

**Jacqueline GOLDBERG**

## **The Writing from the Tremor**

*We are not here to heal our illnesses.  
Our illnesses are here to heal us.*

Carl Jung

*Health as literature, as writing,  
consists in inventing a people who are missing.*

Gilles Deleuze

I became a writer at a very young age, following the dictate of my body. Today, I keep on writing because my body demands one portion of reality, another of words and silence.

The tremors of my hands led me to writing. At first, to escape from the bullying I suffered by my classmates in school, to make my loneliness bearable. Then I understood that writing was the passageway to other borders, which allowed me to speak for myself beyond the disability that still today prevents a cup of tea from following a straight path to my lips, a pencil from tracing gentle figures, a sheet of paper from being calmly held in these hands.

Shaking has always been the most willful of my unwillingnesses. I am a writer, at will, because I tremble, because my body unwillingly shakes.

Someone told me once the day I'd write about my tremor would be the day I'd stop shaking. It was a joke, not a promise. I wrote a book about my shaking, *The Room of Tremors* (*El cuarto de los temblores*, OTeditores, Caracas, 2018), and here I am, still shaking.

Let me tell you the story about my tremor, which is the story of a writing body, a body that shakes, a body that shakes and writes. I was four years old when it appeared. My parents were the first ones to notice. We were gathered around the kitchen table. It was enormous: it had horns, scales, wings, claws, a tail, a big nose, a hump. It howled, it barked, it purred. We tried to get back. We couldn't.

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ICPL and the International Writing Program Panel Series, September 14, 2018

Al-Nadi (Jordan), Ali (Pakistan), Goldberg (Venezuela), Pachyan (Armenia)

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From that moment, countless neurological tests started. We went on many trips seeking the reason for my tremor. All encephalographic scans, x-ray scans, blood tests, scrutinizing looks, always turned out to appear “normal.” Normal. That was the tragedy. We were hoping for a harsh remark, an anomaly, a pit, an end.

Not only did they take me to see doctors, but also to a man at the border who prescribed plants, to a Chinese doctor who filled my back with needles, to a fortune teller. So many trips. So many small trips to my body.

Writing was the hardest part of my condition. My handwriting is ugly, zigzagging, almost indecipherable. I spend numerous hours on hand-writing a page, a task that, for others, would only be a matter of minutes. It happens the same with bureaucratic forms. My handwriting is the identity of the tremor, and it is always my handwriting which arouses suspicion. For that reason, at age seven I was already typing on the Olivetti typewriter that my parents had in their optical store. After that, I worked on a typewriter which would become mine, placed in the center of *A Room of One's Own*.

Only twenty years have passed since my tremor acquired a proper name: Myoclonus-Dystonia. It is supposedly a congenital disease, not a degenerative one, located in the gene DYT11 of the chromosome 7q21-q22. It is a rare, minority condition, one without a rear-view mirror. An orphan disease. I say this with no certainty, because I have not been able yet to get tested on it.

I never wanted to be an astronaut, because I tremble.  
I didn't see myself becoming a flower vendor, because I tremble.  
I didn't dream of being a watchmaker, because I tremble.  
I did become a writer, precisely, because I tremble.

Susan Sontag says in *Illness As Metaphor* that “everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick.” Tremors provokes that every few seconds I switch from living in one kingdom to living in the other.

I am not always shaking, even if I just did.  
And I am not the only one shaking. Other writers shook for many reasons: William Shakeaspeare, Brian O'Neil, Imre Kertesz. Even Saint Teresa of Ávila, the mystic Carmelite nun—who, interestingly enough, was named the patron saint of Spanish writers—all trembled.

Our body is the epicenter of powerful metaphors. The place where language shakes, where its pleasure and its power lie. Our body is in itself a shaking text.  
Our body leads to writing. Each body does what it can.  
Our body demands a syntax to place some order in the world, to avoid becoming completely astray in it.

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If my body didn't shake, I wouldn't need the stroke of writing lightning.  
If I didn't have a tremble-body, the world would be imperfect and illegible.  
If I didn't shake, I wouldn't be here in Iowa, speaking on this panel for the International Writing Program, shaking.

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