan symbols, and warm relations with the native people. His settlement was called "atheist" (McWilliams, 2017: 437) by the Puritans, an accusation aimed to marginalize his alternative vision of community, pleasure and belief. He expressed these oppositions and criticisms in a humorous, satirical style in his work *New English Canaan*, becoming one of the first American literary voices to oppose authority (Heath, 2007).

His works challenge the strict moral codes of the Puritans and, in this respect, represent early examples of humor, satire, and the idea of freedom in American literature; thus, he was described as a dissident among Puritans. In addition to describing Morton as a dissident, many prominent Puritans of the time described him as "a proud insolent man", "an arrant knave", "a serpent", and "an instrument of mischief" (Heath, 2007: 136). These terms attributed more to the systemic discredit of Morton's way of life and belief system. Moreover, William Bradford's labeling of Morton as "more craft then honestie" (Heath, 2007: 136), showed that any activity,

culture or practice that deviated from Puritan morality was viewed as both a theological and political threat. However, Kupperman (1977) states that while Morton is often regarded as a morally problematic and unreliable figure, as he does not keep up with Puritan's severe moral rules, Morton's accounts are vital and thus "worth looking at as historical evidence" (663). In this respect, Morton's texts should be considered important historical sources that question Puritan narratives and offer a different perspective on early colonial historiography. In short, criticisms of Morton can be explained from two perspectives. The first criticism adopts an antisympathetic approach towards Morton, referring to him with accusations such as "licentious and libertine" (Niedziolka, 2009: 14), whilst the other criticism shows a sympathetic approach towards Morton, stating that he is humane like Bradford and Winthrop.

Although it is generally accepted that Morton arrived in New England in 1622, many studies suggest this is incorrect and that Morton arrived in 1624. One of the main reasons for such studies is the criticism surrounding whether Morton existed before Anne Bradstreet and whether he was the first poet. Heath (2007) describes Morton as "being the first American poet" (165). Morton's poems and verse passages in *New English Canaan* were written in the late 1620s and early 1630s, predating Bradstreet, Wigglesworth, and the Puritan poetic tradition. Connors (1939) shows that the date 1622 in Morton's work, *New English Canaan*, contradicts English court records from the same period. Documents confirm that Morton was a party to cases requiring his personal presence in the Chancery Court and Star Chamber in England during the spring and summer of 1622. Connors, however, bases his argument on supporting historical data, including a 1636 legal petition, passenger lists of the *Unity* ship which arrived in New England in 1624, William Bradford's chronicle, and Morton's own account of only three cows being present in the Plymouth settlement at that time. Based on these findings, the author reconstructs the timeline of Morton's presence in New England, arguing convincingly that the 1622 date is likely a printing or typographical error, and that Morton first arrived in the region in the spring of 1624.

Between 1616 and 1619, a major plague swept across the southeastern coast of New England, affecting indigenous populations. Little is known about the cause and origin of this plague, but it is believed to have been caused by diseases from Europe. The high mortality rate is attributed to the indigenous populations' lack of immunity to diseases from the Old World. Morton, in his 1637 work *New English Canaan*, uses these plagues as a basis to explain how they were interpreted. He sees this plague as a punishment from God for the infidel native people, aiming to eliminate and punish the indigenous population so that New English Canaan could be established in their place (Rubin, 2013). What Morton wants to show here is how the

body is instrumentalized through discourses of divine punishment and social exclusion. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Morton mentions Asclepius in one of his poems because even Asclepius could not bring healing to humanity, demonstrating that God had already decided from the outset who would live and who would perish.

An examination of selected poems by Thomas Morton reveals that influences from the moral/religious, medical, and limiting models are particularly prominent in his works. In the text "From New English Canaan" (The Poem), the medical model is evident in the language of illness and bodily decay. The poem beginning with the line "Rise Oedipeus, and, if thou canst, unfold" produces a clearer image of bodily and mental illness, especially as can be seen in the following lines:

Though Scilla's sick with greife, because no signe
Can there be found of vertue masculine.
Esculapius come; I know right well
His laboure's lost when you may ring her Knell.

These lines are consistent with the main outlines of the medical model. On the other hand, in Morton's poem *Carmen Elegiacum*, the moral/religious model appears more dominant. The lines bring together the concepts of sin, the devil, remorse, despair, and death, presenting the states of fall, decay, and ruin associated with disability within a clear moral/religious framework:

That knives and halters, ponds, and poisonous things
Are always ready, when the Divell once brings
Such deadly sinners to a deep remorse
Of conscience self-accusation, that will force
Them to dispaire, like wicked Cain, while death
Stands ready with all these to stopp their breath

Similarly, the line "She was too good for earth, too bad for heaven" is consistent with the moral model, as it presents a dualistic discourse that judges man's spiritual standing. In contrast, the limits model is prominent in *Epitaph*. The following lines emphasize the fragility of the human body, the brevity of life, and the transience of existence, prompting reflection on disability in light of the limitations and inevitable finitude of human life:

For underneath this heape of stones
Lieth a percell of small bones;

What hope at last can such impes have,
That from the wombe goes to the grave.

1.1.2. Anne Bradstreet

As a prominent female writer from the early American colonies, Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672) is an unusual example of how a woman can produce intellectual works while at the same time embodying the female identity typical for Puritan women of that time. She wrote about her life experiences such as motherhood, companionship, personal suffering, illness and spiritual introspection (Requa, 1974). Her works have been steadily reprinted, anthologized and interpreted since the 17th century. She has been acclaimed more as an anomaly than as a poet, and her poetry, when examined, has been occasionally viewed within the context of Puritanism and occasionally outside of that context. Bradstreet, an original poet, has maintained her relevance to this day, as Eberwein (1994: 165) puts it, “each generation constructs its own portrait of this woman,” because Bradstreet is considered “historically, metaphorically, and even biologically the mother of American poetry” (161). Therefore, given Bradstreet’s multifaceted nature, it is quite difficult to fit her into a specific mold.

It is known that Puritans always sought to maintain balance in their lives, and failure to do so was interpreted as a deviation from moral boundaries (Richardson, 1967). In accordance with the core values of the Puritan worldview including temperance, self-discipline, and control over oneself, Bradstreet’s lack of self-discipline on occasion has also led to criticism about whether she is consistent with Puritans, because the running themes in her later poems, especially her poems about marriage, include the themes about “sexual desire, earthly love, and the condition of the woman in the 17th century” (Matiu, 2024: 27). Therefore, as time progressed, it can be said that she adopted a more secular approach than the strict and serious Puritan approach. To put it differently, “she plays gently but ironically with Puritan sensibilities” (Gray, 2011: 11). However, it cannot be said that she completely abandoned the Puritan style. The presence of God is clearly felt in almost all of her poems. In one poem, she explicitly states that God is the savior of humanity with the line, “O heal my soul.” One of the fundamental philosophies of the Puritans was to see God as a health-giver and healer, an approach that Bradstreet reflects quite well in her poems.

Being a woman was a difficult identity marker during the Puritan era, and being a woman poet was even more so. However, Bradstreet navigated various difficulties, especially by moving strategically within her society. As Stanford (1966) articulates, “because she did observe in her conduct an exact conformity to the mores of her community, Anne Bradstreet

was able to continue to write, though the practice of writing by women was disapproved of by many in the community and by the governor himself” (377). Known for her so-called domestic writing, what she wrote later in life concerned her family, husband, and religious struggles, while “Her earlier public and formal poetry, ostensibly 'male' in subject matter and style, is most often dismissed as apprentice work derivative of Elizabethan models” (Schweitzer, 1988: 291). However, it would be misleading to locate her writing in the dogmatic limits of the Puritan era. In fact, her spiritual conflicts with the dogmatic perception withheld by various Puritan poets suggest a “pattern of tension, which has often been demonstrated to be characteristic of later American literature, that explains much of her work as well” (Stanford, 1966: 373). Especially in her elegies, her problem does not seem to be that “of being a woman or of being the first American poet, but rather the problem of fearing she has no right to speak, of fearing her voice cannot insert itself into English literary history” (Hall, 2013: 23). Thus, although she was a woman poet of the Puritan era, she could also be read as a poet of the American Renaissance, an argument that is likely to remain unanswered given her pioneering spirit as reflected in her writing.

An examination of selected poems by Anne Bradstreet reveals that moral/religious, medical, and limiting model influences are particularly prominent in her works. In the poem “The Author to Her Book,” the medical model is evident in the language of flaws and defects, constructed through the metaphor of the body. The lines “Thou ill-form’d offspring of my feeble brain”, “Where errors were not lessened”, and “Thy blemishes amend, if so I could: / I wash’d thy face, but more defects I saw, / And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw” represent the work as a flawed body. Alongside this, the moral model can also be observed. The lines “At thy return my blushing was not small” and “I cast thee by as one unfit for light” highlight the discourse of shame, inappropriateness, and worthlessness. In the poem *Upon Some Distemper of Body*, the moral/religious model is even more pronounced. The lines “And looking up unto his throne on high, / Who sendeth help to those in misery”, “He chased away those clouds and let me see”, and “He eased my soul of woe, my flesh of pain” demonstrate that physical suffering is interpreted within the framework of divine help and spiritual relief. In the same poem, the medical model also becomes visible through the loss of bodily function with the line “Then eyes lay dry, disabled to weep more.” Bradstreet’s *The Four Ages of Man*, one of her most notable poems in terms of disability, reflects these three models together. The moral/religious model is particularly evident in the lines “Ah me! conceiv’d in sin, and born in sorrow”, “The sins and dangers I am subject to: / From birth stained, with Adam’s sinful fact”, and “As many was my sins, so dangers too, / For sin brings sorrow, sickness, death, and woe,”

all of which associate human suffering with sin, judgment, and spiritual consequence. This framework is further articulated in “Remembering not the dreadful day of Doom, / Nor yet the heavy reckoning for to come” and “And I shall see with these same very eyes / My strong Redeemer coming in the skies.”

The medical model is reflected in the poem’s emphasis on bodily pain, illness, and physical deterioration. This is evident in lines such as “The vexing Stone, in bladder and in reins”, “The knotty Gout doth sadly torture me”, and “And the Consumption to the bones doth waste me.” The same model is further reinforced through references to wounds, fevers, pox, and frenzy in the lines “My comely legs, as nimble as the Roe, / Now stiff and numb, can hardly creep or go” (ll. 415–416), which foreground physical decline and loss of function. On the other hand, the limits model becomes visible in the lines “Man at his best estate is vanity”, “In every Age I’ve found much vanity. / An end of all perfection now I see”, “My memory is short and brain is dry”, and “I cannot labor, nor I cannot fight.” In short, in Bradstreet's poems, disability is represented not only as a physical defect or illness, but also in a multi-layered expression within the framework of sin, divine order, human fragility, and existential limitations. A comprehensive analysis of *The Four Ages of Man* from a medical perspective will be presented in later sections of the thesis.

1.1.3. Michael Wigglesworth

Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705) was a priest-poet born in early New England and educated at Harvard. Considered one of the cornerstones of the Puritan faith, Wigglesworth responded to the spiritual needs of the time by addressing the themes of apocalypse and divine justice in his poems in addition to his preaching duties. Published in 1662, *The Day of Doom*, with its more than ten thousand verses, has been recognized as a popular masterpiece embodying the fear of God and moral warning in the daily lives of society. The poem is an apocalyptic depiction reflecting the strict worldview of Puritan theology (Matthiessen, 1928). His works demonstrate how the fear of God and the quest for salvation permeate daily life. He explores the relationship between physical pain and divine justice in a didactic style. To be more precise, Salska (1984) notes that Wigglesworth's poetic side is more direct and didactic than that of Puritan poets like Bradstreet and Taylor, and that “his poems are permeated with a clear sense of audience whom they attempted to instruct and correct” (117).

Like many Puritan divines, Wigglesworth kept a secret diary. In his diary, he dealt with inner conflicts, including inner confessions, supplications, and prayers to God, and predestination. The diary, which he kept hidden from publication, constantly reminds the reader

of the dilemma, as Poenaru (2016: 36) also points out: “Am I damned or am I of the elect?” In addition to these dilemmas, Morgan (1961), in his Introduction to the twentieth-century edition of Wigglesworth’s diary, likens his private diary to an account book, stating that it consists of assets and liabilities, but the debit side is almost full. This analogy demonstrates that Wigglesworth always felt inadequate, indebted, and sinful before God, a tendency shared by Puritans throughout that age. He explicitly states that only God could give him strength and that he could never suffice on his own: “In my pain and anguish, I lift up my heart and voyce to the Lord my God, and He helped me through the difficulty, giving me so much strength as enabled me to bear it” (Wigglesworth, 1965: 12).

Tanner (1988) states that Wigglesworth is one of the poets who best reflect Puritan culture, describing his poem *The Day of Doom* as “the best seller of Puritan literature” (13). Topically, this is an understandable situation when one considers the philosophy of Puritan literature: the Elect are rewarded with heaven in the afterlife. Wigglesworth similarly implies in his poems that regardless of all the good things individuals do in their lives, as well as how successful they are in worldly affairs, God determines beforehand, in a way that is far beyond human understanding, which individuals will be saved and which will be condemned (Tanner, 1988).

An examination of selected poems by Michael Wigglesworth reveals a strong emphasis on the moral/religious model. This is most evident in the poem *The Day of Doom*, where the sinful body and soul are depicted amid fear, trembling, hiding, suffering, punishment, and divine judgment. The lines “Wallowing in all kind of sin, / vile wretches lay secure” present sinners as morally fallen and humiliated figures, while the lines “Sinners awake, their hearts do ake, / trembling their loynes surpriseth; / Amaz’d with fear, by what they hear” make visible the bodily impact of fear. Also, the following lines show the amalgamation of the spiritual with the physical:

No heart so bold, but now grows cold
and almost dead with fear:
No eye so dry, but now can cry,
and pour out many a tear.

He presents the collapse as the result of divine fear, as can be seen in the lines below:

No hiding place can from his Face
sinners at all conceal,
Whose flaming Eye hid things doth 'spy
and darkest things reveal.

Interestingly, the poet presents an analogy, comparing humans to Moles who are to be brought to justice in fear and humiliation:

Out of their holes those creeping Moles,
that hid themselves for fear,
By force they take, and quickly make
before the Judge appear.

Moreover, the lines “(To sinners sad) ’twixt good and bad, / ’twixt Heirs of woe and bliss” clearly reflect the logic of the moral/religious model that divides humanity into absolute moral categories.

The same religious structure is also seen in the poem *Sentence and Torment of the Condemned*. The discourse, beginning with the line “No Friends so near, but Saints to hear their Sentence can abide”, particularly emphasizes the concepts of divine condemnation, exclusion, and eternal punishment in the lines “What? to depart... from thee Eternally... / To be for aye banish’d away, with Devils company! / What? to be sent to Punishment, and flames of Burning Fire” and “Oh fearful Doom! now there’s no room for hope of help at all.” However, physical and spiritual torment are intertwined: “For tort’ring pain which, they sustain in body and in Soul... / Their pain and grief have no relief, their anguish never endeth. / There must they ly, and never dy, though dying every day.” The lines “Who fare the best, and feel the least, yet feel that punishment / Whereby to nought they should be brought, if God did not prevent” also support an understanding that emphasizes absolute destruction without divine intervention, rather than salvation. Therefore, in Wigglesworth's poems, disability is largely represented through themes of sin, divine punishment, fear, physical pain, and eternal condemnation. A comprehensive evaluation of the poem *The Day of Doom* in terms of the moral/religious model of disability will be presented in later sections of this study.

1.1.4. Edward Taylor

Edward Taylor (1642-1729), a Puritan minister and poet, was persistent in his search for the truth about God's creation, both within himself and in the world around him. He pursued this truth so that, as a Puritan poet, he could properly give glory to God. That is why Pearce (1950) describes him in terms of his piety by writing, “Taylor is most a Puritan” (32). Taylor expresses his quest for the truth about God by underlining his hardwork, a common Puritan aspect of work ethic, by writing: “To Prove thou art, and that thou art the best / And shew thy Properties to shine most bright.” Hence, his focus on such single subjects led to creating meditative poetry, in which he uncovered and re-expressed the spiritual and philosophical ideas

of the Puritan worldview by exploring human emotion and experience, illustrating how the Puritans respond to his world and his understanding of God (Carlisle, 1968). By examining the individual's relationship with God, the journey of spiritual purification, and deep inner questions about human limitations, he also expresses bodily experience as a portrayal of a reflection of divine love, as "he remains humbled and awed at His feet; he is always true to the Puritan theme of O, Lord, I am not worthy" (Maynard, 1972: 16).

There is also debate about whether Taylor should be considered the foremost among American colonial poets. In the introduction to his book *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, Stanford states that Taylor may not be the best colonial poet because he was the best "second-rate writer" (Thorpe, 1966: 356), noting that Taylor actually adopted a metaphysical style, using unusual imagery and similes that are not common in American colonial poetry. One eye-catching aspect of Taylor's poems is his language, which is rich in imagery, as he employs various unusual "coinages" or "colloquialisms" (Thorpe, 1966: 358) in addition to a series of sensual narratives written with a tone of sincere religious devotion. His poetry addresses metaphysical themes and intense theology, and his use of colorful, highly emotional language makes him historically and literarily significant (Johnson, 1937).

What distinguishes Taylor from other Puritan poets is indeed his unusual use of language and his production of poems rich in metaphor. While his extensive use of figurative language may seem exaggerated, Taylor's striking, even excessive, metaphors stem not from poetic vanity but from Puritan humility. His poems, it can be suggested, reveal their own limitations while acknowledging the absolute supremacy of divine creation. MacGregor (1988) claims, "not simply to flaunt poetic power but, simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically, to abase themselves before the infinitely superior metaphors created by God" (341). Hence, due to the complexity of his language, unearthing what his poetry encapsulates requires a careful examination of what his lines referred to in social language use.

An examination of selected poems by Taylor reveals that the influence of moral/religious, charity, and limiting-model are particularly prominent in his work. The moral/religious model is distinctly emphasized in the poem *Huswifery*, as can be seen in the following lines, in which the human body and soul are presented as entities to be shaped directly by divine intervention:

Make me, O Lord, thy Spinning Wheele compleate.
 Thy Holy Worde my Distaff make for me.
 Make mine Affections thy Swift Flyers neate
 And make my Soule thy holy Spoole to be.

My Conversation make to be thy Reelee
And reel the yarn thereon spun of thy wheel.

Moreover, the poem explores themes of deficiency, inadequacy, and incompleteness, which are concepts often discussed in disability studies:

Then cloath therewith mine Understanding, Will,
Affections, Judgment, Conscience, Memory
My Words, and Actions, that their shine may fill
My wayes with glory and thee glorify.

In contrast, the poem *Upon a Spider Catching a Fly* presents multiple models of disability simultaneously. The moral/religious model is clearly seen in the lines:

To tangle Adams race
In's stratigems
To their Destructions, spoiled, made base
By venom things, / Damn'd Sins,

Here, the association of humanity with sin, fall, and destruction allows for the interpretation of disability within the context of moral decay and religious corruption. What is more, the charity model is prominent in the lines, "Whereas the silly Fly, / Caught by its leg" and "But mighty, Gracious Lord / Communicate / Thy Grace to break the Cord, afford." These lines, depicting a helpless, trapped figure awaiting help from a powerful, merciful rescuer, are consistent with the charity model, with its themes of dependence, passivity, and the need for salvation. The limits model, on the other hand, is evident in the line, "Strive not above what strength hath got." This expression emphasizes an individual's physical and existential limitations.

1.1.5. Cotton Mather

Cotton Mather (1663–1728), one of the most influential, controversial, and multifaceted writers of early America, was caught between Puritan theological views and Enlightenment rational ideas. Wickham (2001) notes that Mather was the first New England Puritan to show a serious interest in both science and medicine. Therefore, it is not surprising that he was a leading advocate for smallpox inoculation, a disease that killed thousands at the time. His support for vaccination has saved many lives. His focus on scientific data and logic reflects his enlightened outlook (Smolinski and Minkema, 2022). Despite his strong belief in science, he thought that the illnesses prevalent then were sent by God and mainly affected sinners. As Koch (2016) suggests, for Mather, "sickness was a symptom and reminder of human weakness" (559).

However, Mather held a relatively positive view of sinners and stated that “by repenting and turning to God, sinners could heal their souls” (559). In other words, all physical well-being is achieved through sincere, genuine love for God. By doing so, people can live disease-free lives and attain long-term health.

Mather defined reason as a gift from God to humans. In this sense, reason was compatible with God and operated according to the principles of divine order. This way of thinking set his ideas apart from the fatalistic views of some Puritans and provided a foundation for concepts like progress, growth, and improvement. The possibility of making the world more ordered, functional, and pleasant through reason is perhaps the main way his Puritan heritage connects to the Enlightenment. In this context, while he certainly accepted the basic parts of the Christian story of loss and fall, he argued for a world where reason and progress could fix those issues (Vartanian, 1973). He saw the universe as a machine created by God, the “Divine Artificer,” which required God’s ongoing conscious activity to function properly. To Mather, the laws of nature were orderly and consistent, but they would fall into chaos if God withdrew His influence. He believed that natural events such as earthquakes, storms, and droughts indicated that humans had fallen out of favor with God and that God was thus withdrawing His protective and sustaining hand (Vartanian, 1973).

An examination of Cotton Mather’s selected poem reveals a prominent moral/religious model. The poem, *The Body of Divinity Versify*, directly addresses humanity’s fall, sin, search for salvation, and ultimate judgment within a religious framework. The lines demonstrate that humanity has been stained by sin from the beginning and that the physical and spiritual consequences of the fall have spread throughout all of humankind:

Tasting Forbidden Fruit our Parents fell;
This Taste has plung’d Mankind all down to Hell.
Our Blest Lord JESUS CHRIST, in our Distress,
Comes to fetch us from Hell to Blessedness.

Furthermore, the lines, “To Judge the World, CHRIST will descend at Last; / A Righteous Doom shall by that Judge be past,” emphasize the absolute and inevitable nature of divine judgment by linking the human body and soul to the process of moral reckoning. The lines that follow clearly divide people into sinners and those who attain salvation:

The Wicked shall bear bitter Pain and Shame,
With Wicked Spirits in Eternal Flame.
The Godly shall, with their Great GOD, on High, /
Reap Joyes, High Joyes, to all Eternity”,

From this perspective, Mather's poetry is shaped around themes that largely reflect the overall Puritan ideology, including major theological problems such as sin, suffering, and punishment, and is therefore represented within a moral/religious model.

1.1.6. Benjamin Thompson

Benjamin Thompson (1642–1714), known as a transitional poet, was one of the few early American poets born into the first-settlement generation in the New England colonies and educated at Cambridge. As a vicar and teacher, he was part of the rational wing of the Puritan faith and described his own work as “not poetry, but truth” (Fussell, 1953: 494). More precisely, as Fussell (1953: 495) states, “he was not a religious or devotional poet, as Taylor and Wigglesworth were, and this is one aspect of his work that sets it apart from our roughhewn notions of the Puritan artist.” Therefore, Thompson does not view poetry as an art form but rather as a tool to reveal the truths of God. This perspective is an intellectual expansion of the didactic nature of Puritan poetry, which proves that, as Fussell (1953: 495) labels him, “he was in every way the most social and realistic of the American seventeenth-century poets, a worker in the surfaces of Puritan history.”

Describing himself as a “critic, colonial mythmaker, apologist, and spokesman” (Eberwein, 1993: 2), Thompson rejects the plainness concept embraced by many Puritan poets in his poetry. Additionally, “Thompson deliberately avoided the emotional or the sensuous” (Fussell, 1953: 502), which makes his poetry more direct and rational. Furthermore, Thompson, who also incorporates the art of mockery in his poetry, sets himself apart from the serious, simple, and emotionally charged poetry of the Puritans. Especially in his poem *The Grammarians Funeral*, the poet “reexamines our ideas about Puritan poetry in general” (Thompson and White, 1980: 52) because, in this poem, the poet “goes beyond the norms.”

An analysis of Benjamin Thompson's selected poems shows that the cultural model is especially evident in the poem. His poem, *The Grammarian's Funeral*, encourages reflection on disability through language, classification, rules, and cultural representation systems. The lines humanize grammatical categories, placing them within a ceremonial and cultural context as follows:

Eight Parts of Speech this Day wear Mourning Gowns
Declin'd Verbs, Pronouns, Participles, Nouns.
And not declined, Adverbs and Conjunctions,
In Lillies Porch they stand to do their functions.

Furthermore, the line “That want the Vocative and can’t say O!” conveys the idea of absence and deficiency through linguistic inadequacy, while the question, “What Syntax here can you expect to find?”, highlights an area where order, meaning, and rules are disrupted. Additionally, the lines “The Verbs irregular, ’twas thought by some, / Would break no rule, if they were pleas’d to come” and “Such Nouns and Verbs as we find defective, / No Grammar Rule did their attendance bind” illustrate how difference is culturally labeled and managed using the concepts of “irregular” and “defective.” Finally, the line “Prosodia gives the measure Word for Word” underscores the poem's focus on meter, order, and norm, while exemplifying the Puritans’ dependence on measure and norms. In short, in Tompson’s poetry, disability appears as a field of difference shaped by cultural codes, forms of representation, linguistic norms, and classification.

1.2. American Renaissance Poetry

1.2.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), who is regarded as a pioneering figure in American Literature, championed the human capacity to directly experience God, shifting from the external to the internal. Hurth (2003) argues that “Emerson turned from the outer world to the inner and distanced himself from the world around him by affirming man's ability to experience God firsthand” (483). However, despite the fact that his poetry was inward, much of his writing praises nature, positioning it as “the great moral educator” (Labriola, 2002: 125).

His belief in God differed from the Puritans as he believed that God reached people through nature, and in return, “nature enables the individual to learn about God through the signs of nature” (Labriola, 2002: 127). At this point, it is necessary to mention Emerson's concept of the Over-Soul, because the Over-Soul is the idea of a universal soul including all beings. To be more precise, God is not found outside or above, as God is a shared consciousness residing in every human being, nature, and at the core of all existence. Hence, for Emerson, the divine becomes “immanent” (Liu, 2026: 6). That is, Emerson states (1950: 2), “we live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meanwhile, within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE.”

By writing “I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all,” Emerson (1983), in *Nature*, outlines an idealized form of subjectivity that depends on unmediated (disembodied) perception in which all one needs to access Truth is the pure sight of things removed from their material limits (10). This disembodied perception has its ethics and politics outlined in Self-

Reliance. The autonomous individual is encouraged to listen to their inner voice rather than to the external dictates of social norms. Both *Nature* and *Self-Reliance* privilege an abstraction of self-sufficiency, meaning that the power to make decisions comes from internal intuition rather than an embodied sense of reality. These formulations create an environment in which the embodied experiences of individuals who are dependent on others, vulnerable, or physically limited are marginalized, thereby demonstrating the able-bodied assumptions embedded in individualistic Transcendentalism and the American Renaissance (Foster, 2022).

An examination of selected poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson reveals that the limits model is particularly prominent in the work. The poem *The Sphinx* presents humanity as a fragile, searching subject confronting its own limitations. The following lines further reflect human existence as a constantly evolving, incomplete, and insoluble process.

But man crouches and blushes,
Absconds and conceals;
He creepeth and peepeth,
He palters and steals;
Infirm, melancholy.

Similarly, the following lines further emphasize human nature: it cannot transcend its own limitations, cannot attain absolute knowledge, and remains in a constant state of searching:

The fate of the man-child;
The meaning of man;
Known fruit of the unknown;
Daedalian plan;
Out of sleeping a waking,
Out of waking a sleep.

In addition to these lines, human psyche or existence to be more exact is described as an unanswered question, what is more symbolically appealing, a question whose each answer remains a lie:

Thou art the unanswered question;
Couldst see thy proper eye,
Alway it asketh, asketh;
And each answer is a lie.
So take thy quest through nature.

Hence, a more detailed evaluation of the poem within the context of the limits model will be presented in later sections of the thesis.

1.2.2. Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau lived for a while by himself in the woods near Walden Pond and away from city life. During this time, he developed important thoughts on solitude and thinking. His withdrawal from society allowed him to reflect, critique, and confront reality. In other words, seeing nature as a space where one rediscovers one's self, Thoreau expressed his belief in conscious living and inner independence by saying, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately" (Thoreau, 2006: 86). An individual is never truly alone, even in the woods, because, according to Thoreau, "solitude is an experience defined by being with phenomena such as Nature, natural beings, and God." That is why he values deliberate living, which demonstrates that an individual can both enhance their own well-being and inspire others when they "live deliberately" (Wielgus et. al., 2017: 211).

Thoreau suffered from many illnesses, including tuberculosis, chronic diseases, psychosomatic lockjaw, autism spectrum disorders, and narcolepsy (Sturges, 2023). Hence, for Thoreau, the idea of health did not remain abstract; rather, it was a state rooted in bodily experience, demonstrating that he was not immune to disability as Sturges (2023) reinforces the notion that "Thoreau's writings, which compensated for his own illness by invoking the ideals of health and wellness and simultaneously employed metaphors of disability to diagnose his contemporaries with a moral disease" (4). Thoreau also directly associates nature with health, stating that anyone disconnected from nature may be disabled in some way. In short, disconnection from nature is linked to illness because Thoreau argues that "nature is but another name for health and the seasons are but different states of health" (Sturges, 2023: 2). Thoreau describes the healing, strengthening, and revitalizing essence of nature with the concept of "tonic of wildness" (Thoreau, 2006: 293). As Da Rocha (2009) articulates "Thoreau's cure-all or panacea – his tonic of wildness" (208), which means that if someone wants to live a healthy life, they must be in harmony with nature in addition to using modern medicines; otherwise, Thoreau argues, "he does not love Nature or his life and so sickness and dies and no doctor can cure him" (208).

An examination of selected poems by Henry David Thoreau reveals that the limits model is particularly prominent in the work. The poem *Conscience* addresses humanity not through rigid moral or physical categories, but through its inner strength, limitations, and existential balance. The line, "A soul so sound no sickly conscience binds it", while suggesting a kind of weakness or potential corruption with the phrase "sickly conscience," primarily emphasizes a strong and balanced state of mind. The lines, "I love a soul not all of wood, / Predestined to be good", present humanity as a subject possessing flexibility, fragility, and the

potential for moral development. Furthermore, the lines, “Give me simple laboring folk, / Who love their work”, give meaning to human existence through everyday labor, simplicity, and natural limitations. Therefore, traces of the limits model of disability are visible in this poem.

1.2.3. Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman (1819-1892), described by various researchers as the “prophet of American democracy” (Dykes, 1943: 175) and the “great philosopher of democracy” (Kateb, 1990: 545) is considered by Thoreau to be “the greatest democrat the world has ever seen” (Matthiessen, 1941: 602). The association of Whitman with the word democracy demonstrates the multifaceted nature of his understanding, which is not merely a conception of a political system but encompasses an aesthetic, ontological, and ethical worldview. Whitman’s poems not only glorify the individual but also aim to integrate the individual into the collective human experience, fostering democratic consciousness, as evidenced by his own words, “the body is a social structure composed of many souls” (Kateb, 1990: 552).

Kateb (1990) states that Whitman’s democratic aesthetic exemplifies democracy as more than merely advocating equal rights. Indeed, it represents a realization of the concept of equality at both the perceptual and aesthetic levels. In doing so, he challenges traditional notions of what constitutes beauty by visually presenting “the wicked, the despised, the diseased” (557). Whitman’s claim is that ugliness has as much meaning as beauty by pointing out that “Of ugliness -To me there is just as much in it as there is in beauty” (557), thus undermining the normative body-ideology of modernity. Disease, in Puritan poetry, was often regarded as either a divine test or a form of moral failure, whereas in Whitman’s point of view, disease is a part of democratic existence and thus removes the body from being viewed through the lens of moral hierarchy and places the body within a collective human experience.

Walt Whitman’s journey as a writer was greatly affected by the major shift in his view of the body and disability that occurred during the pre-Civil War period. During the pre-war era Whitman had a very specific view of what a healthy body represented. He believed that a healthy body was a “metaphor for a strong democracy” and viewed disability and illness as metaphors for the failure of politics (Kuusisto, 2005: 156). Whitman’s experience as a nurse during the Civil War and the subsequent paralysis he experienced after the war broke his “ideologically constructed muscular body” and replaced it with a “fully conscious representation of altered physicality in prose” (Kuusisto, 2005: 158). Whitman constructed various war metaphors to describe his paralysis and directly linked his personal bodily crisis to the national traumatic effect of the war.

This physical transformation led Whitman to shift from the traditional understanding of the individual as an “indivisible” whole to the concept of the great composite democratic individual (Kateb, 1990: 552). Along with his experience of disability, “while arguing that the rights of the body are as sacred as the rights of the soul” (550), he found true greatness in his invisible spirit, which he described as multi-faceted, astonishing, and evolutionary. In this new perspective, personality becomes merely a temporary social mask, while the inner world of the disabled individual becomes an infinite pool of potential shared with everyone. This profound attitude, developed by the poet as a disabled observer, allowed him not only to witness another's suffering but also to become that wounded person, to say, “I am that man, I suffered, I was there” (567).

This physical crisis evolved Whitman's language from a static structure to a “language of momentum” (Kuusisto, 2005: 161). The fragmented structure and lyrical collage style seen in *Specimen Days*, “incongruous and full of skips and jumps” (Kuusisto, 2005: 158), is a direct reflection of the poet's unstable physical condition and the shifting inner world on his mental screen. For Whitman, this new form of writing is a conscious strategy developed to “tell the truth about the catastrophe of human consciousness” (161) and to survive through lyrical awareness.

An examination of selected poems by Walt Whitman reveals that his works simultaneously exhibit traces of moral, limiting, identity, cultural, and social models. In *Song of the Broad-Axe*, the moral model is highlighted through the evaluation of the body in terms of strength, health, and superiority. The lines, “Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands, / Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands, / There the great city stands” and “A strong being is the proof of the race and of the ability of the universe”, present a strong and healthy body as the ideal measure. The lines, “Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards” and “And nothing endures but personal qualities”, further reinforce the normative emphasis on the body and personal competence. In contrast, *Song of Myself* exhibits a much more multi-layered structure. In the poem, the limits model becomes visible in the lines “Agonies are one of my changes of garments” and “I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there”, where pain and fragility are presented as part of the human experience. The identity model, on the other hand, is highlighted through the appropriation of bodily difference and the affirmation of the subject in the lines “I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person”, “I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul”, “I celebrate myself, and sing myself”, and “Welcome is every organ and attribute of me... / Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile.” The cultural model is established through the cultural representation

of marginalized bodies and voices in the lines, “Through me many long dumb voices, / Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves, / Voices of the sick and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs”, while the social model is highlighted by the emphasis on equality, opposition to exclusion, and social inclusion in the lines, “There shall be no difference between them and the rest” and “Whoever degrades another degrades me... / I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.”

The poem *The Wound-Dresser* is also important in terms of the social model. Lines such as “To each and all one after another I draw near, not one do I miss”, “Some suffer so much”, and “From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand” represent wounded bodies not only in terms of their physical condition but also in the context of care, contact, and social encounter. Therefore, in Whitman’s poetry, disability is addressed in a multi-layered way along the axes of body, identity, suffering, representation, and social equality. The poem *Song of Myself* will be examined in more detail in the context of the social model in later sections of the thesis.

1.2.4. Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson is an original voice of the 19th-century American literary canon. While her contemporaries, such as Walt Whitman, expanded the boundaries of the self through revolutionary free verse, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow gained fame through moralistic quatrains, Dickinson developed a “private poetic method” within the profound obscurity of her Amherst study (Gale Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2018). Her “white election”, which is the deliberate withdrawal from society and the symbolic donning of white vestments, was not merely an eccentric act; it was an “archetypal drama” and a “face-saving abdication” that enabled her to craft an aesthetic entirely independent of prevailing literary trends (Wilner, 1971: 138). By refusing to participate in the growing national literary movement, Dickinson chose to focus on her internal landscape rather than seeking public recognition. Dickinson’s radical isolation can be understood not simply as a stylistic choice, but as a condition deeply shaped by the physical and familial limitations of her life.

Records indicate that Dickinson’s creative output was influenced by her “fragile health,” characterized by her “continuing eye trouble” and “nervous collapse,” all of which limited her social standing (Gale Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2018). Her family likewise suffered from various health problems, such as her mother suffering from a “paralyzing stroke” in 1875, which made Emily serve as a primary caregiver for the invalid parent. Yet, for Dickinson, these health problems were converted into a “will-to-closure” (Wilner, 1971: 126) as these physical boundaries did not seem to stop her from writing. In contrast, her physical constraints seemed

to show themselves in the various punctuation marks that characterized her originality in her poems.

Dickinson's formal radicalism in her manuscript versions of her poems was a "metaphysical subversion of syntax" that confused her 19th century peers since when Dickinson sought professional assistance, editors such as Samuel Bowles and Thomas Wentworth Higginson literally operated on her verses in order to conform to Victorian standards (Gale Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2018). An example of this editing occurred when Bowles smoothed out Dickinson's provocative reference to Alcohol in her poem "I taste a liquor never brewed", changing it to "whirl" and imposing the title "The May-Wine" (Gale Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2018). Beyond the rhyme scheme of her verse, Dickinson's "unusual spelling" and use of dashes functioned to either halt the reader or propel them along their reading path. As noted by Wilner (1971), the dash operates as "the Hyphen of the Sea", separating mortality from eternity and at the same time connecting the two (126). Dickinson's revolutionary approach to language, described by Wineapple (2011) as "had never before been seen, "utilized formal deviance to reflect the "inner turmoil" Dickinson experienced in her homebound exile. (131).

Dickinson's "closely-knit family circle", comprised of her father, Edward, her sister, Lavinia, and her surrogate sister, Susan Gilbert, formed the emotional structure upon which Dickinson built her genius (Gale Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2018). Dickinson's seclusion was a psychological necessity that allowed her to navigate the patriarchal domestic binary of her father's overwhelming energy and her mother's passivity. (Wilner, 1971). It was within this environment that Dickinson generated her royal persona-the "Empress of Calvary"-and constructed a "Master" in her mind, one that she could control herself. Through this desire for total imaginative authority, Dickinson transformed the local color of Amherst into a mythic landscape and used her domestic confinement to take charge of the English language on her own terms.

Dickinson's "distinctive aphoristic style and original metaphors" defeated the confusion of the conservative audience that initially befuddled her work. (Gale Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2018). The course of Dickinson's legacy progressed from the "shrunken, scrubbed, misunderstood" first editions to the final edition of 1955, which restored her original vision (Wineapple, 2011: 132). Today, the apotheosis of Emily Dickinson has been completed. She is regarded as a seer and a master of mimesis, whose health and heartbreak were the fundamental fuel for her artistic brilliance.

An examination of selected poems by Dickinson reveals that social and identity-model influences are particularly prominent in her work. The social model is clearly evident in the poem "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," as it depicts mental and sensory disintegration through the experience of external pressure and alienation. The following lines create the impression that an external and oppressive community is invading the individual's mental space:

Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
 That Sense was breaking through –
 And when they all were seated,
 A Service, like a Drum –
 Kept beating – beating – till I thought
 My mind was going numb –
 And then I heard them lift a Box
 And creak across my Soul,

Similarly, the lines, "And I, and Silence, some strange Race, / Wrecked, solitary, here – / And then a Plank in Reason, broke", demonstrate the subject's isolated, alienated, and socially excluded position. These parts clearly show how the text follows the social model.

In the poem, *I'm Nobody! Who are you?* both the social model and the identity model become visible together. The social model is established particularly through the pressure of exclusion and public visibility. The line "They'd banish us; you know!" overtly reveals the possibility of social exclusion, while the expression "How dreary to be somebody!" questions the oppressive nature of public identity and normative visibility. The line "Then there's a pair of us" creates a sense of shared identity that transcends loneliness, while the lines "How public like a frog / To tell one's name the livelong day" critique normative publicness, transforming the state of being "Nobody" into an alternative and even more meaningful identity space.

In the poem "They shut me up in Prose," the social model is established more directly through an experience of oppression and confinement. The line "They shut me up in Prose –" enables us to see that the subject is limited and controlled by an external force. This pressure is further highlighted in the lines, "They put me in the Closet – / Because they liked me 'still' –", suggesting that the individual is silent and immobile due to social domination. The lines, "They might as wise have lodged a Bird / For Treason – in the Pound –", depict the confinement of a free and natural being as a meaningless but violent social intervention. Therefore, in Dickinson's poems, disability is represented as an experience shaped by society's mechanisms of exclusion, repression, labelling, and confinement.

1.2.5 Herman Melville

Herman Melville spent the majority of his writing career as a successful novelist; however, he also dedicated a portion of it to poetry. This time frame of his writing poetry is one of turmoil in Melville's life. As a result of financial difficulties, Melville looked for "nonliterary ways to support his family" and worked as a customs inspector (Spengemann, 1999: 569). He also suffered from numerous physical ailments such as sciatica, neuralgia, and chronic hypochondria (Schulman, 2023). It is reported that Melville's physical decline began around 1859 when he tried to regain his "manly" seafaring vigor by sailing on the clipper ship *Meteor*, however, Melville returned home to a nation engulfed in a civil war that paralleled the internal fragmentation Melville was experiencing (Schulman, 2023).

As Melville transitioned from "poetic prose" and grandiose views of nature found in *Moby-Dick*, searching for absolute truths, to a "detuned," "impacted," and "laconic" style, Melville's poetry evolved similarly to his disillusionment (Spengemann, 1999: 579). Melville's later writing style was characterized by inconclusiveness because Melville abandoned formal coherence in order to write "unpredictable, imperfect, and disappointing sequels" that reflected a world that lacked the capacity to resolve ambiguity (578). In Melville's Civil War collection *Battle-Pieces*, Melville utilized a photographic style and arranged his poems in an album, as photographs are arranged in an album, to capture fragmented aspects of reality rather than a single story (Schulman, 2023). By employing a multi-voiced approach, Melville was able to mate disparate elements of reality, such as the public and the private, or the land and the sea, through fortunate associations rather than logical progression (Spengemann, 1999).

In *Battle-Pieces*, Melville used the disabled figure as a primary metaphor for the broken body politic of the post-Civil War U.S. Melville often associated "honor" with being "unmarred" in limb, thus revealing a personal obsession with wholeness, and, therefore, perceived disability as a problem to be solved (Schulman, 2023). Melville's private correspondence reinforces his aversion to disability. After meeting a surgeon with a facial wound, Melville referred to the disfigurement as a "horrible masque" that hid the "manly" man beneath (Schulman, 2023, 10). Through figures such as the *College Colonel*, Melville analyzed the "socially produced experience of disability," and connected physical crippling to a loss of bodily autonomy and poor mental health (Schulman, 2023: 2). That is why, Melville's works provide a complex site for examination in disability studies, since while Melville's works reflect many of the prejudices against the ideal bodies of the 19th century, his works also indicate the vulnerability of all human beings by reminding "able-bodied viewers of the vulnerability of

their own bodies, activating fears about physical autonomy and wholeness that permeated nineteenth-century culture” (Schulman, 2023: 3).

In selected poems by Melville, the social model is prominent. In *The College Colonel*, the alienation and social rupture experienced by the individual in the post-war period are noteworthy. While the lines “There are welcoming shouts, and flags; / Old men off hat to the Boy, / Wreaths from gay balconies fall at his feet, / But to him—there comes alloy” present an outward appearance of celebration and acceptance. The following lines, “It is not that a leg is lost, / It is not that an arm is maimed. / It is not that the fever has racked— / Self he has long disclaimed,” show that the real devastation lies in the individual’s alienation from himself. This suggests that disability is also related to the loss of social experience and identity.

Similarly, in *In the Prison Pen*, disability is represented as a devastation produced by external conditions and an inhumane environment. The lines “Tis barren as a pelican-beach— / But his world is ended there. / Nothing to do; and vacant hands / Bring on the idiot-pain; / He tries to think—to recollect, / But the blur is on his brain” reveal the relationship between isolation, emptiness, and mental collapse. Furthermore, the lines “A smiting sun. No shed, no tree; / He totters to his lair— / A den that sick hands dug in earth” and “Till forth from the throngs they bear him dead— / Dead in his meagerness,” demonstrate the individual’s physical and mental breakdown because of environmental conditions and societal neglect.

1.2.6 Nathaniel Hawthorne

Foster (1942: 241) states that Hawthorne (1804-1864) is “the most complete artist” of the American Renaissance. Hawthorne's theory is based on the idealization of reality rather than its exact copying. Hawthorne’s life was shaped by the legacy of his Puritan ancestors, such as William Hathorne, who persecuted Quakers, and John Hathorne, the judge of the witch trials. Deeply troubled by guilt over the sins of these ancestors, the author lived in seclusion at his Salem home for about 12 years (1825-1837), spending this period reading and writing. While not a complete Puritan in terms of belief, he embraced the perspective of spiritual life, the inner reality of Puritanism. He structured his works as a profound critique of Puritan morality, the transcendentalism of his time, and the world he knew. Hawthorne’s concept of dark necessity allowed him to explore humanity's spiritual turmoil and the impact of ancestral sins by examining the empirical realities underlying Puritan symbols. As Mabie (1904) states, “He saw life as the Puritan had once seen it, with clear and authoritative in sight; but he saw it under radically different conditions and with the immense modification of the artistic temperament” (19).

Hawthorne's literary style transcends the boundaries of the traditional novel, establishing a kind of romance built on neutral territory where reality and imagination merge. Despite his aversion to writing poetry and his dislike of modern poetry, rare poems written early in his career, such as *Grace*, possess a classical structure, technical perfection, and religious depth comparable to the works of the 17th-century poet George Herbert. Following in the footsteps of allegorical masters like Spenser, Milton, and Bunyan, he transformed events and characters into moral symbols. Instead of expressing his poetic sensibility in verses, he preferred to incorporate it into the symbolic structure of his romances (Foster, 1942).

Although he did not live during the Puritan period, Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose poems reflect many characteristics of Puritan poetry, emphasizes a moral/religious model in his selected works. In the poem *Go to the Grave*, death, mortality, and the inevitable decay of the human body are presented as a moral and existential lesson. The lines, "Go to the grave where friends are laid, / And learn how quickly mortals fade, / Learn how the fairest flower must droop, / Learn how the strongest form must stoop, / Learn that we are but dust and clay, / The short-lived creatures of a day" emphasize human weakness and transience. The line "The grave to them is but a road" also presents death as part of a greater spiritual transition. The same model is evident in the poem *The Darken'd Veil*. In addition to these lines, "Oh could I raise the darken'd veil, / Which hides my future life from me" highlights the idea of uncertainty and fate. The following lines show how deep the religious and moral sentiment of the poem is:

Would make me seek the lonely tomb
To slumber in its endless gloom.
Then let me never cast a look,
Within Fate's fixed mysterious book.

Needless to say, it is possible to find traces of both Puritanism and the American Renaissance in Hawthorne's poems. In the following chapters, his and others' poems will be discussed at length, using disability theory to analyze them. In chronological order, Puritan poets will be studied first, followed by the poets of the American Revolution.

CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF DISABILITY MODELS IN SELECTED POEMS

2.1. Disability in Puritan Poetry

2.1.1. Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* and the Moral / Religious Model of Disability

As one of the most popular poems of the early American colonies in the 17th century, *The Day of Doom* by Michael Wigglesworth exemplifies how literature can be shaped by the values and beliefs of its time. As one of the very first works of literature read across the colonies, it rapidly gained popularity among Puritan readers. It is reported that nearly 1,800 copies of the first edition were sold within the first year of publication; therefore, it is evident that a large segment of the colonial population had access to the poem (Matthiessen, 1928). Its wide appeal indicates that the poem met deep cultural needs of Puritans about sin, judgment, and salvation. *The Day of Doom* exemplifies the moral model of disability. Within the moral model of disability, physical disability is viewed as an identifiable sign of moral or spiritual weakness rather than simply a biological condition. For the moral or religious model of disability, “disability should be regarded as a punishment from God for a particular sin or sins that the person with disability may have committed” (Letšosa & Retief, 2018: 2). In the poem, Wigglesworth repeatedly illustrates physical pain, fear, and suffering, which stem from sins. Therefore, the suffering body has become an image for God's judgment. It means that individuals' moral conduct and their spiritual discipline will ultimately decide what happens to the soul after death.

The poem contains very strong, vivid physical imagery, which could be attributed to Wigglesworth's previous illnesses. For example, F.O. Matthiessen (1928) stated that Wigglesworth suffered from many illnesses and thus possessed poor physical health. As Adams (1990: 280) states, “Wigglesworth's own physical miseries provide a resource, drawn from his life experience, that facilitates his depiction of the pain full side of the resurrection of the body.” It is overt that his illness did not produce sympathy for his suffering but instead gave rise to vividly descriptive depictions of the human body being subjected to extreme physical punishments. Strong and vivid physical images are used throughout the poem to describe the Last Judgment and to emphasize the vulnerable nature of the human body. The physicalizing of fear is evident in the depiction of the sinners' response to the impending judgment of God. In his writings on the event of the sinners being judged by God, Wigglesworth states: Sinners

awake, their hearts do ake, / trembling their loins surpriseth; / Amaz'd with fear, by what they hear (Wigglesworth, 1867: 22).

The instant fear experienced by the sinners is transformed into physical manifestation. They do not merely have internal fear, but rather, their physical body exhibits the fear from the terror of God's judgment. The sinners' physically experiencing pain or anguish from their aching heart and trembling body, demonstrate the physical vulnerability of all humans before a divine authority. The aching and trembling reinforce the Puritans' conviction that spiritual corruption will ultimately lead to physical suffering. The connection between fear and bodily response becomes even clearer in the following lines:

No heart so bold, but now grows cold
and almost dead with fear ;
No eye so dry, but now can cry,
and pour out many a tear. (24)

Again, in these lines, the body is the primary site where moral failure is expressed. Wigglesworth insists that the somatic collapse he describes is not confined to the especially wicked but includes all sinners, which demonstrate that every heart, every eye, everybody is subject to this physiological catastrophe. What is more, the images of the heart growing "cold" and the tears that cannot be controlled illustrate the overwhelming influence of divine judgment on the body. Within the framework of the moral model of disability, such bodily reactions reflect the idea that sin produces visible physical consequences.

In the moral model, bodily states are often equated with sin, wickedness, or spiritual deficiency. Wigglesworth articulates the following:

Some hide themselves in Caves and Delves,
in places under ground:
Some rashly leap into the Deep,
to' scape by being drown'd : (24)

The sinners' attempt to hide in caves and underground presents the shame and humiliation brought by sin, which is central to the moral model of disability, as a form of bodily escape. In these lines, physical movement becomes an expression of moral panic. The sinners attempt to conceal themselves within the earth to avoid divine judgment, but their efforts remain in vain because Wigglesworth states:

No hiding place can from his Face
sinners at all conceal,

Whose flaming Eye hid things doth spy,
and darkest things reveal. (25)

Here, Wigglesworth claims that there is no possible way for humans to escape from the all-seeing eye of God as God has “the flaming Eye” with which he sees everything, and there is no hiding place for the sinner. This imagery shows the moral model’s assumption that moral corruption cannot remain hidden and will inevitably be exposed and punished by divine authority. As Morgan (1966) said, no Puritan could ever be entirely certain of his spiritual state, since God’s penetrating gaze reveals not only external actions but also the hidden spiritual flaws that are believed to produce suffering and exclusion. That is to say the sinful body cannot disguise its condition, and thus its moral pathology is always already legible to the gaze of authority. This theme is further emphasized by the portrayal of “creeping moles” in their holes, as “creeping moles” represent a loss of dignity and shame for those who fail morally. As follows:

Both good and bad, both quick and dead,
and all to Judgment bring.
Out of their holes those creeping Moles,
that hid themselves for fear,
By force they take, and quickly make
before the Judge appear. (26-27)

The characterization of sinners as burrowing animals hiding underground portrays them as being on an animal-like level, which is reflective of the way the moral model degrades people based on their assumed spiritual status. The fact that these creatures were removed from their holes reflects the complete loss of control of the body as it was to be judged by the divine. Hence, bodily fear and vulnerability serve as outward signs of the individual's moral failure and demonstrate that spiritual corruption gives rise to the physical weakness or suffering that the sinners experience.

The significance of *The Day of Doom* in terms of DS lies not just in how it depicts the moral model, but in the absolute and total way that it enforces this model. In the poem, the condemned bodies have no possible means of being rehabilitated or restored to a better state. Thus, the moral model is taken to an absolute limit that the body is not simply a place where the physical evidence of moral wrongdoing is seen. It is the permanent and eternal vehicle for God’s judgment. The condemned body is not a body that may be cured or enhanced. Rather, it is a body that has been permanently assigned to its condition by divine verdict. Reading the poem through Retief and Letšosa’s (2018) framework of the moral model sheds light on both

the poem's theological argument and the moral model's depth in history. It also illustrates that the logic of bodily pathologization and moral condemnation has deeper roots than the medical models that secularized and codified it in the 19th century. In this way, *The Day of Doom* is a foundational work in Western cultural history in how we have thought about the relationship between the body, moral identity, and judgment.

2.1.2. Anne Bradstreet's *The Four Ages of Man* and the Medical Model of Disability

Anne Bradstreet's *The Four Ages of Man* is one of the most ambitious poems within the early American Puritan canon. The poem uses the voice of four ages of man: childhood, youth, middle age and old age. A thorough survey of human life from birth to death can be observed in the stages of poem. Each speaker catalogues the defining characteristics, moral failings, and above all the physical vulnerabilities of their respective life stage, culminating in Old Age's extended inventory of bodily deterioration. The poem has been viewed through the lens of the Puritan vanitas tradition, as a comprehensive examination of the fleeting nature of earthly existence and the pervasiveness of sin. However, such a reading risks obscuring the poem's remarkable engagement with the body as a medical, pathological object.

When viewed through the lens of DS, particularly the medical model of disability as described by Retief and Letšosa (2018), *The Four Ages of Man* can be seen as a piece of writing that offers an understanding of bodily experiences using a logic very similar to biomedicalism. The medical model, as defined by Olkin (2001: 26), views disability as "a defect in or failure of a bodily system" that is "by definition abnormal and pathological." Thus, the two primary objectives of interventions for this type of failure are "to cure," "to reduce the physical condition to its maximum degree of normalcy," and "to rehabilitate" (Retief and Letšosa, 2018: 2). Rather than simply noting the existence of bodily pain, Bradstreet's poem systematically categorizes and lists these forms of suffering and classifies the body as a collection of systems that fail when they deviate from a state of health.

The medical model of disability is a product of the mid-nineteenth century, emerging as modern medical science began to systematically replace the moral and religious model that had dominated premodern thought (Retief and Letšosa, 2018: 2). Thus, applying the medical model to a 17th-century Puritan text may seem to be anachronistic because the medical model's main assumption is that disability and bodily deviance reside in the individual body as a form of pathology. It is not historically bound to the period of its formal articulation. Rather, the model crystallized a logic of bodily pathologization that had long been operative in cultural and literary representation, even when framed in explicitly theological terms.

The most notable aspect of *The Four Ages of Man* from the perspective of the medical model is its emphasis on disease, physical symptoms, and bodily malfunctions in each of the four speakers' presentations of their respective stages of the life cycle. As such, the poem provides the greatest number of the above-mentioned lists written with a taxonomic impulse, the desire to list, label, and categorize bodily failures. As though the central aim of the poem was to create a list of all the pathologizing logic of the medical model, the poem identifies deviations from a norm with clinical specificity:

What gripes of wind, mine infancy did pain?

What tortures I, in breeding teeth sustain?

What crudities my cold stomach hath bred?

Whence vomits, worms, and flux have issued?

What breaches, knocks, and falls I daily have? (Bradstreet, 1867: 147)

The passage develops a series of discrete physical complaints, including colic, teething pains, digestive issues, intestinal parasites, wounds, and falls. Each complaint is treated as a distinct bodily event. The accumulation of the speaker's questions creates a rhetorical structure that can be described as creating a medical inventory. Each pathologic state is cataloged in the same way that one would compile a case history. In this context, the child-body is created not as a pure, innocent, or spiritual being, but as a source of continuous and relentless physical dysfunction. This is consistent with Retief and Letšosa's (2018) explanation of how the medical model "emphasizes the limitations of individuals with disabilities" (3). In short, the child-body is created by its pathologies and its deviances from healthy functioning.

The poem systematically lists the many ways that the body fails. The speaker describes how the senses and motor skills fail one after another. The body is shown to consist of several distinct parts that become less functional over time. The Old Age uses the body as a symbol of inevitable and increasing decay, having gone through the turmoil of youth and the responsibilities of middle age, so the speaker sees the body as a place where their physical condition will continue to deteriorate:

Mine Almond tree, grey hairs, doe flourish now,

And back once forth, apace begins to bow:

My grinders now are few, my fight doth fail.

My skin is wrinkled, and my cheeks are pale.

No more rejoyce at mulicks pleasing noife,

But waking glad to hear the cocks shrill voice: "

I cannot fcent favours of pleafant meat.

Nor fapors find in what I drink or eat:
 My arms and hands once ftrong have loft their might
 I cannot labour, much lefs can I fight."
 My comely legs as nimble as the Roe
 Now ftiff and numb, can hardly creep or goe, (166)

Retief and Letšosa (2018: 3) define the medical model as a deviation from the norm by stating that “PWDs deviate from what is normal.” In Bradstreet's “Old Age” passage, the normative body is referenced specifically in its absence. Disabilities are defined in relation to an implied normative standard: a healthy body. The disabled or deteriorated body is thus described relative to its distance from this healthy norm. Therefore, it aligns with the medical model's approach, where the identity of the disabled body is constructed through its difference from the norm.

Following Woods and Thomas's (2003) position, beyond the taxonomic logic of pathologization, *The Four Ages of Man* also engages with what Retief and Letšosa (2018) describe as the medical model's construction of disability as a personal tragedy, which views disability as “objectively bad, as a pitiable condition, a personal tragedy for both the individual and her family, something to be prevented and, if possible, cured” (3). This tragic logic permeates the poem's treatment of bodily disease and deterioration and is most fully expressed in the Youth speaker's mention of afflictions as follows:

Sometimes by wounds in idle Combates taken.
 Sometimes with Agues all my body fhaken:
 Sometimes by fevers, all my moifture drinking,
 My heart lies frying, & mine eyes are linking,
 Sometimes the Cough and Stitch, painfull Pleurilie,
 With fad affrighrs of death doth menace me:
 Sometimes the two fold Pox me fore be:marrs
 With outward marks, & inward loathfome fcarrs,"
 Sometimes the Phrenzy ftrangly mads my brain,
 That oft for it in Bedlam I remain. (155-156)

These diseases expressed by the use of word chunks such as “wounds”, “Aques”, “fevers”, heart lies frying”, and the “Cough and Stitch”, all signify personal disasters affecting an individual, described primarily in terms of how they feel, that is, through mentioning shaking, frying, sinking, marring, and maddening. The language used for personal pain and injury is straightforward: “the Pox” causes “ugly marks of his eternal scars” on a person's face,

and the “Frenzy” confines the speaker to Bedlam. The body is the only site of these disasters, and each one is experienced by the individual as their own tragedy, not as a social condition or structure. This perfectly illustrates the individualism that characterizes the medical model: “Disability is seen as a medical problem that resides in the individual” (Olkin, 2001: 26).

Parsons (1951) emphasizes the concept of the sick role to describe the social effects of the medical model, where individuals who are ill are expected to depend on professional help, act passively about their illness, and have their condition recognized as abnormal in terms of social functioning because a “sick person is helpless and therefore in need of help” (440). While Bradstreet’s poem neither addresses medical treatment nor any indication exists in terms of a doctor-patient relationship, the way the poet portrays the diseased speaker, someone whose agency and social ability are greatly reduced by physical illness, reflects sick-role ideas in many ways. As *Old Age* states directly: My arms and hands once strong have lost their might/ I cannot labour, much less can I fight (166). Thus, the inability to carry out the productive and protective roles of normal social life results directly from physical decline. Hence, the speaker is defined by incapacity, by what they can no longer do, as their social identity is shaped through bodily failure.

It would be a serious mistake to interpret *The Four Ages of Man* solely as a proto-medical text, untainted by its Puritan theological perspective. Retief and Letšosa (2018) note that “the basic philosophy underlying the [moral/religious] model is still frequently encountered in the way people reason when confronted with illness or disability” (2), and that the moral-religious model was prevalent particularly in the premodern period to which Bradstreet belongs. In Bradstreet’s poem, the medical interpretation of the body’s pathology is consistently shaped by a theological logic in which physical disease is intertwined with moral corruption and the consequences of the Fall.

Childhood explicitly illustrates this theological causality: “Stained from birth, with Adam’s sinful fact, / From thence I gan to sin, as soon as act; [...] For sin brings sorrow, sickness, death, and woe” (151-152). By stating that “sin brings sorrow, sickness, death, and woe,” Bradstreet articulates that bodily changes are occurrences of sin, which points to the nature of disability that cannot be considered solely a medical phenomenon. In contrast, our original sin is the major cause of our bodies’ pathological conditions, suggesting that bodily defects are ultimately a moral as well as a theological issue. Bradstreet’s cause-and-effect relationship, as prescribed in this poem, reminds us of the fundamental logic of the moral or religious model as described by Retief and Letšosa (2018) because, according to this perspective, “a person’s disability should be considered as punishment from God for some specific sin(s)” (2). In short,

the content of Bradstreet's *The Four Ages of Man* fits well within the moral and religious model as well as the medical model, as her words connect carnal sin with bodily deterioration, which results from humans' inability to prevent the awful consequences of the former.

What is unique about *The Four Ages of Man* is how the theologians use their belief in the cause of disease as a form of medical style pathologization. The reason for this is that sin is viewed as a universal experience that we are all sinful because of Adam but nevertheless "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (New International Version [NIV], 2011, Romans 5:8). Therefore, the diseased body is a universal condition since everyone is sinful. The catalog of diseases listed in the poem applies to everyone. As a result, the poet's Puritan theology creates a paradoxical egalitarian pathology. Thus, Old Age can say, "What you have been, ev'n such have I before, And all you say, say I, and something more" (161). Through the doctrine of original sin, the bodily pathological conditions were made universal; therefore, disease is a universal experience for humanity as opposed to being a sign of individual deviance. In Bradstreet's poem, there is no fully normative body against which the diseased body can be defined as deviant, because all bodies are shown to be diseased at some point, or vulnerable to disease. This anticipates what Creamer (2009: 32) describes as the recognition that all human beings experience some level of limitation in their everyday lives since limitation is "an unavoidable aspect of humanity."

2.2. Disability in American Renaissance Poetry

2.2.1. Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* and the Social Model of Disability

Whitman's *Song of Myself* (1855) stands as arguably the most radical democratic text produced in the American Renaissance, a period that roughly spans the decade between 1850 and 1860 and encompasses the major works of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman himself. While scholars have long read the poem as a celebration of individualism, democratic community, and embodied spirituality, it has received comparatively little sustained attention through the lens of disability studies. Read alongside the theoretical frameworks offered by the social model of disability, *Song of Myself* emerges not merely as a poem that tolerates or includes disabled bodies among its famous democratic catalogues, but as a text that structurally and philosophically anticipates, contests, and in certain respects complicates the very assumptions that disability scholars have identified as central to both the oppression and liberation of people with disabilities.

The social model of disability suggests that disability is not inherent in the individual but is created by a society that excludes and marginalizes people with impairments. As

Shakespeare (2006) states, “the social model demonstrates that the problems disabled people face are the result of social oppression and exclusion, not their individual deficits” (217). The central political goal of the social model is not to fix impaired bodies to fit the environment, but to change environments to accommodate the full spectrum of human embodiment. Whitman’s lines powerfully illustrate this perspective in several ways.

In the poem “Voices of the diseas’d and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs,” and “Of the deform’d, trivial, flat, foolish, despised,” (Whitman, 1904: 28), Whitman illustrates that disability is not just a physical condition but a socially constructed one. The physical defects or deficiencies in disabled people are not the true disability; instead, disability resides in the demeaning language society uses to describe them, as Whitman emphasizes. These words, which demean and devalue the body, align with UPIAS’s statement, “It is society which disables physically impaired people” (1976: 3). In other words, considering Garland-Thomson’s (2005: 524) assertion that “all bodies are shaped by their environments from the moment of conception,” it becomes clear that what truly makes a person disabled is the frequent use of such words, implying that society’s gaze turns a body into something “deformed” and deserving of contempt.

As Retief and Letšosa (2018) highlight, the terms used to describe PWDs, such as “invalid,” “cripple,” and “handicapped” (3), are rooted in frameworks that reinforce the idea that disabled people are not comparable to their able-bodied peers. Whitman also critically exposes this by gathering the adjectives that mainstream culture applies to non-normative bodies. At the same time, the poem reveals the mechanics of social stigma rather than merely depicting it as natural. The word “despised” is especially meaningful because it shifts the focus from the body itself to the social attitude toward it. This core idea is central to the social model, which, as defined by UPIAS (1976), views disability as “the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization” (14), meaning an external disadvantage rather than one originating within the individual body.

Whitman’s imagery of the asylum and the surgeon’s table illuminates how modern institutions manage and contain bodies that deviate from social norms, a process the social model identifies as a primary mechanism of disability: The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm’d case / (He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother’s bed-room;) (15)

These lines show how society isolates individuals it deems “normal” by confining them to institutional spaces, thus removing them from daily life. In other words, the asylum ceases to be a place of treatment and becomes a place where individuals isolated from society are kept

under surveillance. Similarly, the phrase “The malformed limbs are tied to the surgeon's table” (15) reveals that the body is transformed into an object in need of intervention. At this point, the individual has no control over their body, and the problem needs to be “corrected” by experts. Furthermore, the phrase “Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for invalids conformity goes to the fourth-remov'd,” (22) implies, through the concept of “invalid,” that the disabled individual is positioned as passive, helpless, and dependent. When all these lines are considered, it becomes clear that Whitman does not view disability as reflecting an individual deficiency, but rather as a condition produced by society through its mechanisms of control, regulation, and exclusion.

PWDs “are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society” (UPIAS, 1976: 4) because no matter how much they want to participate in society, they always encounter a barrier. In the poem, Whitman’s lines exemplify this difference by linking bodily suffering to material and structural conditions. The “groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits” (9) highlight vulnerability rooted in economic inequality and exploitative labor, not in individual weakness. The body that collapses from malnourishment or exhaustion is not inherently lacking; it has been made deficient by a social system that unevenly distributes risk and deprivation. The language of passing through “the swung half-door,” where the speaker sees a man “limpsy and weak” bearing “galls of his neck and ankles” (11), deepens this point. The galls are signs of physical work and possibly bondage, marking on the body the social relations that shaped it. Whitman’s ability to speak for “interminable generations of prisoners and slaves” (28) shows that it is institutional power, not an inherent ability, that has caused their bodies to become dependent and confined. The social model’s focus on “barriers to participation” caused by social and environmental factors linked to ableism (O'Connell, Finnerty and Egan, 2008: 15) is exactly what Whitman’s poem depicts as a kind of ongoing, literary record of these barriers.

Therefore, while rejecting all barriers, exclusions, and inequalities, Whitman’s poem implies that disability is not an individual matter but a matter of social inclusion and justice. Whitman’s statement, “I will not have a single person slighted or left away” (21), emphasizes that no individual should be excluded from society and should participate without hesitation, presenting a radical understanding of inclusivity. This approach reflects the fundamental assumption of the social model. Furthermore, Whitman’s line, “There shall be no difference between them and the rest,” (21) directly rejects the artificiality of distinctions such as normal, abnormal, healthy, or disabled. At this point, difference ceases to be a hierarchical measure of

value and becomes part of equality. Whitman's ethical approach is even more clearly revealed in the statement:

Whoever degrades another degrades me,
 And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.
 Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me the current and index.
 I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy, (27)

The implication in the above-mentioned part is clear: devaluing an individual harms not only that person but also the entire social structure to which they belong. Thus, disability ceases to be an individual problem and becomes a matter of social and ethical responsibility. Similarly, the statement "By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms" (27) emphasizes the principle of equal access and participation, thus placing disability within a political context. In this regard, Whitman positions disability as an inequality that can be resolved through societal restructuring.

Whitman rejects the hierarchical value system by which the body is evaluated and, ultimately, the notion of a "normal" body. When Whitman says "Welcome is every organ and attribute of me," (4) he shows that all parts of the body are equally acceptable and that none are excluded. By taking this inclusive stance, Whitman is opposing the medical model, which values the body based on what is wrong with it. In addition, when Whitman says, "Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest" (4), he has eliminated the possibility of defining bodily difference as a deviation from the norm. Whitman's inclusive position has led him to reject the notion that we evaluate the body against a fixed norm. Instead, he views all bodies as equivalent and whole. While the term "perfect health" (1) seems like a normative point of reference at first, the validity of that term is completely undermined in later sections of the poem. Therefore, instead of evaluating the body against a comparative standard, Whitman presents an understanding where each body is good and worthy in and of itself. This perspective, then, rejects the medical model, which views disability as an individual deficit, and supports the social model, which views bodily difference as socially defined.

Whitman also addresses the suppression of voices and the obstruction of representation. The saying "Through me many long dumb voices" (28) points to the existence of individuals silenced by society. Here, the expression "dumb voices" symbolizes the social invisibility of individuals and the deprivation of their means of expression. Whitman, at this point, positions himself as a mediator, becoming the voice of marginalized and oppressed groups throughout

history with his words, “Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves” (28). This reveals that disability is a state of socially imposed silence.

2.2.2. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *The Sphinx* and the Limits Model of Disability

The Sphinx reflects the ARP’s effort to conceptualize the relationship between humanity, nature, and truth. Emerson argues that humans can directly experience God, while positioning nature as a living realm bearing the signs of the divine. In this respect, Emerson’s ideas about experiencing God through nature and the universal spirit are similar to those of the American Renaissance concerning the transcendental, the self, and the universal. However, Emerson’s concept of the “transparent eyeball” and “self-reliance” often produces an idealized model of the subject, relegating bodily limitations to the background. It is precisely at this point that *The Sphinx*, presenting humanity not as a perfect and complete being, but rather as a limited, fragile, and unresolved entity, opens a fruitful reading area for Creamer’s (2009) limits model which perceives disability not by means of a rigid disabled-or-able-bodied distinction, but through the concepts of embodiment and “limit-ness, to being fully present in our embodied limits,” because limitations are not exceptional but ordinary and inevitable parts of human life. In this context, rather than representing a specific physical defect, *The Sphinx* connects disability with the shared vulnerability of being human by constructing human existence through limitations, deficiencies, searches, and incompleteness.

In the poem’s opening lines, Emerson presents humanity as a being defined by uncertainty and transition. The lines “The fate of the man-child; / The meaning of man” (Emerson, 1892: 9), instead of explaining humanity through a fixed and definite essence, render its meaning as an open question. Similarly, the phrase “Known fruit of the unknown” (9) suggests that the origin and meaning of human existence are not fully grasped. This uncertainty deepens in the lines, “Out of sleeping a waking, / Out of waking a sleep; / Life death overtaking,” (9) because here humanity is represented as an experience constantly transitioning between binary oppositions. From the perspective of Creamer’s model of limits, these images in the poem show limitation, transitivity, and incompleteness as constitutive elements of human existence. Emerson sees the human condition as one of constraint and doubt at the start of the poem. In addition, the reference to the “Daedalian plan” (9) can be associated with complexity. Since the term is used within a mythological context, we could associate it with the maze Daedalus built. Human beings are transitional creatures standing on the threshold between wakefulness and sleep, lacking complete solidity or static integrity, a state that coincides with

Creamer's concept of "limit-ness." Humans are uncertain subjects constantly confronting their own limitations within the labyrinth.

Emerson presents the self-assured and serene posture of beings in nature (palm tree, elephant, thrush, and waves) in contrast to the inner restlessness of man. As follows:

Erect as a sunbeam,
 Upspringeth the palm;
 The elephant browses,
 Undaunted and calm;
 In beautiful motion,
 The thrush plies his wings;
 Kind leaves of his covert,
 Your silence he sings.
 "The waves, unashamed,
 In difference sweet, (10)

While the waves play shamelessly with the breeze and the thrush flaps its wings in unwavering harmony, the picture darkens for man. In contrast to the harmonious and self-contained state of other beings in nature, man is described as:

But man crouches and blushes,
 Absconds and conceals;
 He creepeth and peepeth,
 He palter and steals;
 Infirm, melancholy, (10-11)

Here, Emerson depicts humanity as restless, hesitant, self-concealing, and not fully reconciled with its own existence in the face of the totality of nature. The words "infirm" and "melancholy," in particular, reveal not only the physical but also the spiritual and existential fragility of humanity. As Creamer (2009: 5) emphasizes, limitations are not merely exceptional flaws specific to certain bodies, but embodied realities experienced to varying degrees by all people. That is, "all of us—disabled and nondisabled—are embodied creatures." In this respect, the expression "infirm" in the poem does not refer to a specific disability but rather reveals the general state of humanity as a limited, fragile, and vulnerable being. Therefore, for Emerson, disability is not about a personal limitation or flaw, but it is about the vulnerability that is a part of what makes us human. The lines which appear in the final section of the poem, clearly reveal that man is not a solvable and complete being: Thou art the unanswered question; / Couldst see thy proper eye, / Alway it asketh, asketh; (13)

In the lines above, man himself is defined as an “unanswered question.” This expression shows that man is limited both physically and spiritually, and epistemologically, because he can never fully comprehend himself, the world, or truth, no matter what he does. This is proven in this line, “And each answer is a lie” (13) which emphasizes the impossibility of absolute knowledge and a complete subject. It is known that the Limits model is defined as a state of limit-ness that extends throughout human life. Man, as “clothed eternity,” (13) is an infinite soul housed in a limited body. Therefore, the poem’s finale makes visible the constantly incomplete and limited structure of man on the planes of knowledge, self, and existence. Emerson thus acknowledges that, while the American Renaissance continued its search for truth, it would never be fully completed. Therefore, “Time is the false reply” (13).



CONCLUSION

This conclusion summarizes the findings of this thesis, which has examined the poetic symbolism of disability through a comparative-historical analysis of American Puritan poetry and American Renaissance poetry. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Disability Studies (DS), specifically the models of disability developed by Retief and Letšosa (2018), this study has demonstrated how bodily difference was constructed, managed, and symbolized across two significant periods of American literary history. The research aimed to address a notable gap in literary-historical understanding, particularly in poetry, which has traditionally marginalized disability in favor of the “sublime,” aspiring to perfection through rhythms created by poetic devices that mirror aspects of human experience.

This study primarily aimed to elucidate the evolution of poetic representations of disability, transitioning from the theocentric worldview characteristic of 17th-century Puritanism to the seemingly more individualistic and increasingly secular perception evident in the 19th-century American Renaissance. By employing a theoretical framework and a research design involving document analysis and close reading of canonical poems, the study adopted an inductive approach, progressing from the analysis of individual poems to a broader understanding of the cultural and ideological functions of disability in these two periods, which are often regarded as contrasting or polarized eras.

The analysis results showed that American Puritan poetry saw disability as a divine symbol, suggesting that, like many other aspects of the era, disability was viewed as a message from God. During this time, as seen in the studied poems, the human body acted as an allegorical space through which God influenced believers’ spiritual and physical lives. A deeper look at the analysis reveals that American Puritan poets mainly relied on the Moral/Religious and Medical models of disability, indicating that physical differences were seldom seen just as biological features; instead, they were seen as clear signs of moral or spiritual weakness. As a result, the body was considered a place of divine support but also a common site for divine punishment for human sins. Accordingly, American Puritan poetry regarded the body as a living entity tested by the sacred. The best example is Wigglesworth’s *The Day of Doom*, which illustrates the Moral/Religious model with vivid and powerful imagery of the human body, like hearts turning “cold” and loins trembling. This notable poem depicts sinners as “creeping moles,” through which the suffering body remains a persistent vessel waiting for God’s judgment. Besides this particular poem, the analyzed poetry collection offered no sign that

human recovery was possible or within reach. Bodily salvation, like spiritual salvation, was only possible through divine will.

Bradstreet's *The Four Ages of Man* illustrates a compelling intersection between the Moral and Medical frameworks by grounding human bodily suffering in the concept of the "stained" nature of original sin. Bradstreet's methodical examination of ailments such as "gripes of wind," "worms," and the "knotty Gout" demonstrates that her writing aligns closely with the medical model, which conceptualizes the body as a system of failing parts. Consistent with other analyzed poems, she upholds the perspective that the body possesses a "sick role" and thereby requires spiritual assistance, a theme further emphasized by other Puritan poets, such as Taylor and Mather. Taylor's *Huswifery* and *Upon a Spider Catching a Fly* exemplify adherence to the Moral and Charity models, portraying the soul and body as helpless entities in need of divine "Spinning Wheel" and "Gracious Lord" intervention. Notably, Mather's *The Body of Divinity Versified* explicitly associates physical pain with the Biblical imagery of the "Forbidden Fruit," thus framing disability within a theological schema of judgment. Consequently, these poems imply that for the Puritans, the notion of a "normative" body was essentially a myth, as all bodies were inherently "diseased" by sin in various forms. Conversely, all these poets unambiguously regarded visible impairments as vital instruments for community moral instruction and as pathways to salvation.

The examination of poets from the American Renaissance reveals that the poetic themes of this period markedly diverged from those of the Puritans, indicating a significant departure from the theocentric determinism previously advocated by American Puritanism. Moving away from Moral and Medical frameworks of disability, the poets of this era appeared to adopt the Social and Limits models. Primarily influenced by the Enlightenment and the democratic inclinations of the post-Revolutionary nation, these poets tended to perceive the human body not as a symbol or manifestation of sin, but as an emblem of individual experience, patriotism, and an emerging national identity.

Needless to say, Whitman's *Song of Myself* emerges as the most radical advocate of the Social Model of disability, as he fundamentally deconstructs the "ideology of ability" by honoring the "deform'd" and the "diseas'd." Rather than glorifying the human body, whose sins are absolved by divine grace, Whitman shifts the focus of human disability from the individual body to the collective societal obligation of inclusive well-being, explicitly stating, "I will not have a single person slighted or left away." Accordingly, Whitman conceptualizes disability as a matter of social justice and democratic inclusivity, opposing the institutionalization of the abnormal, the "lunatic," and the objectification of "malformed limbs"

on surgical tables. Instead, he advocates for a society that eradicates barriers to full participation. Similarly, Emerson's *The Sphinx* offers a profound application of the Limits Model of disability, transcending the binary division of disabled and non-disabled individuals to present "limit-ness" as a universal human condition. By describing human beings as "infirm" and "melancholy," Emerson implies that all human existence is inherently limited, fragile, and unresolved. Consequently, unlike their Puritan predecessors, the poets of this period, to varying extents, regarded disability not as an exceptional pathology but as an ordinary dimension of the "embodied creature."

Analysis of poems from the American Revolutionary era further shows that the Social and Identity models of disability are most clearly seen in the works of Dickinson and Melville. While Dickinson's "private poetic method" and her "white election" allowed her to turn physical and social "confinement" into a source of imaginative power, her poems, like *I'm Nobody! Who are you?*, challenge normative visibility and promote a "Nobody" as a meaningful alternative to social "Prose." Likewise, Melville, especially in his poetry written after the Civil War, uses metaphors like the "amputated hand" and "maimed" limb to symbolize a broken body, critically exploring how external conditions and societal neglect lead to 'idiot-pain' and feelings of alienation.

All these analyses support the argument that there is a clear evolution in the poetic symbolism of disability from American Puritanism to the American Renaissance. While the Puritan era was defined by "absolute dependence" on God, where disability was a vertical signifier of the relationship between the Creator and the sinner, poets of the American Renaissance sought the "divine within," transforming such a theological view of disability into a view that focuses on the individual within a democratic community. Thus, it can be stated that American poets shifted the human body, and thus human disability, from Moral Pathology to Social Construction: while Puritans saw the body as "stained" by sin (Moral Model), poets of the American Renaissance, such as Whitman, saw it as "shaped by its environments" (Social Model). Likewise, by doing so, American poets historically shifted the discourses that shaped disability from Personal Tragedy to Universal Limit, as Bradstreet viewed bodily decay as a "personal tragedy," while Emerson viewed it as a natural "limit-ness" of the human condition (Limits Model).

Through this study, my modest contribution to the fields of literature, cultural studies, and disability studies aims to establish a theoretical framework for understanding how the poetic content of two contrasting periods addresses human disability. As the findings indicate, disability is not merely a fixed medical condition but a historically dependent cultural construct

that either reproduces or challenges the normative values characteristic of its era. By demonstrating how the “Moral model” of the 17th century endures within the “Medical model” of the 19th and 20th centuries, I have observed the historical development of the persistent tendency to pathologize or moralize differences. This insight has been further reinforced by my growing recognition that various contemporary texts continue to shape both poetic and everyday discourses concerning disability, aligning with those addressed in this thesis.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the corpus is necessarily selective: while the chosen poems are representative and canonical, the analysis does not cover the full breadth of poetry produced in either period, and different poem selections might have yielded additional or partially different model distributions. Second, there is a lack of previous research studies on my topic. American puritan poetry and the poetry of American Renaissance have never been analyzed together before. Third, the disability models employed, drawn primarily from Retief and Leřosa’s (2018) framework, represent one taxonomic approach within a much broader and contested field. Applying alternative or more recent theoretical frameworks, such as Crip Theory or Intersectionality, might illuminate aspects of the texts that the current models do not fully capture.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the poetic symbolism of disability has shifted from being a tool for religious edification and divine judgment to serving as a way to explore democratic equality and existential vulnerability, with these two periods seen as opposing poles. Future scholars might build on this research by examining how disability is represented in the works of poets from different eras, paying particular attention to the voices marginalized within the main canon, especially those of disabled individuals. Furthermore, conducting comparative analyses of national literatures could be a valuable effort to determine whether the transition from “Puritan-to-Renaissance” is a distinctly American development or part of a larger pattern seen across various countries. Future scholars might build on this research in several productive directions. First, expanding the corpus to include a wider range of poets from both periods, particularly those whose voices have been marginalized within the canon including women, African Americans, and Native American voices would offer a more comprehensive and inclusive picture of how disability was constructed in early American poetry. Second, applying intersectional frameworks that consider race, gender, and class alongside disability would deepen the analysis, especially given that many of the poets studied, such as Bradstreet and Dickinson, wrote from positions shaped by gender constraints that also inflected their representations of the body. Third, comparative studies extending the analysis to British

Romantic or Victorian poetry, or to non-Anglophone literary traditions, would be valuable to determine whether the “Puritan-to-Renaissance” trajectory identified in this study reflects a distinctly American development or is part of a broader pattern across Western literary history.

Ultimately, this thesis claims that poetry is a powerful “machine made of words” capable of either reinforcing the “ideology of ability” or uniting a diverse society by honoring every “inch and particle” of the human form and, by extension, the overall human experience.



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APPENDIX 1- Analytical Checklist

Poem	Disability Model(s)	Lines
Puritans		
The Author to Her Book	Moral Medical	Medical Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain, Where errors were not lessened (all may judg). Thy blemishes amend, if so I could: I wash'd thy face, but more defects I saw, And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw. Moral At thy return my blushing was not small, I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
The Four Ages of Man	Moral Medical Limits	Moral Ah me! conceiv'd in sin, and born in sorrow, The sins and dangers I am subject to: From birth stained, with <i>Adam's</i> sinful fact, As many was my sins, so dangers too, For sin brings sorrow, sickness, death, and woe, Remembering not the dreadful day of Doom, Nor yet the heavy reckoning for to come, And I shall see with these same very eyes My strong Redeemer coming in the skies. Medical The vexing Stone, in bladder and in reins, The knotty Gout doth sadly torture me, And the Consumption to the bones doth waste me, Sometimes by wounds in idle combats taken, Sometimes by Agues all my body shaken; Sometimes by Fevers, all my moisture drinking, My heart lies frying, and my eyes are sinking. Sometimes the Cough, Stitch, painful Pleurisy, With sad affrights of death, do menace me. Sometimes the loathsome Pox my face be-mars With ugly marks of his eternal scars. Sometimes the Frenzy strangely mads my Brain That oft for it in <i>Bedlam</i> I remain My comely legs, as nimble as the Roe, Now stiff and numb, can hardly creep or go. Limits Man at his best estate is vanity. In every Age I've found much vanity. An end of all perfection now I see. My memory is short and brain is dry. I cannot labour, nor I cannot fight:
Upon Some Distemper of Body	Moral Medical	Moral And looking up unto his throne on high, Who sendeth help to those in misery; He chased away those clouds and let me see He eased my soul of woe, my flesh of pain, Medical Then eyes lay dry, disabled to weep more;

From New English Canaan (The Poem)	Medical	Medical Rise Oedipeus, and, if thou canst, unfould Though Scilla's sick with greife, because no signe Can there be found of vertue masculine. Esculapius come; I know right well His laboure's lost when you may ring her Knell.
Carmen Elegiacvm	Moral	Moral That knives and halters, ponds, and poysonous things Are alwayes ready, when the Divell once brings Such deadly sinners to a deepe remorse Of conscience selfe accusing, that will force Them to dispaire, like wicked Kain, whiles death Stands ready with all these to stopp their breath. Shee was too good for earth, too bad for heaven.
Epitaph	Limits	Limits For underneath this heape of stones Lieth a percell of small bones; What hope at last can such impes have, That from the wombe goes to the grave.
The Day of Doom	Moral	Moral Wallowing in all kind of sin, vile wretches lay secure: Sinners awake, their hearts do ake, trembling their loynes surprizeth; Amaz'd with fear, by what they hear, With mighty voice, and hideous noise, more terrible than Thunder. No heart so bold, but now grows cold and almost dead with fear: No eye so dry, but now can cry, and pour out many a tear. Some hide themselves in Caves and Delves, in places under ground: Some rashly leap into the Deep, No hiding place can from his Face sinners at all conceal, Whose flaming Eye hid things doth 'spy and darkest things reveal. Both good and bad, both quick and dead, and all to Judgment bring. Out of their holes those creeping Moles, that hid themselves for fear, By force they take, and quickly make before the Judge appear. (To sinners sad) 'twixt good and bad, 'twixt Heirs of woe and bliss.
Sentence and Torment of the Condemned	Moral	Moral No Friends so near, but Saints to hear their Sentence can abide. What? to depart'(unto our smart) from thee Eternally: To be for aye banish'd away, with Devils company! What? to be sent to Punishment, and flames of Burning Fire, To be surrounded, and eke confounded with Gods Revengeful ire! What? to abide, not for a tide these Torments, but for Ever: To be released, or to be eased, not after years, but Never. Oh fearful Doom! now there's no room for hope of help at all: Sentence is past which aye shall last, Christ will not it recall. For tort'ring pain which, they sustain in body and in Soul. For day and night, in their despight, their torments smoak ascendeth. Their pain and grief have no relief, their anguish never endeth. There must they ly, and never dy, though dying every day: There must they dying ever ly, and not consume away.

		Dy fain they would, if dy they could, but death will not be had. God's direful wrath their bodies hath for ev'r Immortal made. They live to ly in misery, and bear eternal wo; Who fare the best, and feel the least, yet feel that punishment Whereby to nought they should be brought, if God did not prevent.
Huswifery	Moral	Moral Make me, O Lord, thy Spining Wheele compleate. Thy Holy Worde my Distaff make for mee. Make mine Affections thy Swift Flyers neate And make my Soule thy holy Spoole to bee. My Conversation make to be thy Reelee And reele the yarn thereon spun of thy Wheele. Then cloath therewith mine Understanding, Will, Affections, Judgment, Conscience, Memory My Words, and Actions, that their shine may fill My wayes with glory and thee glorify.
Upon a Spider Catching a Fly	Moral Charity Limits	Moral To tangle Adams race In's stratigems To their Destructions, spoil'd, made base By venom things, Damn'd Sins. Charity Whereas the silly Fly, Caught by its leg But mighty, Gracious Lord Communicate Thy Grace to breake the Cord, afford Limits Strive not above what strength hath got,
The Body of Divinity Versified	Moral	Moral Tasting Forbidden Fruit our Parents fell; This Taste has plung'd Mankind all down to Hell. Our Blest Lord JESUS CHRIST, in our Distress, Comes to fetch us from Hell to Blessedness. The Wicked shall bear bitter Pain and Shame, With Wicked Spirits in Eternal Flame. The Godly shall, with their Great GOD, on High, Reap Joyes, High Joyes, to all Eternity "To Judge the World, CHRIST will descend at Last; A Righteous Doom shall by that Judge be past."
The Grammarians Funeral	Cultural	Cultural Eight Parts of Speech this Day wear Mourning Gowns Declin'd Verbs, Pronouns, Participles, Nouns. And not declined, Adverbs and Conjunctions, In Lillies Porch they stand to do their functions. That want the Vocative, and can't say O! What Syntax here can you expect to find? The Verbs irregular, 'twas thought by some, Would break no rule, if they were pleas'd to come. Such Nouns and Verbs as we defective find, No Grammar Rule did their attendance bind. Prosodia gives the measure Word for Word.
American Renaissance		
The Sphinx	Limits	Limits But man crouches and blushes, Absconds and conceals; He creepeth and peepeth, He palters and steals; Infirm, melancholy,

		The fate of the man-child; The meaning of man; Known fruit of the unknown; Daedalian plan; Out of sleeping a waking, Out of waking a sleep; Thou art the unanswered question; Couldst see they proper eye, Alway it asketh, asketh; And each answer is a lie. So take thy quest through nature,
Conscience	Limits	Limits A soul so sound no sickly conscience binds it, I love a soul not all of wood, Predestinated to be good, Give me simple laboring folk, Who love their work,
Song of the Broad-Axe	Moral	Moral Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands, Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands, There the great city stands. All waits or goes by default till a strong being appears; A strong being is the proof of the race and of the ability of the universe, Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards, And nothing endures but personal qualities.
Song of Myself	Limits Identity Cultural Social	Limits Agonies are one of my changes of garments, I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there Identity I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person, My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe. I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken, Tumbling walls buried me in their debris, I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul, I celebrate myself, and sing myself, Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean, Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest. Culture Through me many long dumb voices, Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves, Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs, Social There shall be no difference between them and the rest. Whoever degrades another degrades me, And whatever is done or said returns at last to me. Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me the current and index. I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy, By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.
The Wound-Dresser	Social	Social To each and all one after another I draw near, not one do I miss, I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young, Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad, (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested,

		Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.) From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood, Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side falling head, His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump,
I felt a funeral, in my Brain	Social	Social Kept treading - treading - till it seemed That Sense was breaking through - And when they all were seated, A Service, like a Drum - Kept beating - beating - till I thought My mind was going numb - And then I heard them lift a Box And creak across my Soul And I, and Silence, some strange Race, Wrecked, solitary, here - And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
I'm Nobody! Who are you?	Social Identity	Social They'd banish us; you know! How dreary to be somebody! Identity Then there's a pair of us How public like a frog To tell one's name the livelong day
They shut me up in Prose	Social	Social They shut me up in Prose – They put me in the Closet – Because they liked me “still” – They might as wise have lodged a Bird For Treason – in the Pound –
The College Colonel	Social	Social There are welcoming shouts, and flags; Old men off hat to the Boy, Wreaths from gay balconies fall at his feet, But to <i>him</i>—there comes alloy. It is not that a leg is lost, It is not that an arm is maimed. It is not that the fever has racked— Self he has long disclaimed. It is not that a leg is lost, It is not that an arm is maimed. It is not that the fever has racked— Self he has long disclaimed. Ah heaven!—what <i>truth</i> to him.
In the Prison Pen	Social	Social 'Tis barren as a pelican-beach— But his world is ended there. Nothing to do; and vacant hands Bring on the idiot-pain; He tries to think—to recollect, But the blur is on his brain. A smiting sun. No shed, no tree; He totters to his lair— A den that sick hands dug in earth Till forth from the throngs they bear him dead— Dead in his meagerness.
Go to the Grave	Moral	Moral

		Go to the grave where friends are laid, And learn how quickly mortals fade, Learn how the fairest flower must droop, Learn how the strongest form must stoop, Learn that we are but dust and clay, The short-liv'd creatures of a day. The grave to them is but a road,
The Darken'd Veil	Moral	Moral Oh could I raise the darken'd veil, Which hides my future life from me, Would make me seek the lonely tomb To slumber in its endless gloom. Then let me never cast a look, Within Fate's fix'd mysterious book.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATIONAL STATUS	
High School	Faik Fikriye Torunoğulları Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School
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Master's (Y. Lisans)	Akdeniz University, Department of English Language and Literature
Tez Konu Başlığı	The Poetic Symbolism of Disability from a Comparative-Historical Perspective: American Puritan Poetry and the Poetry of the American Renaissance
Foreign Languages	Turkish (Native), English (C1), German (A1)
PUBLICATIONS	
Articles Cihantimur, T. (2024). Reading John Lee's poetry with disability studies. <i>Creative Flight: An International Half-Yearly Open Access Peer- Reviewed E-Journal in English</i>, 5(2), 98-113. Book Chapters Zorba, M. G., Cihantimur, T., & Arikan, A. (2025). On pedagogical stylistics, sustainability, and disability in language teaching: Suggested activities. In İ. H. Mirici (Ed.), <i>A multidimensional perspective on educational practices</i> (19–31). Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Arikan, A., & Cihantimur, T., (2025). The (Neo)Medieval on Instagram: A netnographic descriptive study. In S. Şentürk (Ed.), <i>Academic Encounters 2025: Intersecting Perspectives on Languages, Literatures, and Cultures</i> (35-54), İstanbul: Çizgi. Presentations Arikan, A., & Cihantimur, T. (2024). On disability theory and its uses in literary studies. <i>The 8th International Halich Congress</i>, December 3-5, Istanbul (Online).	