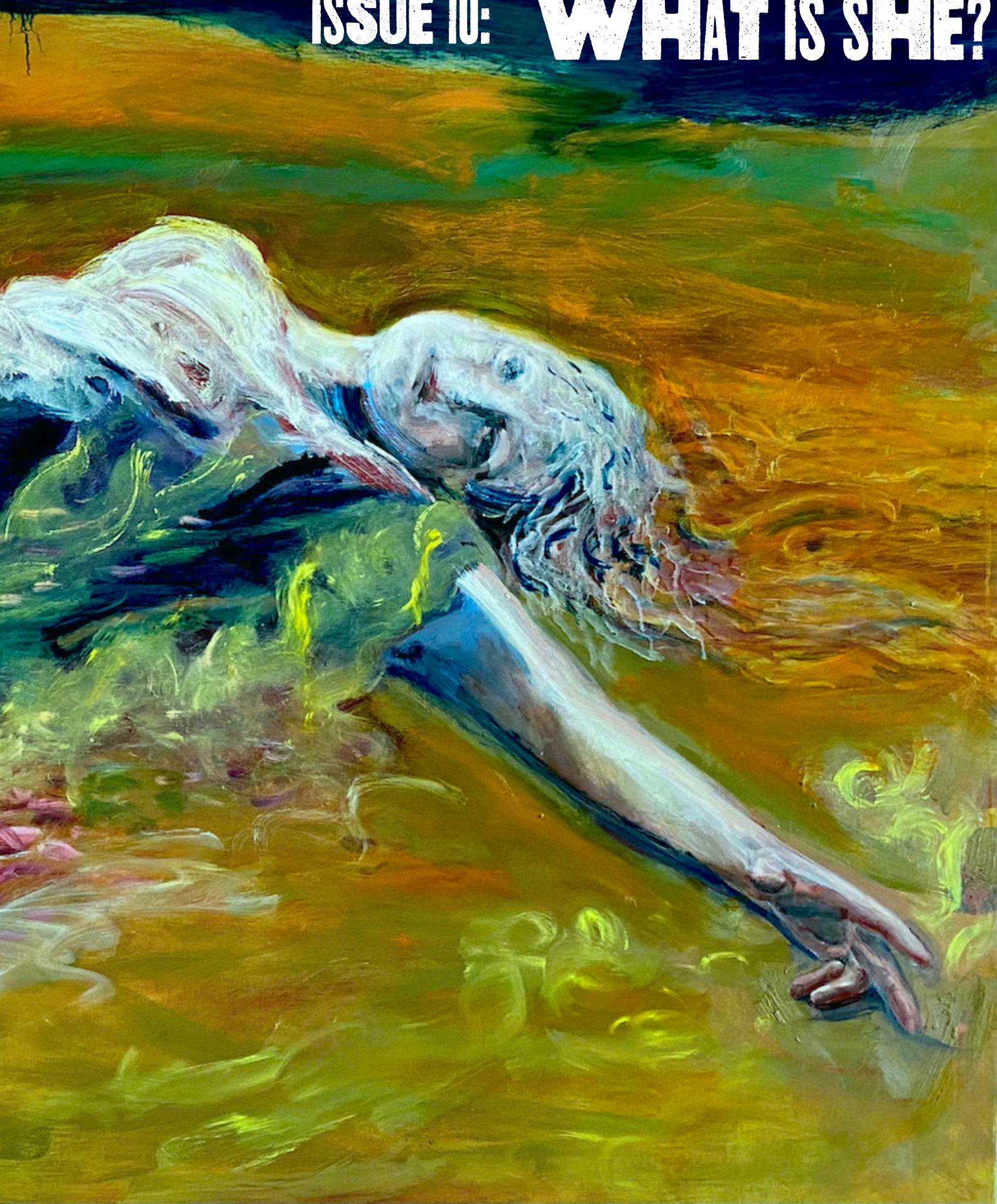


# FEMINIST SPACES

ISSUE 10: **WHAT IS SHE?**





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Cover Image, *Descanso* by Sandra Cavanagh  
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

*Feminist Spaces* addresses the inequities that plague women internationally. We acknowledge, however, that the marginalization that we examine in our issues does not exclusively affect individuals who identify as women. As an intersectional journal, we believe that all social issues are interconnected. A feminist not only acknowledges the struggles of all marginalized identities—including women of color and transgender, queer, fat, and disabled individuals—but also seeks to deconstruct the oppressive structures that affect these groups. This year, the team at *Feminist Spaces* reflected on the disparities surrounding gender fluidity, which sparked this issue's theme, "What Is *She*?" in which we ask our community to ponder what the word "she" really means—to society, as a pronoun, as an expectation, as an oppressor, as a stereotype. This topic requires a larger discourse, and for this issue of *Feminist Spaces*, the conduit is creative. As a first for our journal, creative submissions far outnumbered the academic. We see this high volume of creative submissions as a commentary on the polarization that society suggests that gender inhabits, as creative work often mirrors the fluidity of gender expression, requiring experiential interpretation. Women have long sought creative mediums as an outlet for expression, and Issue 10 showcases the preservation and exploration of this tradition. This issue forces reader participation and asks that you become part of the text—part of the conversation.

The belief that gender is a social construct, rather than a biological truth, remains globally threatened, resulting in increased



social pressure to conform to the gender expectations affiliated with one's biological sex. Linking gender with sex not only disregards the unique experiences of intersex people, but it also excuses and encourages the marginalization of any individual who does not adhere to social expectations of gender. In an attempt to deconstruct these rigid gender roles, we amplify the diverse voices of those who experience the negative effects resulting from the perpetuation of gender biases. The statistics are evident in Courtney Chapman's article "Intersectional Analysis of News Coverage of Fatal Violence against Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Individuals" in which Chapman investigates misrepresentations of gender identity in the media and exposes the stereotyping of news coverage about transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, revealing the long-term negative effects of this unequal treatment. Other interpretations of "What Is *She*" intervene in the break between gender and identity. Cover artist Sandra Cavanagh, for example, offers a varied visual experience with her oil paintings titled "*Descanso*," "*Las Amazonas*," and "*Dressing the Bride*." We are pleased and proud to showcase Cavanagh's "*Descanso*" on the cover of Issue 10, as her use of color blending breeds difficulty in deciphering whether the depicted subject is melting into the ground, laying in the grass, or becoming one with the Earth. Nature is often deemed inherently feminine, and we find that this piece, along with Heather Davey's essay "Ecofeminism and the 'Undomesticated Space' in *Jane Eyre*," both challenges and welcomes the assumption that nature is an innate facet of femininity. This issue also includes many inspirational artistic interpretations of *She* and, through these creative works, summons the reader's intellectual interaction. For instance, M.A. Dubbs' poem, "*Ella* Everlasting" beautifully manipulates language to express the varying functions of *She* both grammatically and socially. Dubbs uses the Spanish pronoun "ella," meaning "she," to represent lineage. "Ella" acts as a collective identity of those who identify with the pronoun, and those who reject it, depicting experiences unique to Spanish-speaking individuals.

Sharing this issue would not be possible without the continued support of the University of West Florida's English Department. Specifically, we would like to thank our department chair Dr. Kevin Scott and journal advisor Dr. Robin Blyn for their endless support and invaluable guidance. We hear your voices because our advisors remain interested and involved in creative and scholarly feminist discourses. We also owe many thanks to the TAG Design Team for their creative journal design. They execute our vision with creative precision.

Every contribution to this issue is highly valued and necessary for the conversation surrounding *She*. But the conversation cannot end with this issue. Carry the discourse, create content, and spread the word. Your participation as contributors and readers fuels the journal's perseverance. Thank you for doing your part. If you wish to contribute to our next issue or would like to learn more about us, you can follow us on Instagram @feminist.spaces, e-mail us at [feministspacesjournal@gmail.com](mailto:feministspacesjournal@gmail.com), or check out our website.

Thank you for your support.

*Feminist Spaces* Editorial Board

# EDITORIAL BOARD BIOGRAPHIES

## Editors-in-chief:

**Natalie Duphiney** (she/her) is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in English. She enjoys fiction writing, and her poetry has been exhibited at the Pensacola Museum of Art and published in *Door Is a Jar* journal and *Unstamatic* magazine. She works as an English writing tutor and hopes to do technical writing and editing after graduation. She also enjoys pole dancing, choral singing, roller skating, and running.

**Sydney Mosley** (she/her) is currently pursuing an M.A. in creative writing at the University of West Florida, and she has the intention of obtaining a doctorate degree in her future. Sydney has a love for writing and enjoys many mediums such as poetry, long-form prose, and playwriting, but she loves writing thrillers and free verse poetry the most. You can read some of Sydney's poetry in creative writing magazines *The Spiral* and *Troubadour*. Outside of writing, you can find Sydney baking vegan and gluten-free pastries; pole dancing; collecting used books; or taking her pittie, Maple, for a hike.

## Managing editors:

**Ashley Byrd** (she/her) is a senior graduate student at the University of West Florida. She earned a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in women's, sexuality, and gender studies in 2022 and plans to one day continue her education as a doctorate student. As a published poet and author, she hopes to continue advocating for gender equality and supporting the queer community through her writing.

**Jurnee French** (she/her) is a graduate student pursuing her master's in creative writing. Though her passion originally pointed to full-length novels, her years in academia have altered her focus to poetry and short-form writing. In the future, she hopes to pursue teaching English as a foreign language.

## Intern:

**Lauren Watkins** (she/her) is a self-proclaimed latchkey kid of the web. She is an artist, poet, and web page butcher; her work concerns the post-digital cyberculture shift through various topics such as eco-feminism, consumer aesthetics, and the virtual landscape. She has previously been published in *ctrl+v journal*, and she is a managing editor for *Venus Hour Literary Magazine*. Lauren is currently a graduate student studying creative writing at the University of West Florida.



## Associate editors:

**Farrah Hale** (she/her) is pursuing a Master of Arts in creative writing from the University of West Florida. She also teaches seventh-grade English and English Composition at the University of West Florida. She has a passion for writing flash fiction and poetry, and you can find some of Farrah's flash fiction in the 2024 UWF *Troubadour*. When she isn't working, you can find Farrah near the water with her two daughters; adding to her to-be-read stack; or lounging at home with her cats, dog, and kids.

**Allissa Sandefur** (she/her) is an English graduate student, poet, and feminist. Her work has been featured in *Harness* magazine, *The Blackwater Review*, *dipity* literary magazine, and UWF's own *Troubadour*. Her current focus is a poetry manuscript concerned with grief and its transformative effects on girlhood. After completing her master's degree, she will begin a PhD program in Renaissance studies at the University of Alabama, where she hopes to teach the application of feminist theory to English literature.

**Max Pietsch** (she/him) is a gender-fluid individual that has a passion for feminism and equality. He is currently taking time off from working toward his bachelor's in psychology. When not at work, she can be found playing video games or just cuddling with her two cats.

# A SERIES OF UNCONNECTED FEMALE FIGURES

I'd like to refuse to be the ethereal counter  
To your stoic earthiness. But it's so satisfying to be a timeless wraith.  
Such a graceful  
Giving in,  
To all these millennia of disassociated voices  
(Come with us, come with us). We will define the hearts of men  
And be untouchable, even as we're handled roughly over and over.  
It's all method acting.  
Playing nature  
is divine:  
Cut off our hands and tongue and we will conjure a depth of  
emotion like the world  
has never seen.  
Magdalene is dead but our echoes are still  
A beautiful assaulted water nymph, ever caught  
Ever turned into another  
powerful,  
insubstantial being  
Smoke drifting on and upwards  
watering their eyes.  
I don't eat air like men, but

If you look closely  
my joints still twist  
threateningly /  
in desperate search for form



# THE NAMES OF WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

Sarah didn't find out her grandmothers' real name until she died, and there was no one else to collect her body. But Sarah never really cared about a name. Naomi, Nana, Grandmother, Sister, Ma, Child. Names were fluid in Naomi's life and eventually in Sarah's. Despite this, Naomi existed. She carried in fresh plums from the backyard. She took mother-form and carried Sarah to school. Bought Sarah her first training bra, a graying garment. Her first tube of mascara, brown. And her first package of pink-wrapped maxi pads.

Naomi, Ma, Grandmother, Nana, stands erect, chopping a bush in the backyard. She sits in the reading chair with a book. She hums in the kitchen, frying okra and pork chops. And that's where she was before Sarah learned her real name, compared to a memory, an apparition in the garden, or a simple reflection in dirty dishwater—an old life fluttering in and out of peripheral vision.

Sarah remembered Naomi's life stroking wet—blending into the landscape, Naomi's mother had left to her, and so on. But Sarah desired a bone-dry piece of canvas, a splintered piece of wood to rub herself against. A place that would know her mark and her it—splinters and all.

"Look here. You'll want to know this when I'm gone," Naomi said over a few hot pans. And after a while, she continued, "Don't get married."

Sarah chewed okra quickly, anticipating she had something to say to her. Eighteen years grew on Sarah like that training bra, tightening, filling up and out—never wanting to be told: stay put.

"Yeah, but you did."

"And I regretted it," Naomi whispered. She flipped a pork

chop. Grease sputtered across yellowed linoleum counters. Naomi slammed a plywood cupboard shut and cut some cold deli ham into her palm to toss into the green beans simmering away on the back of the stove. Sarah traced a burnt pan mark, an endless circle of scorch. Nothing bleach could elbow-grease out. Naomi's two pocket linen slacks faded at the knees, and the armpit of her denim blouse left little peepholes where her pale skin, untouched by garden sunshine, broke through. Her body, long and arthritic, jolted with her attempts at movement.

"You cook for a man 30 years. You'll see."

Naomi liked her salt with a little bit of food and whole lemons in her iced tea. All things a man could not provide for her because she could provide it for herself. Dreams are much like small things such as salt and lemons, something we crave but are too guilty to be as indulgent despite their ease.

Sarah remembers how Naomi said it then; words, meanings of many cigarette butts floating in a Coke without fizz. Naomi spent 30 years married to the same man. The kitchen stained with nicotine, the peeling floral wallpaper, the croaking frogs overpowering the popping grease—these things about home and about Naomi are inseparable from Sarah and who she thought she was. Sarah remembers fixing her grandfather's plate with no salt and feeling as if Naomi knew then, right then, who Sarah would become and that she could do nothing about it.

A year from that day, Sarah met Abraham. He was the kind of young man fresh out of seminary school, a fine-toothed comb deep in his pocket. He was a vase of lilies on Sarah's front porch. A jar of Tupelo honey from a town over the state line. Abraham was the standing ovation to an angel's food cake mix that was littered with oozing, over-ripe berries from the back of the ice box. He was the congregation's hands as they slapped into each other when Sarah bowed down, red in the face.

Soon, Sarah's belly grew round, engorged with life—growing by

the day, fuller and heavier. Abraham made her sit with her legs high on the wall with a Bible opened on her stomach. She crooned at the pages until her name fluttered around a verse, and she stopped. There, on a page, she was asking God to give her a child. Sarah fiddled with her wedding band, sliding it around, on and off. She thought about how unoriginal bible names were and the types of people who named their children after parables.

She could see how God gave, and He took like lapping waves of the ocean, with no meaning—almost as if she, they, whoever folded in the pages could count on His cruel humor, laying out names that never meant anything.

*Vase. Lily. Honey. Cake. Wife. Red Raspberry Leaf. Moon Cycle. Baby.*

As if a name could speak about a person, give them a plan, and give a person meaning when living inside a world of grocery lists and burp bibs. What does wife even mean? Sarah didn't want a child, and marriage, she realized, reflected a note tacked to the refrigerator: Ephesians 5:22, handwritten by Abraham.

*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.*

Sarah did not want one more reason to stay. She thought about Naomi often, how right she had been, despite never letting herself admit it. However, Sarah had only lasted four missed cycles in her marriage.

Something about *Sarah's Uterus, Vagina, Vulva, Mons Pubis, Labia Majora, and Fimbria* was perfect for plucking. Names that have no meaning to her as a new mother, an ex-heifer. But, blood—clumps—toilet bowl strainer do mean something to Sarah. These names carry relief, destruction in syllables, and a neat doctor cadence.

Sarah's loss of God's grace carries a Luciferian fall in signed slips of paper, the turning over of an insurance card folded neatly unto nameless hands. Naomi nods solemnly when cries bubble out from

under Sarah's tongue, a little girl escaping to grasp for Polly Pocket's favorite shoes lost, the death of a goldfish, not enough glitter.

A feeling washes over Sarah that is indescribable by words, then and now; simultaneously, she tries to tack on its name: guilt, grief, worry, insignificance, empowerment, and tries to wash them away. Wanting nothing more but to wake up before being fertile became her. But these feelings are like droplets of water, starting to surge out of her heart like an ever-flowing riverdamned up in her body until they pour out as tears. Names are not just words—names are stories, a resonance of identity. And still, Sarah wishes to digest the pages of the Bible, feel as the names of Hagar and Boaz and Yahweh are leached by her stomach acid to dance as lambs dance.

Naomi plucked Sarah straight from the hospital bed, swiping an extra pack of adult diapers from the nurse's station. Grand-human, mother-thing, Naomi was quick to assess the damage as if she had been born into her role to soothe with macaroni made from jarred, shelf-stable cheese.

"You ain't a heifer no more," she said—sweat from her brow, drawing a sunhat from the coat rack. "Maybe you ain't meant to have no babies."

"Nana, it was my choice."

"Yous just heartsick. Don't you go and ruminate on alla' that."

"No, Nana. I'm being serious. It was my choice. I didn't want it."

Naomi took the hat off her greying head. She flips sweat over Sarah's left shoulder.

Sarah's face fell lopsided in the sunlight, and leaves flickered darkness on her cheeks. The heat grew between her legs as the warmth became stuck in her hospital diaper. Naomi watched Sarah go crooked.

Naomi said, "I said don't you go ruminate on that. I mean it when I say some women just ain't meant to have children. And I ain't being ugly with you Sarah. There's nothin' wrong with having no babies. You ain't missin' out." Naomi's pause lifted Sarah to a



strange place, where her mind felt like a flour sift—taking in what was put there, sorting out the bits that did not suit.

"But you's still a mother. You ain't no heifer." Naomi said with a few snaps of garden shears—it was rhythmic. *Mother*. An empty womb, Sarah recalls, was supposed to separate herself from such a term. And despite what Naomi thought, *Mother*, floated out her mouth and into the air, depositing only droplets upon a bubbling creek below them. *Mother* stung but didn't stick to Sarah like she had believed it would. She winced when the syllables fell out of Naomi's parched mouth, but the words did not stick or scar; instead, they floated away, congealing with the humidity of summer. What Naomi thought of Sarah was no more real than what Sarah believed of herself.

Sarah kicked off her plastic flip-flops and stuck her feet into the steady stream of coffee water crawling by the bank's edge. Naomi continued with a slight unease in her shoulders but began to hum softly as she chopped a childhood lullaby Sarah recognized. Sarah turned around from the base of her neck and saw only yellow, straight through Naomi. Then, for a moment, they were staring at a giant honeysuckle bush, taking in its sweet fragrance—the carpenter bees gently scraping by their bodies. Taking deep breaths. The first Sarah: God changed her name. It is impossible to be defined by one single name. Like a snake cannot be defined by his molt at a given time. Or a hurricane from one rain droplet. Because when you start to finally be something, you are suddenly half-something else. Taking form like clay in a thunderstorm.

Naomi and Sarah laugh until they are just heat, light, and sound striking far in the vast desert that is their lives.



***When Doubts Overcome You***

Irina Tall



# INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF NEWS COVERAGE OF FATAL VIOLENCE AGAINST TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING INDIVIDUALS

In the past decade, there has been a rise in violence, specifically fatal violence, against Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) individuals. Research has found news coverage of these victims to be reflective of the negative stereotypes imposed upon those in LGBTQIA+ communities. These studies provide a crucial foundation for a more comprehensive analysis of how the news coverage differs based on the victims' intersectional identities. Intersectionality refers to the heightened discrimination experienced by people who have multiple marginalized identities (Crenshaw 1989). The present study looks at a sample of news articles (n=81) of 32 TGNC victims of fatal violence in 2023. The findings address the types of positive language, types of negative language, misgendering, and focus on the victims' TGNC status while considering the victims' race and gender identity. An intersectional lens is necessary for research because a broad lens of media analyses of TGNC victims in previous studies results in harmful generalizations of the news coverage. Table 1 lists keywords used throughout the paper, commonly used by TGNC communities.

**Table 1** *Background terms on gender identity*

Term	Definition
Gender Identity	One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth (HRC 2024b).
Gender Nonconforming	A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectation of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. For some people, "gender non-conforming" may also be the gender identity they most identify with, or the gender identity label they use to describe themselves to others (HRC 2024b).
Transgender	Relating to a person who identifies as a different gender from their gender as determined at birth (HRC 2024b).
Nonbinary	An adjective describing a person who does not identity exclusively as man or woman—as well as a gender identity some may use to identify or describe themselves (HRC 2024b).
Deadname	A name given to a trans person, typically at birth, that they no longer use (TJA 2024).



# Literature Review

## Violence against Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Individuals

Policing of gender-nonconforming individuals has occurred in the United States since colonization by the Europeans in the 1500s (Bronski 2011; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011). Imposing the gender binary, establishing a gender hierarchy, and enforcing laws on sexual practices deemed deviant were "essential to the formation of the U.S. nation-state on Indigenous land" (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011, 3). Those in power did not enforce these practices equally, and they worked to reinforce hierarchies of race, class, and gender through laws and norms (Bronski 2011; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011). The criminalization of individuals not conforming to European gender ideologies began the "melding of homosexuality and gender nonconformity with concepts of danger, degeneracy, disorder, deception, disease, contagion, sexual predation, depravity, subversion, encroachment, and violence" (Mogul, Ritchie, Whitlock 2011, 23). These stereotypes persist today and continue the oppression of marginalized groups, as seen in the current violence and rhetoric against TGNC individuals (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024; Mogul, Ritchie, Whitlock 2011).

There has been an alarming spike in hate crimes and fatal violence against TGNC individuals in recent years. As of 2024, "nearly half of all TGNC people experience sexual assault, harassment, or intimate partner violence at some point in their lives" (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024, 50). This information is concurrent with the increase in legislation across the country focused on restricting TGNC rights (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024). Some of these bills aim to control gender expression and conversations in educational settings, participation in sports aligning with gender identity, and access to gender-affirming healthcare (Trans Legislation 2024). In 2009, the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate

Crime Prevention Act created a classification of hate crimes based on gender identity and sexual orientation (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024; LGBTQ History 2023). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began including anti-transgender violence as a hate crime in 2013 (FBI 2023; HRC 2023). The FBI concluded that "[a]lmost 500 gender identity-motivated hate crimes were recorded in 2022," including attacks, bomb threats, violent protests, and even fire-bombings (FBI 2023; HRC 2023). These numbers from the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) are most likely under-reported as they are collected voluntarily (FBI 2023; HRC 2023; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011). These numbers are also likely underreported because "[i]ndividuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, often have a strained relationship with the police and are less inclined to disclose their victimization to authorities" (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024, 28). As a result, many hate crimes can go unreported by victims, creating an unclear picture of the reality of the crimes (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024; Meyer 2015). Even when reported to law enforcement, crimes fueled by anti-transgender bias may not be charged as a hate crime, further undercounting the victims (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024, 28). These issues impact TGNC individuals at higher rates, but everyone who identifies as TGNC is not impacted the same (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024; HRC 2023; Meyer 2015; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011).

Individual experiences in the TGNC communities cannot be understood by solely focusing on gender identity. Race, social class, sexuality, and other individualistic factors contribute to the varied experiences in the lives of TGNC people (Clevenger, Kelley, Ratajczak 2024; Meyer 2015). Often, hate crimes and the underreporting of hate crimes disproportionately impact "people living at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities" (Clevenger, Kelley, Ratajczak 2024; HRC 2013). The combined transphobia, sexism, misogyny, and racism that TGNC individuals face can intensify the violence and discrimination imposed upon them (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024; Meyer 2015). The

Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which has been tracking fatal violence against TGNC individuals since 2013, shows the disparities in 326 victims over the past ten years. Since 2013, 85 percent of the victims of fatal violence are people of color, 83.3 percent of the victims of fatal violence identify as women, and 62 percent of the victims of fatal violence are Black transgender women (HRC 2023). These statistics directly reflect the intensified risk of discrimination and violence that people who identify with multiple marginalized groups experience.

## News Framing Analysis

How news sources present information is important because "the media can control and shape the knowledge and understanding that we, their audience, develop about the world" (McCullagh and Campling 2002, 15). Newspapers achieve this influence through a variety of framing techniques. McCullagh and Campling (2002) defines frames as "patterns of cognitive interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion" (25). Frames in news coverage are often not recognized by audiences, causing audiences to be unknowingly influenced by framing in the news (Matthes 2009; McCullagh and Campling 2002). A common type of framing that can affect the interpretation of news coverage is selectivity (McCullagh and Campling 2002; Van Dijk 1988). Selectivity of news coverage is the conscious or unconscious choices of what information to include (McCullagh and Campling 2002). For example, choosing which event to write articles on or what information or photographs to include is selectivity (Matthes 2009; McCullagh and Campling 2002). Due to the selectivity of news coverage, not all stories and information are shown in their entirety or at all. In this example, selectivity can cause "[a] distortion and a misrepresentation of significant events and issues in the world" (McCullagh and Campling 2002, 9).

Framing also occurs in news coverage through language and sentence structure (Van Dijk 1988). The language chosen in

news coverage is significant as it can influence the audience's understanding of the events with the definitions and connotations of specific words (McCullagh and Campling 2002). McCullagh and Campling's example of word choice is "to characterize a trade union as making demands and management as making offers is to convey very different meanings about what are generally comparable negotiating strategies" (2002, 23). While both word choices explain a similar action, they lead to different conclusions for the audience. The word "demands" provides a tone of authority or forcefulness, while "offers" provides a passive tone. The structure of sentences in news coverage can influence the audience's understanding because "the general principle is that important information must come first" (Van Dijk 1988, 19). Placing certain information at the beginning of an article, or the beginning of a sentence, gives it prevalence, showing the audience what they should focus on. Sentence structure thus can influence the audience's interpretation of the news article (Van Dijk 1988).

Other important framing techniques for this study are episodic and thematic framing. Episodic framing is when an event is presented as a singular issue, while thematic framing gives context to the event to show it on a broader level (Iyengar 1996). These types of framing can influence how audiences interpret the causation of events. For example, Iyengar's (1996) study showed that, when the media framed poverty episodically, the audience was likely to attribute blame to the individual. In this example, episodic framing led audiences to conclusions that are not entirely accurate. When poverty was framed thematically in Iyengar's (1996) study, the audience was more likely to recognize it as a societal issue. Thematic framing can help audiences connect specific incidents for a clearer understanding of events covered by the media (Iyengar 1996).

The valued perspective of White, male, middle-class, heteronormative audiences usually influence the frames in news coverage (McCullagh and Campling 2002; Usher 2023; Van Dijk 1988). An example of this influence is the selectivity of news coverage, giving more attention to the powerful, wealthy,



and ideal story pieces (McCullagh and Campling 2002; Usher 2023). The effect of this viewpoint is also evident in the language, sentence structure, and themes presented in news articles that "often perpetuate stereotypes about race and class and have long been unwelcoming to non-White journalists" (Usher 2023, 6). Exclusionary perspectives of the media result from journalists and their audiences being predominantly White and middle-class (Usher 2023). This journalistic make up, and resulting lens, can create inaccurate representations in news coverage about those who do not fit in the lens journalism uses.

## News Coverage of Violence against TGNC Individuals

A variety of studies have examined the news coverage of violence against TGNC individuals, and Black trans women are most victimized and make up most of the news coverage (Avalos 2023; DeJong, Holt, Helm and Morgan 2021; Osborn 2022; Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner 2022). The victims' gender identity and race, as well as their TGNC status, are meaningful when analyzing the framing of the news coverage because of the predominantly heteronormative and White lens of journalism (Usher 2023). Due to this lens, "stigmas, stereotypes, and false media portrayals continue to influence how legal actors and the public view some victims (individuals and groups), and thus influences who is or is not viewed as a victim" (Clevenger, Kelley, and Ratajczak 2024, 5).

Two studies measuring the type of language used to describe TGNC victims found that neutral language was more common than positive or negative language (Osborn 2022; Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner 2022). Osborn (2022) defines positive language as "reference to praiseworthy personality traits, or potential, and close relationships with friends and family" and negative language as "references to victims' criminal records, mental health symptoms, and/or involvement in sex work and other 'high risk' behaviors" (2042). They found positive language describing the victim occurred

in 27.8 percent of the news articles, while negative language describing the victim occurred in 18.2 percent. This measurement in the language used by different news sources is a way to gauge the framing of victims and its impact on the audience's understanding of the news story. Solomon and Kurtz-Costes (2017) found that participants who observed clips portraying transgender people positively had more positive attitudes toward transgender people. Conversely, when participants observed negative portrayals, they had more negative attitudes toward transgender people. This finding suggests the language used to describe victims can invoke sympathy and understanding or skepticism and apathy toward people in the TGNC communities who experience victimization (Solomon and Kurtz-Costes 2017). Deadnaming of TGNC victims is also a common occurrence in news coverage (DeJong et al. 2021; Seely 2021; Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner 2022).

Deadnaming is using a name the victim no longer identifies with, including listing that name as "formerly known as" or "otherwise known as" (Seely 2021; Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner 2022). The amount of deadnaming that occurred varied by the study. Seely (2021) found that 13.2 percent of the articles referred to the victim by their deadname, while DeJong and colleagues (2021) found that most articles deadnamed the victims. Seely's (2021) study included 212 news articles about 53 transgender victims of homicide in 2018 and 2019. DeJong's (2021) study consisted of 218 articles about homicides of trans people from only mainstream media outlets. While Seely's (2021) study found a smaller number of articles deadnamed the victims they were reporting on, it is still important to recognize because any amount of deadnaming goes against the guidelines of the Trans Journalists Association (TJA). The association created a guide to "provide a foundation of covering trans issues with accuracy and nuance, and it addresses many common languages and reporting difficulties" (TJA 2024). The TJA guidelines define deadnaming and guide journalists to never guess anyone's gender identity or pronouns and instead to use gender-neutral terminology when uncertain (TJA 2024).



Victim blaming was also a consistent theme found in studies on news coverage of crime against TGNC individuals (Avalos 2023; DeJong et al. 2021; Osborn 2022). Osborn (2022) found that victim blaming occurring in news coverage often "focused on criminal history and involvement in sex work" (2046). This rhetoric in the media is problematic because "transgender women involved in sex work are likely to be disproportionately viewed as unworthy of protection," (Meyer 2015, 81) and this ideology "contribute[s] to further stigmatization and dehumanization of this group" (Osborn 2022, 2046). Longstanding homophobic actions, laws, and rhetoric have created harmful views of people who are TGNC, and victim blaming in the news continues to perpetuate these beliefs (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011). Avalos (2023) examined 30 news articles of randomly selected transgender victims of homicide between the years of 2016 and 2022. The study found that "trans men were more likely to be victim-blamed when they were fatally shot by the police, whereas trans women [were] likely to be victim-blamed when it became known that they were sex workers" (2023, 16). This finding is significant because it shows the difference in harmful stereotypes placed on male versus female victims who are also a part of the TGNC communities. These stereotypes are reflective of the heteronormative lens journalism writes through by associating blame with different behaviors based on gender expression and identity (McCullagh and Campling 2002; Usher 2021).

News coverage also frequently minimizes a victim's TGNC status (Osborn, 2022; Seely, 2021). Osborn's (2022) research found that minimization of TGNC status most frequently happens in the coverage of White trans women, as they "came closest to fitting the stereotype of the 'ideal victim'" (2046). The omission of TGNC information, intentional or unintentional, prevents the audience from understanding this violence. A connection between this coverage and episodic framing is evident, as both lead the reader to see the subject as an isolated event (Iyengar 1996; Seely 2021). Conversely, Seely's (2021) study also found more than half of the

news articles in their sample provided the context of the violence they were reporting on with a majority mentioning racism and transphobia. This type of coverage can be connected to thematic framing as it "portray[s] the violence as a social issue rather than an isolated event" (2023, 86). Thematic framing of violence against TGNC individuals gives the audience the information to recognize the patterns and full extent of the issue. While this example is a positive understanding of thematic framing, disclosing information about victims' TGNC identity may result in harmful discourse and dangerous backlash toward TGNC communities (Fischer 2020).

Research shows that news coverage of vigils and memorials is highly likely to contain positive language (Osborn 2022; Wood et al. 2022). These news articles included descriptions and information about memorials held in the victim's honor (Osborn 2022; Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner 2022). Osborn's (2022) research found that "these pieces recounted the events of the vigils or memorial services held in a victim's honor and tended to cast them in a favorable light" (2043). This news framing is significant because it humanizes the victim by showing friends and loved ones mourning. The descriptions of these memorials and vigils for the victims also serve as thematic framing in these news pieces. The findings in Wood, Carrillo and Monk-Turner's (2022) article on news coverage of transgender victims of fatal violence connect the memorials to a problem within the transgender communities. An example is when Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner (2022) give the finding that "although devastating and traumatic, the resiliency of the trans community ensured as these deaths fostered a renewed sense of community and collective action oriented toward greater awareness, visibility, and justice" (379). Including the information of memorials and vigils in the coverage of TGNC victims places their deaths in the context of other crimes against those communities rather than being a singular event.

## Theoretical Framework

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor at Columbia and UCLA, published a paper coining the term "intersectionality" (Steinmetz 2020). Crenshaw explained the legal issues Black women faced when suing for discrimination in court. One of these examples is of five Black women who brought forth a case against General Motors in which the court ruled there was no discrimination based on sex because women were working in the company, and there was no discrimination based on race because they had Black people working in the company (Crenshaw, 1989). The court did not consider the women General Motors hired to be all White, and the Black people they hired were all men (Crenshaw 1989). This decision showed that "Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups" (Crenshaw 1989, 143). The court failed to understand that Black women's experiences of discrimination are not the same as Black men's or White women's because the intersection of their marginalized identities creates a different set of discriminatory challenges they face. Through Crenshaw's analyses of the multidimensionality of Black women's experiences, the term "intersectionality" was named and has become an imperative way to understand the experiences of people with a variety of intersecting identities. In an interview with *Time* magazine, over 30 years later, Crenshaw explains intersectionality as "a lens, a prism, for seeing how various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (*Time* 2020, 3). This lens has allowed a better understanding and research of individual experiences and considers how they differ based on overlapping identities.

Using the lens of intersectionality to analyze the news coverage of fatal violence against TGNC individuals offers a more comprehensive understanding of the portrayal of victims in the press. Previous research coded their study samples of news coverage for language types and found neutral language to be the most used (Osborn 2022). Osborn's (2022) study provides valuable

information about the language describing TGNC victims of fatal violence but does not show how that information may differ based on the victim's intersecting identities. Most of the language used to describe the victims does not apply equally to all TGNC individuals because of the overlapping power structures they face (Meyer 2015). Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner's (2022) sample of news media only contained transgender women of color, providing a necessary insight into the language used to describe victims who face multiple systems of oppression, finding that negative, not neutral, language commonly occurred in the form of trivializing the lives of transgender women of color.

Previous research on deadnaming TGNC victims, finding that it did occur, but only rarely, needs to consider intersecting identities as well (DeJong et al. 2021; Seely 2021; Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner 2022). DeJong et al. (2021) and Seely (2021) provide a crucial starting point for the analysis of deadnaming in news coverage but do not consider how it may differ based on the race, gender identity, and other intersectional characteristics of the victims. Wood, Carrillo, and Monk-Turner's (2022) research again provides information specifically on transgender women of color, showing how deadnaming frequently impacts individuals with this intersection. More analyses of misgendering in news coverage on TGNC individuals with different intersectional identities are needed.

One of the repeated themes found across studies on TGNC victims was victim blaming (Avalos 2023; DeJong et al. 2021; Osborn 2022). Avalos (2023) considered the differences in victim blaming by gender, showing how and when trans men and women were more likely to be victimized. The comparison reveals how the intersection of each TGNC victim's status and gender identity impacts their portrayal in the media (Avalos 2023). Osborn (2022) found that victim blaming in news coverage of TGNC victims most occurred with Black transgender women. These victims have multiple intersecting identities, resulting in heightened discrimination.

Another common theme found in previous studies on media coverage of TGNC victims was the minimization of the victim's trans-gender status (Osborn 2022; Seely 2021). Osborn (2022) tracked the minimization while considering race and gender identity, finding minimization occurred the most in White female-identifying victims. This minimization occurred because they were closest to the "ideal victim" stereotype (Osborn 2022). The consideration of intersectionality in the research by Avalos (2023) and Osborn (2022) provides insight into the harmful stereotypes perpetuated by the media for their audiences to consume. The intersectional lens also shows the experiences of different individuals and groups will not be the same for every TGNC victim. The current study will utilize the lens of intersectionality to analyze how the news coverage, specifically positive and negative language use, misgendering, and focus on the TGNC identity, of TGNC victims of fatal violence may differ based on the victims' different intersecting demographic characteristics.

## Methods

### Data Collection

A list of the 32 names of TGNC individuals who were victims of homicide in 2023 was compiled from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which has collected data on the homicides of gender-expansive individuals since 2013 (HRC 2024a). This data is compiled through "daily monitoring of local news and social media" and direct reports to the HRC. To be included in the HRC's count, the victim must have died in the United States, "the cause of death must be confirmed by authorities to be a homicide and/or caused by another person," and "the victim must have identified as transgender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, or some other non-cisgender identity at the time of their death" (HRC 2024b). The HRC prefaces that their "data collection is often incomplete or unreliable when it comes to violent and fatal crimes against the trans

community" due to underreporting and a lack of coverage of these crimes (HRC 2024b). Victims murdered in 2023 were included in this study because 2023 was the most recent full calendar year. Table 2 lists the demographics of each victim whose articles were searched for in this study. The goal was to collect three articles on each of the victims to ensure representation of all the victim types. Unfortunately, 16 articles were not found, and the information on which victims' three articles were not found is also included in Table 2.

Table 2 *Victim Demographics*

Victim's Name	Race	Gender Identity	Age	Articles Found
Amber Minor	Black	Woman	40	3
Megan Riley Lewis	White	Woman	53	3
Savannah Ryan Williams	Latina	Woman	38	3
Jean Butchart	White	Man	26	3
Kejuan Richardson	Black	Man	21	3
Amiri Reid	Black	Woman	21	3
LaKendra Andrews	Black	Woman	26	3
London Price	Black	Woman	26	3
Lisa Love	Black	Woman	35	3
Dominic Dupree	Black	Nonbinary	25	2
A'nee Johnson	Black	Woman	30	3



Table 2 continued *Victim Demographics*

Victim's Name	Race	Gender Identity	Age	Articles Found
Sherlyn Marjorie	Latina	Woman	35	3
Chyna Long	Black	Woman	30	3
Luis Angel Diaz Castro	Latino	Man	22	0
YOKO	Black	Nonbinary	30	3
Thomas Robertson	Black	Nonbinary	28	0
DeVonnie J'rae Johnson	Black	Woman	28	1
Camdyn Rider	White	Man	21	3
Jacob Williamson	White	Man	18	3
Chanell Prez Ortiz	Latina	Woman	29	0
Ashia Davis	Black	Woman	34	3
Banko Brown	Black	Man	24	3
Koko Da Doll	Black	Woman	35	3
Asheley Burton	Black	Woman	37	3
Ta'Siyah Woodland	Black	Woman	18	3
Tortuguita	Indigenous	Nonbinary	26	3
Chasshay Ashanti Henderson	Black	Woman	31	3

Table 2 continued *Victim Demographics*

Victim's Name	Race	Gender Identity	Age	Articles Found
Maria Jose Rivera Rivera	Latina	Woman	22	1
Zachee Imanitwitaho	Black	Woman	26	3
Unique Bankcs	Latina	Woman	21	2
KC Johnson	White	Woman	27	3
Jasmie Mack	Black	Woman	36	3

The search engines Yahoo.news and Google.news were used to search for articles on each victim. These search engines were chosen because they are commonly used sources that provide a bank of news articles available to the general public. The search terms consisted of each of the victims' names along with "homicide" or "murder" and the date of the murders to find news coverage of the events. Those additional search terms were added to the names of the victims to help ensure articles being found met the sampling criteria. Op-eds, magazines, and social media posts were excluded, as they did not provide objective coverage of the crimes that this study aimed to analyze. The articles collected were from national and local news sources. Articles from human rights and LGBTQIA+-centered media (e.g. *Pink News*, *The Advocate*, *Human Rights Campaign*) were excluded because they are geared toward the LGBTQIA+ communities and focus on issues of how the crimes and their coverage were handled rather than the crimes themselves. The articles collected consist of news reports about each crime written for and consumed by the public. Collecting articles that followed these criteria ensured the sample represented how the TGNC victims are portrayed by news outlets the general public is consuming. Articles that met these criteria were then read and duplicates were excluded. The final sample consisted of 81 news articles published from January 7th to December 29th, 2023.

Analysis

Once the articles were collected for the sample (n=81), the descriptions of the TGNC individuals in each news article were analyzed. After reading previous studies that have analyzed media coverage of TGNC victims, themes of positive language, negative language, mis-gendering, and focus on TGNC identity were established. Positive language is defined as descriptions of the victim that talk about their life positively: good qualities or personality traits, hobbies, involvement in the community, relationships with friends and family, or word choice that frames the victim or their death as a tragedy and takes it seriously. While coding the articles, four major types of positive language emerged: (1) quotes, (2) word choice, (3) descriptions from news sources, and (4) memorials (defined in Table 3). Negative language is defined as descriptions of the victim that talk about their life negatively, dehumanizing the victim or trivializing their death. While coding the articles, two major types of negative language emerged: (1) de-humanizing language and (2) victim blaming (defined in Table 4). Misgendering is defined as using the victim's deadname or incorrect pronouns. Focus on TGNC identity was broken up into three types: (1) no mention of the victim's TGNC identity, (2) information on the victim's TGNC identity after or along with other information about the victim, and (3) primary focus on the victim's TGNC status before or without any other information about the victim.

Table 3 *Types of Positive Language*

Quotes	Direct words from someone other than the news source, ex: family, friends, activists, police
Word Choice	Words that evoke sympathy from the audience by focusing on the tragedy of the crime or framing the victim favorably
Descriptions by News Source	Victim's qualities, contribution, or personal life that portray them favorably and were written by the news source, rather than quoting someone
Memorials	Mention of memorial or vigils being held in honor of the victim

Table 4 *Types of Negative Language*

Dehumanizing Language	Description of the victim or their victimization that draws attention away from their humanity or trivializes them or their death
Victim Blaming	Implication the victim's behavior contributed to their death, ex: pursuing a relationship with the person who killed them, criminal behavior, sex work

Each article was read and coded using a physical copy. Then, each quote from the articles that applied to the qualitative themes was entered into an Excel document organized by the demographic information of each victim the article focused on. Once all the articles were coded and the information was entered in the Excel file, they were analyzed considering the race and gender of the victim the article focused on. Frequencies were then calculated for how often each of the themes was found for different victim demographic groups: Black women, Black men, Black nonbinary individuals, White women, White men, Latina women, and Indigenous nonbinary individuals.

## Findings

The findings are split up into four sections based on the themes coded in each article. The first section is on the positive language used in the articles, which includes quotes, victim descriptions, word choice, and memorial descriptions. The second section is on negative language use, which includes victim blaming and dehumanizing language. The third section is on the misgendering of the victims through deadnaming and the misuse of pronouns. The fourth and final section is on each article's amount of focus on, or lack of, the victim's TGNC identity. Each section addresses how these themes occur across the different victim demographics in the sample of articles and includes a table to showcase the data.

### Positive Language

Positive language, which shows the victim favorably or sympathetically, was used in 56 of the 81 (60.1 percent) articles in the present study. Overall, the most common type of positive language found was in quotes and interviews, occurring in 43 out of the 81 (53.1 percent) articles in the sample (see Table 5). An example is in an article about YOKO, in which their friend recalled, "YOKO was an exceptional, joyful, absurdly talented, and extremely loving

and gentle human, and there are so many friends grieving" (Daley, 2023). Another example of a positive quote comes from an article about Jean Butchart. An article quoted his mother who described him as "a well-loved person, an unofficial leader in the local trans community" (Lofton, 2023). Talking to family members or loved ones and including their feelings in the media coverage humanizes the people the articles are about by showing the audience their positive attributes and that they have people who love and mourn them.

The second most frequent form of positive language was word choice when describing the victim or their victimization, occurring in 36 of the 81 (28.4 percent) articles in the sample. An example is in an article written about London Price, which says "[a] family is pleading for answers after a transgender woman was killed outside her own home" (NBC 6, 2023). Choosing to include the information of where Price was killed and the words "*her own home*" personalizes the crime and humanizes her, portraying her as a sympathetic victim. Another example of positive word choice comes from an article about Jacob Williamson that describes, "[a] family searching for answers" (Boddie, 2023). The focus on the Price and Williamson families and the word choice of *pleading* and *searching* centers the audience's attention on the mourning families, conveying how the victims are loved and missed.

Positive descriptions written by the news source are the third most frequent form of positive language, occurring in 23 of the 81 (28.4 percent) articles in the sample. One example is in an article written about Banko Brown, which revealed, "Brown, who had experienced homelessness and housing insecurity since he was a child, worked as an organizer for the San Francisco-based Young Women's Freedom Center, which supports girls, young women, and transgender youth" (Martinez, 2023). This description in the news article reminds the audience that Brown was someone other than the victim of a crime and shows how he positively contributed to his community. Another example is in an article about Megan Riley Lewis, which states, "Lewis even invited strangers into her



home on Christmas Day, hoping to ease the pain of loneliness and loss felt by many during the holidays – including trans people who often feel alienated from friends, family, and society. But her sparkle was extinguished before the holidays were over" (Trethan, 2023). The news article's description of Lewis shows how she positively contributed to her community and how she is more than just the victim of this crime. The last form of positive language found was descriptions or information about memorials held for the victims, occurring in 17 of the 81 (21.0 percent) articles in the sample. Memorial descriptions or information humanize the victim by showing how others are mourning their death and celebrating their life.

The presence of positive language, including any of the themes for positive language identified, varies based on the demographic of the victim. Overall, positive language was used in all articles with White, male victims (appearing in 9 out of 9 of the sample of the article) and with indigenous, nonbinary victims (occurring in 3 out of the 3 articles sampled). On the other hand, positive language was least commonly found in articles on Black, nonbinary victims (occurring in 20 percent of sampled articles) followed by Latina women (occurring in 26.6 percent of articles sampled). The lack of positive language for Black nonbinary individuals and Latina women is apparent for each theme.

The four themes of positive language also vary when looking at the victim demographics of the articles separately. The majority of the positive language in articles about victims who were Black women is found within quotes, occurring in 28 of the 43 (65.1 percent) articles collected for this demographic. The frequency of positive quotes is also higher in articles on victims who are Black women compared to their frequency in articles on victims of other demographics. The quotes commonly consist of references to the injustice facing Black communities, TGNC communities, or both. An example is in an article about Lisa Love that states, "We must end the epidemic of fatal violence viciously targeting transgender and non-binary people" (*Chicago Defender*, 2023). An article about

KoKo Da Doll is another example. It says, "[w]e were honored to have her at the Festival this year ... she reminded Black trans women, 'we can do anything, we can be whatever we want to be. It is a tragic loss.'" (Thomas and Vlessing, 2023). Descriptions and information on memorials for victims also occur more frequently in articles about victims who are Black women compared to victims of other demographics. Memorial descriptions and information are in 13 of the 43 (30.1 percent) articles collected on Black women victims. Another important frequency for a specific theme of positive language was in the positive word choice in articles where the victims were White men, occurring in 6 of the 9 articles (66 percent) collected on this victim demographic. Positive word choice is the most frequent form of positive language in articles about victims who are White men. Positive word choice is also comparatively more frequent in articles about victims who are White men than in articles about victims of any other demographic, except the Indigenous nonbinary victim.

**Table 5** *Types of Positive Language Used in Articles by Victim Demographic*

Victim	Overall Positive Language	Quotes	Word Choice	Descriptions by News Source	Memorials
Black Women	32 (74.4%)	28 (65.1%)	20 (46.5%)	10 (23.3%)	13 (30.2%)
Black Men	4 (66.7%)	3 (50%)	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)	0
Black Nonbinary	1 (20.0%)	1 (20%)	1 (20.0%)	0	0
White Women	3 (50.0%)	3 (50.0%)	1 (16.6%)	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.0%)
White Men	9 (100%)	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)
Latina Women	4 (44.4%)	2 (22.2%)	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)	0
InIndigenous Nonbinary	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	2 (66.7%)
Total	56 (60.1%)	43 (53.1%)	36 (44.4%)	23 (28.4%)	17 (21.0%)

Note: The frequencies for each of the victim demographics come from the number of articles collected for each of the victim demographic categories, not the overall total. Articles were counted in multiple categories if they contained multiple criteria.

## Negative Language

Negative language is used in 40 of the 81 articles (49.4 percent) collected for the sample. The two major themes involving negative language are identified as dehumanizing language and victim blaming. Dehumanizing language occurred in 15 of the 81 articles (18.5 percent). An example is in an article about DeVonnie J'rae Johnson that reads, "[s]ecurity guard shot and killed a homeless woman in a grocery store" (Folven, 2023). Referring to Johnson as a "homeless woman" dehumanizes her by prioritizing that aspect of her and drawing attention away from her victimization. Another example is in an article written about KC Johnson that divulges, "[h]uman remains that washed ashore a state over were identified as a local transgender woman" (*Port City Daily*, 2023). Using the words "human remains" and "local transgender women" dehumanizes KC by drawing attention away from her being a vulnerable person who was murdered. Dehumanization was found most frequently in articles about Black women. The dehumanizing language is in 11 of the 45 (24.4 percent) articles collected on victims who are Black women.

Victim blaming is present in 27 of the 81 (33.3 percent) articles collected across all victim demographics. Victim blaming was found most frequently in articles written about victims who were Latina women and White men. Victim blaming occurred in 7 out of the 9 (77.8 percent) articles on victims who were Latina women. Of the 7 articles with victim blaming of Latina women, 6 focused on criminal behavior or engagement in sex work. An example is in an article written about Savannah Ryan Williams that informed the audience "he [Bible] walked past Williams, who was in a bus shelter, and Williams asked if he was interested in sex. They walked to the courtyard and once finished, Bible said Williams was making him feel suspicious and that's when he shot her" (Skluzacek, 2023). Another example from an article about Sherlyn Marjorie recounts, "the defendant told law enforcement he was being blackmailed by the woman he allegedly later killed" (Kalmbacher, 2023). Both examples

of victim blaming draw responsibility away from the people who killed these women. Victim blaming also occurred in 6 of the 9 (66.7 percent) articles collected for victims who were White men. All of the victim blaming found in the articles on victims who were White men focuses on how they pursued a relationship with the person who killed them. An example is in an article about Camdyn Rider that reports, "[f]amily members said the couple argued in the past and it turned physical, deputies said none of those incidents were reported to law enforcement" (Luperon, 2023). This type of negative language provokes less sympathy from the audience as it suggests they did not do enough to protect themselves from this crime.

**Table 6** *Types of Negative Language Used in Articles by Victim Demographics*

Victim Demographics	Overall Negative Language	Dehumanize	Victim blaming
Black Women	19 (44.2%)	11 (25.6%)	9 (20.9%)
Black Men	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.6%)	2 (33.3%)
White Women	5 (83.3%)	3 (50%)	2 (33.3%)
White Men	6 (66.7%)	0	6 (66.7%)
Latina Women	7 (77.8%)	0	7 (77.8%)
Indigenous Nonbinary	1 (33.3%)	0	1 (33.3%)
Total	40 (49.4%)	15 (18.5%)	27 (33.3%)

Note: The frequencies for each of the victim demographics come from the number of articles collected for each of the victim demographic categories not the overall total. Articles were counted in multiple cate-gories if they contained multiple criteria.

## Misgendering

Victims were misgendered in 21 of the 81 (25.9 percent) articles across all victim demographics. Misgendering occurred in two ways: deadnaming and using incorrect pronouns. Examples include when articles identified the victims' using their deadname or "also known as," "whose birth name was," or "their legal name was" followed by their deadname. Deadnaming occurred in 16 of the 81 (19.8 percent) articles. The use of incorrect pronouns refers to when news articles use a pronoun to describe the victim that did not match the victim's gender identity and occurred in 5 of the 81 articles (6.2 percent). Misgendering was found most frequently in articles in which the victim was Black and nonbinary. This misgendering occurred through the usage of incorrect pronouns, appearing in 2 of the 5 (40 percent). This finding could be reflective of the lack of understanding of a nonbinary gender identity. Misgendering occurred in 0 of the articles included in this sample for victims who were White women and Indigenous nonbinary victims. This finding could be indicative of the preface given to these victims in the news coverage.



**Table 7** *Misgendering in Articles by Victim Demographics*

Victim Demographics	Misgender	Deadnamed	Incorrect Pronouns
Black Women	13 (30.2%)	10 (23.3%)	3 (7.0%)
Black Men	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	0
Black Nonbinary	2 (40%)	0	2 (40%)
White Women	0	0	0
White Men	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	0
Latina Women	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	0
Indigenous Nonbinary	0	0	0
Total	21 (25.9%)	16 (19.8%)	5 (6.2%)

Note: The frequencies for each of the victim demographics come from the number of articles collected for each of the victim demographic categories not the overall total. Articles were counted in multiple categories if they contained multiple criteria.

### Focus on the Victim's TGNC Status

Almost half of the articles in the sample have a primary focus on the victims' TGNC status, accounting for 38 of the 81 articles (46.9 percent). An article written about Jacob Williamson is titled "Transgender Teen Killed After Going on Date in South Carolina, Police Say" (Phillips, 2023). An article written about Lisa Love is similarly titled "Black Transgender Woman Shot & Killed While Walking Home in Chicago" (*Chicago Defender*, 2023). Thirty of the 81 articles (37.0 percent) provide positive context of the victims' TGNC status. Positive context often occurred when the article

talked about the victim, their family, or the crime before providing information about their TGNC status. No mention of the victims' TGNC status occurred in 21 of the 81 articles (25.9 percent).

The three forms of framing a victim's TGNC status also varied based on victim demographics. All the articles in the sample written about White trans men mention their TGNC identity while all the articles about victims who were Black and nonbinary exclude their TGNC status. Primary framing on TGNC identity was most often in articles written about Latina women, occurring in 7 of the 9 articles (77.8 percent). Primary framing on TGNC identity was also commonly found in articles written about White women, occurring in 4 out of 6 of the articles (66.7 percent).

**Table 8** *Framing of the Victim's TGNC by Victim Demographic*

Victim Demographics	No Mention	Positive	Primary Focus of Article
Black Women	10 (23.3%)	19 (44.2%)	20 (46.5%)
Black Men	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)
Black Nonbinary	5 (100.0%)	0	0
White Women	2 (33.3%)	1 (16.7%)	4 (66.7%)
White Men	0	5 (55.6%)	5 (55.6%)
Latine Women	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	7 (77.8%)
Indigenous Nonbinary	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	0
Total	21 (25.9%)	30 (37.0%)	38 (46.9%)

Note: The frequencies for each of the victim demographics come from the number of articles collected for each of the victim demographic categories, not the overall total. Articles were counted in multiple categories if they contained multiple criteria.

## Conclusions

From the previous findings, some overarching themes about news coverage of TGNC victims of fatal violence have emerged. Findings of the news coverage of Black transgender women who are victims of fatal violence may promote negative stereotypes and interpretations from the audience. The majority of the quotes in articles written about Black women focus on the injustice the Black and TGNC communities are facing. Including this information gives thematic framing to the audience because it places these crimes in a broader context rather than framing it as a singular event (Ineygar, 1996). This context could make the audience aware that violence is not an individualistic issue and provide context allowing the audience to gain a fuller understanding of the violence imposed upon these marginalized communities. However, the consistent thematic framing could also draw individuality away from the cases of victims who are Black transgender women. The visibility of these victims' TGNC identities also opens room for negative discourse and action from the audience (Fischer 2020). The lack of individuality created from this type of thematic framing is also exacerbated by the dehumanizing language, which occurs most often for Black women. Dehumanizing language can negatively affect the audience's belief these victims are worthy of protection and should be afforded sympathy (Meyer 2015; Solomon and Kurtz-Costes 2017). The lack of individuality given to Black transgender women victims in news articles can increase the effect dehumanizing language has on the audience's understanding of each victim.

Findings about the coverage of transgender Latina women who are victims of fatal violence also show how the media may be perpetuating negative stereotypes and ideologies. Victim blaming

occurred most for White men and Latina women, but for Latina women, it focused mostly on sex work. This finding aligns with previous studies of news coverage on TGNC victims (Avalos 2023; Osborn 2022). This portrayal is harmful because "transgender women involved in sex work are likely to be disproportionately viewed as unworthy of protection" (Meyer 2015, 81). Majority of the articles written about Latina women also had a primary focus on their TGNC identity, often having it be the first piece of information given about the victim. Prefacing information of the victims' TGNC identity implies to the audience that it is the most important information (Van Dijk 1988). Again, the visibility imposed upon these victims can lead to harmful reactions from audiences (Fischer 2020). These findings can lead to a stronger correlation between transgender women, specifically Latina transgender women, and sex work, again creating an idea that these women are "unworthy of protection" (Meyer 2015). Both of these findings also show how the media demoralizes transgender Latina victims of fatal violence by focusing on their deviance from societal norms rather than using tools to invoke sympathy.

Multiple findings about the news coverage of White transgender male victims of fatal violence also show problematic themes. Victim blaming occurred frequently for White men, but with a focus on the relationship they had with the person who killed them. It is important to note that two of the White men who were included in the sample were killed by their partner, and the findings may vary with the inclusion of articles on other victims. Intimate partner violence is stereotypically deemed feminine and can cause the audience to view these victims differently (Coney and Mackey 1999). The finding that 100 percent of the articles written about White transgender male victims mention their TGNC identity, ensuring the audience knows they have transitioned from female to male, may also influence the audiences' perceptions. The combination of these findings shows how White transgender men are feminized in the media. While this association in the media is problematic, it is also important to note that 100 percent of the articles about White

transgender male victims also contained positive language.

The majority of the news articles written about individuals who are Black and nonbinary did not contain positive language of any form. Misgendering most occurred in articles written about victims who were Black and nonbinary, and all five of the articles written about this victim demographic did not mention their TGNC identity. The only other articles collected on people who identify as nonbinary were on an Indigenous nonbinary victim named Tortuguita. Similar results were not found in articles collected on Tortuguita, which may be a result of their death occurring in a protest against police brutality, which received larger coverage. These findings show how those who identify as nonbinary are not receiving the visibility and respect from the media they should be. News sources overlooking Black nonbinary victims' gender identity, only focusing on their race and not their intersecting identities, continue to create the problem Crenshaw (1989) was initially fighting against when she started her work on intersectionality. These findings may also indicate the general public and the media's lack of understanding of the gender identity of individuals who identify as nonbinary.

Findings about the rate of misgendering victims who are White transgender women align with findings in previous studies that White women are considered "ideal victims" (Osborn 2022). None of the articles written about White women in this study misgender them. This group was the only victim demographic in which this finding occurred. Ensuring the correct female names and pronouns are used continues to uphold the audience's idea of them as the "ideal victim." News sources may hold more importance in correctly gendering these victims because their being White females could invoke more sympathy and readership from the audience.

## Limitations and Future Research

One way the current research was limited is the small sample size (n=81). This limitation resulted in a limited number of articles

analyzed for the study and a limited number of articles from specific races/gender identities. Only three articles were obtained for victims who were Indigenous nonbinary, but this number was the case because there was only one victim from this demographic from the year 2023 recorded by the HRC. Because the sample was limited to articles about victims who died in 2023, the racial/gender identity groups to analyze based on these victims were limited to the ones included in the study. There was also a lack of articles found that met the criteria for victims who were Black women (two articles not found), Black men (three articles not found), Black nonbinary individuals (four articles not found), and Latina women (six articles not found). Additionally, there were zero articles found on Luis Angel Diaz Castro, the only transgender Latino man killed in 2023 according to the HRC. Future research should aim to expand the number of victims' articles collected for specific intersecting demographic groups, such as transgender Latino men, and the number of articles collected in general. Creating a broader and larger sample would hopefully encompass more race/gender identity groups to analyze the coverage. A larger sample size will also allow for more articles to be analyzed, hopefully obtaining a more complete picture of how TGNC victims are portrayed in the news based on their intersecting identities.

The current research was also limited because only intersectional identities of combined race and gender identity were analyzed. While race and gender identity are necessary to analyze, other individual characteristics can also impact how victims are portrayed in the media. Future research should aim to include more identity factors in research such as socioeconomic status, location, ability, and more. The analysis of the combination of these identities, along with race/gender identity, can lead to a better understanding of patterns in the media depicting TGNC individuals.

Another limitation was the sample only consisted of written news articles. Other forms of media are becoming increasingly common such as news reports on television and social media. The inclusion or individual analysis of these types of media coverage on TGNC victims of fatal violence could give another perspective on the rhetoric used and the stereotypes perpetuated.



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***Crumble***  
Jess Self



***Mother/Martyr***  
Jess Self



# CISSIES

i.

I mention my boyfriend, Al, offhandedly to a coworker.  
She asks, "Is he a girl like you?" Back home I recount this to him.  
He says "kinda."

My coworker says I ought to meet her niece, or "nephew,"  
I forget what word she used, but her niece who is trans.  
She pulls up a photo. I do not know her niece, so I say she is beautiful,  
which my coworker does not seem to like.

ii.

At the walk-in clinic, a nurse sorts out that I am trans  
when I tell her that I am on daily spironolactone and estradiol.  
I give her a list of all the sex organs I have had, have now,  
and a brief word on how I got them.

She looks at me thoughtfully, as if I were her teacher,  
and after a beat, she asks me what protection I use.  
I say, "condoms," but I am not sure if that clears anything up.

iii.

Al is at work. A little girl buys a stuffed animal from him,  
asks him, the old classic, "Are you a boy or a girl?"  
"A boy," he says. She says, "That's weird." "It is," he says,  
and the little girl's mom hits her lightly on the arm.

iv – xii.

A little girl tells me I'm very beautiful.  
Another girl tells me that I sound like her dad. Her friends agree.  
A little boy with the name I used to go by comes through my line.  
I think he got a stuffed dinosaur.

xiii.

A coworker does not realize I'm trans  
until I tell her how glad I am not to have a uterus,  
midway through our conversation about childbirth.

xiv.

A man at the smoking bar finally works up the nerve  
to come up to me and figure out what's in my pants.

Against my better judgment, I tell him, and he asks,  
"You're not going to get any surgeries or anything right?"  
He makes me promise him this.

xv.

The bartender at the smoking bar, normally very nosy  
according to the drunken man next to me,  
does not say anything to me the entire night,  
but tells me to get home safe.

xvi.

A cashier says to me, "Oh—  
you wear it well—better than most,"  
upon seeing my ID.

# SINEAD, WHALE HEART

I remember it . . . that morning before I found out Sinead O'Connor died. It was a Wednesday, and I was sitting in my kitchen like I usually do, sipping hot hibiscus tea and skimming the morning papers before leaving for work. I came across a story about a large pod of pilot whales—around 100—who beached themselves on the shores of Western Australia (Towie 2023). This event followed a day of strange behavior by the whales that fascinated the casual spectator but unsettled marine biologists: the whales spent several hours huddled together in shallow waters. On Tuesday afternoon, a photographer captured a striking image of the pod forming a heart shape in the blue water (Towie 2023). By that evening, they would be washed ashore, stranded. Sadly, despite attempts to return them to the sea, 50 pilot whales died by Wednesday morning, and the rest were euthanized less than 24 hours later.

My heart cracked that morning. I carried in my belly the unbearable weight of those whales who died, their organs crushed by the heaviness of their own bodies without the help of the water to suspend them. Grief clung to my skin like humidity as I gathered my things for work. All I kept thinking was, *My God. What were those whales trying to tell us? And what will it take for us to finally listen?*

Then, early afternoon arrived, along with the debilitating news of Sinead's death. In the quiet of my office, I stared at a friend's text—a link to a BBC article that displayed a black and white image of Sinead, smiling just enough to showcase her famous dimpled cheeks, those dark doe eyes staring so bigly at the camera (McNamee and McIntosh 2023). The stark white lettering below it read, "Irish Singer Sinead O'Connor Dies at Aged 56." I felt as though my heart had been clawed out of my chest by a greedy hand and struck against a rock, right on the fissure the whales had run through it, breaking it clean open.

I had been dreading this day off and on for years. I always worried about Sinead departing too early and too young from this earthly plane. Two days earlier, I was driving home from work blaring her iconic song "Jerusalem" and blurted out to the ether: *Please Sinead, don't die. Not yet. We need you. I need you. Please, please. Just hang on.*

Less than 48 hours later, I'd feel conflicted about that plea. Dizzied by my grief, I was momentarily stilled by a pang of guilt. Who was I to demand Sinead live on to help me navigate this utterly mad world, to deny her ultimate peace after all that she had publicly and privately suffered? If I was so concerned for her welfare over the years, what stopped me from helping her, even if it was just to speak out more on her behalf in social conversation? And if Sinead and her teachings meant so much to me, how committed had I really been to living them out in my own life, despite the risk of drawing the ire of the oppressive forces that not only attacked her, but also demand the rest of us keep to being quiet, agreeable women? Through my own failures to defend her and her teachings with more audacity, had I betrayed her?

I am still disoriented by Sinead's loss. I am frightened of the chasm it has left in me—the craggy space that needs more smoothing from her teachings, the parched patches that thirst for more of her wisdom, the spindly stems that reach for her courage to wrap themselves around. As I step into my 50s, I realize how much I expected to age with Sinead. I still needed her to show me how to keep aging into the bad girl by letting go of the good girl who has been groomed to please-and-thank-you. Sinead never apologized for being a bad girl, even when her fearless and towering voice shook the status quo like an undersea earthquake when she made it known that female fury and sorrow are reverent things emerging from a timeless, collective history. This absence makes me frightened of the chasm her death has left in this already scooped-out, spat-out world—a world that silences and disappears women of all ages who dare howl their righteous rage in ear-splitting decibels. Almost a year later, I am not done grieving her—nor do I think any of us should

be. Based on the expressions of grief across social media following her death, it seems clear that most of us who loved and admired Sinéad and her music are not done being haunted by her. But this is a good haunting: the kind that triggers sorrow, guilt, and nostalgia as catalysts to preserving her culture-changing wisdom—the kind that reminds us of the role we can play in keeping her teachings alive.

Since Sinéad's death, I've often thought of the whales, who beckon to carry me on their backs so they can show me their slow and steady ways of navigating the salty depths of the ocean as they sing to me their whale songs. So far removed are we land dwellers from the origins of our own grief songs that we have forgotten their words and cadence. Instead, we tend to rush a grief story, to hurry a life's meaning, summing it up in a handful of impassioned obituaries that neatly contain themselves within an ordained word count. We have no patience for slow lessons. The cultural push to "move on" to the next story of loss or tragedy or heartbreak does nothing to teach us how to listen to whales, or to iconoclasts like Sinéad.

Maybe I am worried about my own forgetting. I am ashamed to admit this: I had let myself forget Sinéad for a while when she was alive. Even though she had become threaded into the fabric of who I was through her music and cultural presence, I took that for granted as the years became more harrowing for her. The radical hysterectomy, the loss of her son to suicide, the ongoing criticism directed at her activist lineage and conversion to Islam: it was convenient to cave in to the too-muchness of her sorrow and oppression and interpret these events as a dilution of her power so fearlessly displayed at its peak in her younger years. As an activist and a woman, I should know better. I should know how to sniff out the oppressors' tricks and tactics designed to disappear a woman like Sinéad. But even I have been lured to drink from the poisonous cup of misogyny, despite Sinéad's warnings about how that poison eats away at the core of female self-worth, seducing women to abandon the memories of our collective invincibility in favor of turning against each other.

It is too easy to forget women like Sinéad, too easy to prematurely

inter her legacy before we learn to extract the medicine she has left for us. So now I stand up in an act of contrition. I owe Sinéad this—all of us who have let ourselves forget her, who have turned our backs on her and fled, who have weighted her down by clinging to her courage while neglecting to grow our own owe this to her. If grief is a protest against forgetting, what better way to pay tribute to Sinéad's rebel heart than to remember her—and to re-member and preserve her legacy, which has been purposefully dis-membered over the course of decades.

*What was she trying to tell us, after all? And what will it take for us to finally listen?*

Sinéad meant the world to me.

I saw her perform live only once, on August 8, 1990. It was six days after I turned 18, but I first laid eyes and ears on her two years earlier. It wasn't long after her debut album *The Lion and the Cobra* came out in 1987. I was 16, huddled in my usual spot next to the console TV in the living room, watching 120 Minutes on MTV as I leaned against the heat register to stay warm in the wee hours of the night. When Sinéad appeared on the screen in her video for "Troy," her alabaster face and bald head appeared almost blinding in their luminescence. Her voice started off so soft it was barely audible—ghostly even, as if she had just been summoned from the in-between. As the strings accompanying her slowly built to an almost unbearable level of tension, they suddenly stopped. Sinéad's voice sliced through the silence with the clarity of an icicle, delivering a promise of resurrection. The strings carried her in short bursts until they crescendoed together in a dizzying flurry. Sinéad's voice unearthed—howling, screaming, snarling. In the video, she transformed into an archetypal representation of female rage, her naked, feminine form engulfed in flames as she spit her words like daggers. Yet the flames did not consume her: they transformed her, first into a gold-encrusted goddess and then back into albedo form—the alchemically symbolic white that comes from purification by fire.

Sinéad both frightened and thrilled me that night in the living room. Her raw, unfiltered display of female rage was something I



had never seen before. I know now that she channeled an ancient, universal source of this fury, freeing long-buried stories about bodies who have been oppressed, violated, and mutilated by misogyny. Her voice, which left me trembling in its wake, roused a lineage of cries that have been stifled by the disenfranchisement of righteous anger and systemic betrayal. At 16 years old, Sinéad helped me recognize my own ties to this legacy.

When I first discovered Sinéad, I had enough rage inside of me to fuel a war. My parents' divorce when I was 10 continued to send aftershocks throughout our family. My mother was at the epicenter; her once robust spirit and physical health shattered. A displaced homemaker in the early 1980s, my mother's suffering was silenced and pathologized; her anger was fashioned into a dagger she was only allowed to turn toward herself. I had no female role models in my life who displayed a healthy relationship with anger, no inheritance of an instruction manual on what to do with this sacred emotion. Sinéad awakened something deep within my adolescent body that I could not quite decode at the time. I was not allowed to voice my sense of injustice at how my young life was unfolding. I was forced to wear my rage like a Scarlet Letter, embodying the typical angry teen who stands in the corner of family gatherings like a stink bomb, steam pouring from my ears, my eyes shooting daggers at every person in range as they effortlessly ignored me.

My uncontained fury was only quelled in young adulthood when I discovered binge drinking an effective panacea. Of course my rage eventually fell into "the spirits": Since I was 10 years old, I learned to keep my fury bottled up in a vessel that was tightly corked and labeled *Shame*. I was offered a slow poison in its place—a blend called *Nice Girl, Good Girl*—which I sipped on steadily for decades (and am still detoxing from to this day, with some minimal relapses). By the time I tuned in to MTV that night, the *Shame* bottle was left for years in an underground cellar, fomenting like a hexed Bordeaux until Sinéad appeared on my TV screen, keening it out of its hiding place.

I was bewitched. Just like the whales, Sinéad carried me on her

back through the abyss of female adolescence and young adulthood. In the privacy of my bedroom, I sang and yelled and wailed along with Sinéad through every song on *The Lion and the Cobra* for hours until I was hoarse and physically exhausted. "I Want Your Hands On Me" left me enlivened at the ferality of her sexuality, a punchy alternative to the more genteel "come hither" seduction I had learned in those early years of my sexual awakening. Other icons of the day brought a playful approach to liberating female sexuality: Sinéad refused to negotiate her desires. Her expressions of sexuality were as fierce as her anger. The two flirted with each other like new lovers.

The rebellion that Sinéad's music awakened in me looked innocent on the surface. Lying on my bed in one of those moments of delicious reverie that are granted in abundance to 19-year-olds in love, the breeze carried with it the sweet perfume of my mother's Lillies of the Valley she planted in the side yard. Sinéad's "Just Like You Said it Would Be" played in the background, taking me deep into the garden of my imagination. I had been a good girl all my young life, groomed by the conservative Midwest Catholicism of my family to please and be pleasing, to exile my rage, desires, and needs into the unknown depths of my body. Sinéad crooned of these more innocent yet subservient times. On the verge of becoming a woman, I itched to shed the old skin of childhood, but I troubled over what parts of my *good girl* I needed to give up. Would the very act of becoming a woman make me not good? Would we be loveable in this woman skin? Sinéad spoke to this tension in that song, and she broke through it with a curdling truth: There will indeed be a price to pay for choosing to be a woman. In the song, Sinéad provokes a potential lover, testing their endurance to love a woman possessed of full-bodied passion, her voice rising with the fiery intensity of her own longing. The song, orgasmic in its closing, explodes like a delicious, licking fire, fueled by an undercurrent of spicy aggression. This song alone began to dissolve the boundaries of my good girl world. Sinéad was leading me over the threshold, out of the Garden of Eden, and I held on to her for dear life. I listened to the cassette of *The Lion and the Cobra* so much it broke, and even then, I could

not bear to let it go. Its cracked shell held some mysterious, precious medicine. Although I quickly replaced it with a new one, I kept the spewed-out innards, securing the tangled clump under the film of a page from my photo album (which I still have to this day). I flipped through that album regularly, always pausing to genuflect with a soft brushing of my fingertips over the clumpy formation: a ransacked bird's nest; a clump of knotted hair ripped from a scalp.

But there was more to learn. I continued to fumble with the potency of my fury. Sometimes it made a great aphrodisiac, but for the most part I was constantly bucked off by my rage, face-planting repeatedly when trying to navigate it. At times it hurt people unfairly; other times, when it was justified, I was still rejected. The consequences of desertion and being rendered unlovable made me fear my anger, and I learned to either fawn or freeze myself out by slipping deep into the tundra of dissociation, which often took the form of grudge holding. Being angry equated to being bad, so why not push people away? There was no middle ground granted to me as a woman, even when my rage was righteous. Yet I lived among men—family members, peers, politicians, priests, professors, bosses—who were rewarded for their aggression, no matter how destructive, misguided, or unrighteous it was. Thirty years later, nothing has changed. Make no mistake: we need Sinead's lessons more than ever.

Back in the 1990s, I took my quivering rage and turned to activism as an effective outlet, inspired by Sinead's fearlessly radical cultural presence. I attended protests for reproductive freedom, apprenticed with mentors from various backgrounds, and forged a long career path in community mental health that diversified my small, white world, bringing me in proximity to the expansiveness of humanity. Many people in my Midwest Catholic-leaning community didn't understand what I was doing and saw these vocations as dangerous and threatening, even trite. I am often rendered unseen and unheard by these people, even after moving to the west coast, denied the generosity of their curiosity as they make assumptions about my character in order to de-potentiate my

calling attention to systems of oppression they draw upon for their own sense of identity and safety in the world. I continue to work on rooting deep into the soil of collective wisdom from teachers like Sinead. Her lessons have been instrumental in weaning me off the *Good Girl* poison. She has helped me peel the *Shame* label off the bottle that contains my rage, replacing it with one that reads *I Will Be Heard*.

I have started sharing my writings with the larger world, despite the quickening it inspires in my heart. In sometimes trembling and sometimes booming tones, I voice my protest in professional settings and speak my mind with close friends and intimates about controversial things. I resist coiling in shame after musing up social interactions by declining the invitation to please. None of these awakened instincts come gracefully. Sinead encourages me to take small sips from that potent elixir, appreciating its depth and complexity, always inspiring more articulate ways to wield its alchemy for positive change.

Sinead's lessons have not been easy. I have often failed them as I continue to struggle with being unlikeable in a world that is hungry to demonize unlikable women. There is a price to pay when a female body expresses rage that demands to be seen and heard. This is an unavoidable truth when confronting Sinead's earthly absence—and more rage swells in response. *Another woman. Another activist. Another casualty.*

I remember the hate that came down on Sinead back in the 90s. I was proud of the hatred, proud that she was causing a stir. Her anger at the Catholic church met my own. When I saw her rip up the photo of the Pope, I was both envious of her dexterous display of power and fearful of the witch hunt that I knew would follow.

And it did. For the rest of her life, she would be judged, lampooned, harassed, stalked, made into a mental health trope, a has-been whose message was pulled apart and buried in scattered pieces to dilute its power. Unlike me, Sinead never seemed to care if people liked her or not. She definitely would not sacrifice her voice to please others. But of course she was affected. I remember

Sinead's face when she was booed off the stage when performing at Bob Dylan's concert in 1992 (Greene 2021). It flashed from fragile to fierce and dignified: she stood tall, resisting collapse and persisted with voicing her rage by belting out the lyrics to Bob Marley's "War." Only one male performer stood by her—Kris Kristofferson. The rest chose to take a pass, despite being crowned as pioneers of liberatory causes. Did they fear her too?

I was naïve to the accumulating toll Sinead's activist soul would take on her earthly being, the toll of living in a world terrified of women and their anger—a world constantly pressing on the fissures that had been struck through her until she finally broke. For a few days after she died, I hated the human world so intently that I wished I could crawl out of the mortal coil of my body and just be air.

Be a bird. A whale. Anything but human.

During those first few days after her death, I felt comforted by the outpouring of intense grief online by so many others who professed their sorrow over her loss and long-term oppression. But I was also surprised. I really expected her death to be received more quietly, with less fanfare. Frankly, I had no sense of how many of us devotees there were out in the world. Where had we all been these years? Why had we not gathered earlier in outward shows of support for Sinead? How did we not insist that her legacy be known to the younger generations who so desperately need her timeless wisdom as well? How many of us were afraid of Sinead too—of what she awakened inside of us?

In the era of social media, where every expression of female fury can feasibly be published online for all to gawk at, it is hard *not* to see the hatred toward angry women—black women, white women, women of culture, trans women, and women of all ages, from the young to the elders to the middle-aged like me. And yet, modernity is so saturated with examples of hating women in general—from the meek and compliant to the angry—the only appropriate response is rage. This hatred is even concretized in legislation that seeks to subjugate female bodies. It is *sane* to feel this level of fury. But the

catch remains: no matter how we express it, as women there will always be people who hate our rage. Remember what Sinead told us? "If they hated me, they will hate you" (O'Connor 1990).

What if female anger was revisioned as a healthy instinct against oppression? What happens when women scream, howl, snarl, and moan in protest? What happens when we become our rage? What happens when we become channels for the rage of our female ancestors? What do we risk by doing so, and what are the dangers we face as a result? What if we stood up to these perceived dangers and did it anyways? Shrieked until our bones shook, howled until the eyeballs of onlookers shattered, screamed so loud the earth cracked open to receive such purifying fire? I am well aware that fearing the holiness of female rage serves as water to the roots of the good girl, especially white good girls who are groomed to appease our own Bluebeards and denigrate our sisters of culture. The good girl warps white female fury in a sleet of "politeness," "kindness," and "goodness." This drains our holy fury of its sacredness, making it into a pallid weapon of racism, internalized misogyny, and other shadowy perversions. How can we self-preserve by revering our holy rage and prevent ourselves—and each other—from beaching? Perhaps we start by learning to decipher the keening of our whale kin. What wisdom might be embedded in those arcane songs?

I find it no coincidence that right before the world learned of Sinead's death, 100 pilot whales beached themselves not long after huddling together in the shape of a heart. But what does a heart have to do with rage? What was this whale heart trying to tell us? After learning of Sinead's death that afternoon, for some reason I could not get the image of a whale heart out of my mind. *Sinead, whale heart. Sinead, whale heart*, I chanted silently throughout the day. It took me too long to realize what Sinead was trying to tell us. Now I get it: the rage, the activism—it is all rooted in love. Rage that is loved becomes a portal to self-love. Activism, fueled by righteous rage, is ultimately an expression of love for the world. Grief, an essential ingredient of activism—and so often entangled with rage—is ultimately love. Rage that is made holy by loving it,



that is tempered by the tears of grief, becomes an *essential source of liberation*. We know now from her candid memoir that so many of those earlier songs that burned with fury were rooted in matters of the heart: betrayal, longing, anguish, yearning, rapture, sorrow. All byproducts of love.

Through all the fury, Sinead laid bare her tender whale heart.

A whale's heart is giant and muscular, on average five feet tall and weighing 400 pounds. It is built to help the whale withstand the immense pressures of the sea, equipping them to reach even greater depths (Maloney 2022). Because it is nutrient-rich, a pilot whale's actual heart makes them vulnerable to killer whales, who relish in devouring the organ if they get the chance. Mother whales symbolically express their heart-centeredness by nurturing their young calves, doting on them in their younger years to ensure their safety, and teaching them the skills needed for survival.

A female whale's heart is so revered that once she reaches menopause, she is regarded as a leader of the pod—a wise matriarch whose vast wisdom of the ocean allows her to guide her pod to the richest feeding territories (Cirino et al. 2024). When matriarchs begin to die, the other whales often gather around them, companioning them as they transition. Incidentally, marine biologists surmised that this was the actual reason for the strange heart-shaped pod that formed in the shallow waters: a matriarch might have been dying, and the rest of the brood came to be with her. A whale heart knows how to grieve (Zhuang 2023). Once a whale dies, her body descends to the bottom of the ocean in what is known as a *whale fall* ("Whale Fall 101" 2021). There, she turns into a source of food and shelter for the marine life that lives on the sea floor. A whale's heart is central to this: its size makes it a storehouse for protein and other nutrients that enrich the oceanic environment, feeding the ongoing circle of life.

Sinead and her Whale Heart. Giant, rich, bountiful in its potential to nourish so many. Wise. *Tender and sweet*. Taken for granted. Fed on. Always vulnerable. Here lies her ultimate legacy. She has left her Whale Heart for us, in the deep, dark, sacred place

all women know—even if they think they do not—where it remains a source of nourishment, its medicine both ancient and timeless. Its walls are strong enough to withstand the ululating of historic female rage, its constitution rich in self-love and love for the world.

Women still have access to the nourishment Sinead has left behind. We just need to choose to use it. That choice will involve risk: we may not be liked or loved or wanted for showing our fury. But we must stop negotiating with predators who regard our wisdom, forged by the fires of holy rage, as something to consume for themselves. We must remember the Whale Heart and never forget her preciousness.

I often wonder if my random plea to Sinead in the car two days before the world learned of her death was a summoning by this powerful matriarch who could create the kind of whale song that groans and shrieks in her time of needing comfort: a singing that could only be heard by her kind, scaring off predators to summon only those who love her. I do believe there were others out there who heard a similar call, whether in dreaming or waking life. And after a long absence from Sinead, perhaps we all listened this time and gathered to form our own heart shape around Sinead's dying form, sitting vigil with her as she prepared for her whale fall. I just hope she knows we were there with her.

I decide to ask the whales one more time for their help. In no time, they appear, put me on their backs, and propel us into deeper waters. They know where they are taking me. A vision appears, fitting for Sinead in its otherworldliness. It is woven by many hands that conjure an immense gratitude that far exceeds my own. This is a vision channeled by Sinead's pod through me, with the help of the salty waters of the vast, ancient ocean:

Sinead floats on the surface of the sun-dappled water, alone. Her eyes are closed, and her arms are extended as if she is poised to embrace the entire world. A soft breeze betrays a hint of surrender as her body softens and yields, slowly sinking below the membrane of the ocean, farther and farther away from our heart formation. In full whale fall, Sinead descends through the depths, down . . . down . . .

down . . . her body like a crescent moon cascading through the blue-green water until she reaches the ocean floor. There she becomes weightless, safe from predatory attacks, unburdened by the sorrows of the world she carried on her back for so many of us, free to roam the salty seas that will lead her to countless unseen shores.

I can promise Sinead to do better by her lessons and sacrifices, but I want to give her more than that. I continue to carry around an aching sadness over her loss. I desperately wish I had the chance to share a whale song with Sinead. As I remain on the surface of the water near where she descended into the depths—my own whale fall still somewhere in the future—for now, this is our song.

*"Thank you for breaking my heart. . .  
Now I'm a strong, strong heart."  
(O'Connor 1994)  
Thank you for everything you have given us, Sinead.  
Thank you for leaving us your strong, strong Whale Heart.  
We promise to cherish it.*

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# WEREMOMMY

In fertile times,  
moon-ridden,  
she dreams of babies:

pink as worms,  
fresh from some primal stew,  
smelling like silt and oysters,  
spawned in that insipid ooze of seed and egg.

These luscious little parasites  
grow juicy as secret grapes.  
Ripening in the damp and dark,  
they loll through her dreams—  
humid, swollen flesh-fruit.

Weremommy,  
baying a baffled rage at the irresolute moon,  
ranting resistance against relentless tides,  
would cast her womb in silver  
against that weird and wild seeding.  
She would bind herself in wolfbane  
to keep from swiping right.

In rueful glee, a guilty gala,  
she mourns and lauds the fertile times for passing.  
It is her joy and her shame  
to be fallow and free,  
fast and alone.

She would bathe the moon  
in a hot saline red.  
encarmine the glow, that potent lure.  
She cries at the carnage, the cycles of blood,  
then laughs at herself  
and howls at the moon,  
feral and fine:  
a fierce lullaby.



# OUR FATHER

Our Father belches and grumbles,  
morose and mean,  
and he will not speak to the angels.

In Heaven,  
we all sleep with the lights on.

While Christ goes quietly to the cross,  
and Lucifer laughs,  
goes mad,  
plunges in fire and glee,  
the sisters keep silent,  
keep secrets.

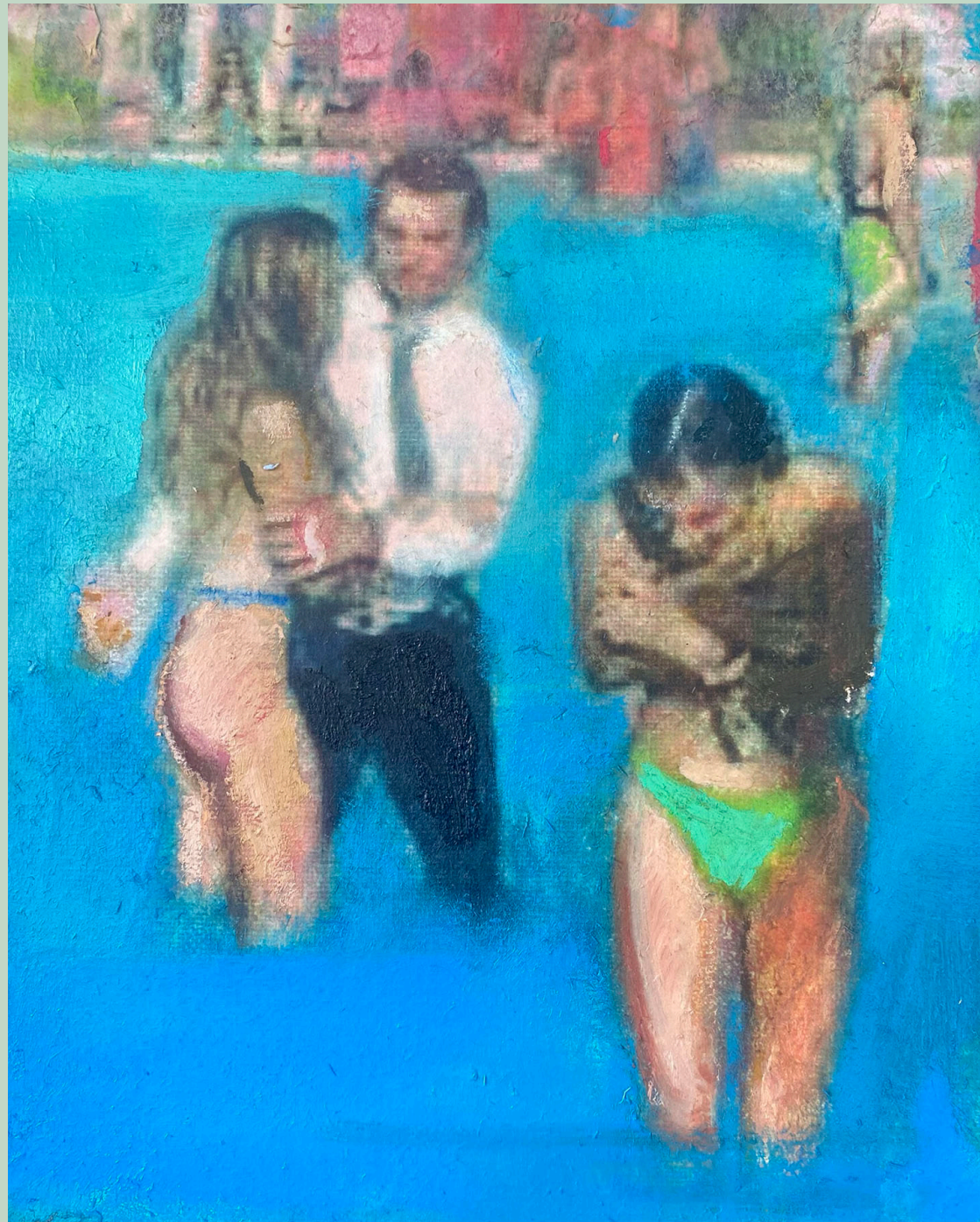
Hallowed be thy name, Father:  
BREADWINNER.

In the holy TV glow  
we eat our daily bread.  
Our Father eats through eternities,  
salivates, masticates.  
He spewed us forth, He eats us again:  
trespassers,  
trespassed against.

Night in the Kingdom:  
Thy will be done. Be done! Be done!

A monster machine, divine, obscene,  
chortles, grunts, stinks, sweats,  
looms above the angels' beds

on earth as it is in Heaven, Father.  
On earth as it is in Heaven.



***Bikini Baptism***  
Caro Dranow

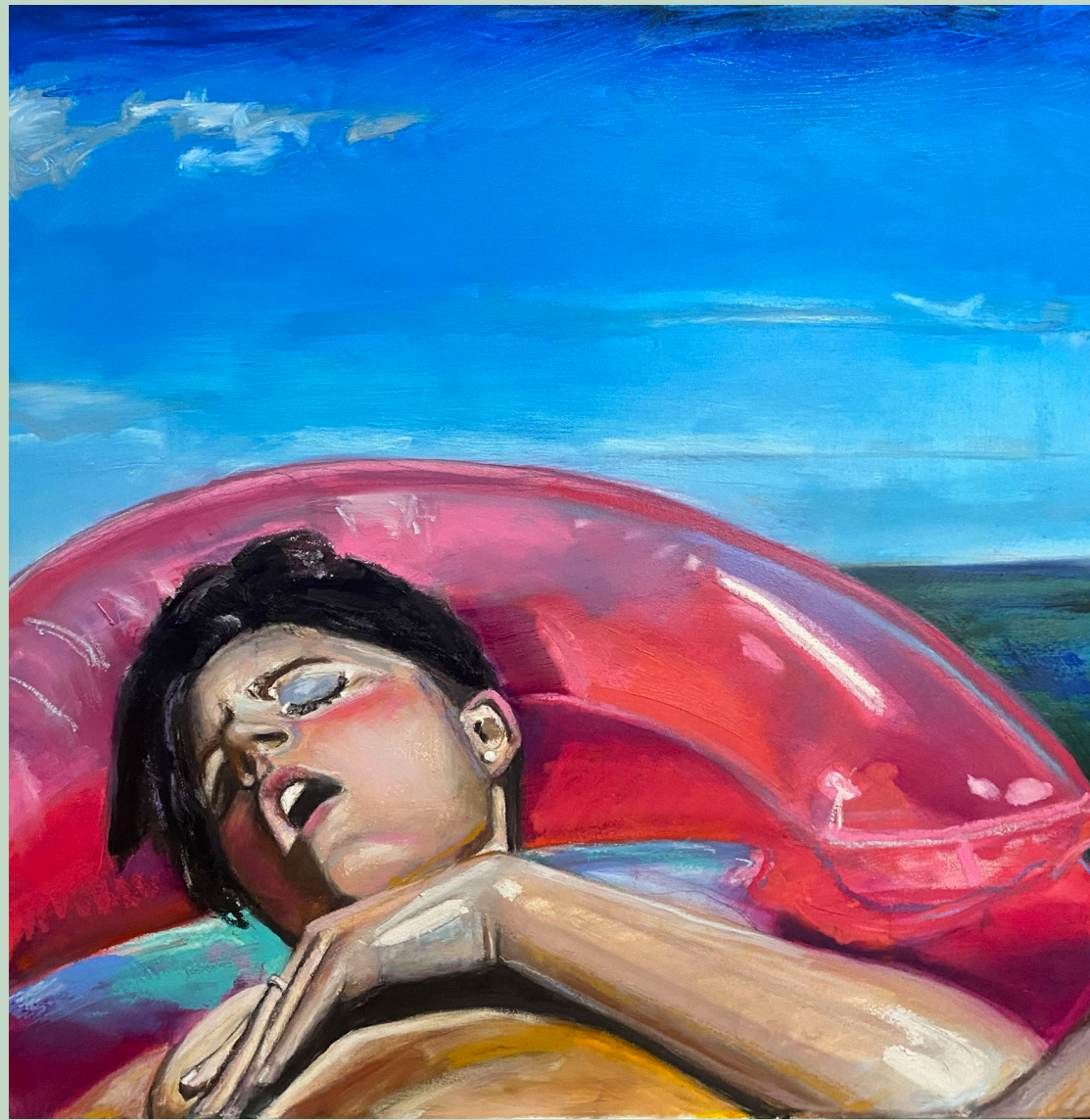
# YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE SAFE

E.J. Mims

I see you laughing  
A pack of hyenas  
Preying on the innocent  
I feel his dirty hands sink into my hair  
He pulls my head back  
Presses himself against me  
The world spins around me  
The smell of stale beer and cigarettes  
The sound of pool balls and bad karaoke  
Your laughter  
And his voice —  
*Look at her, she likes it*

- You were supposed to be safe





***Out to Lunch***  
Caro Dranow

# THE INVISIBLE COSMETIC PROCEDURE

Kat Hennessy

Are all men necrophiliacs? A short essay exploring soul murder and its effects on heterosexual relationships.

The most common and violent kind of plastic surgery is also the most unknown. It is not always obvious to the eye, no more than an outward change in one's demeanor, or a newfound dullness to the eye, maybe a false smile, and because of this, it carries on silently and dangerously. Women who have suffered from the surgery will never disclose to you what kind of operation they have undergone because they do not know it has happened themselves.

The procedure starts young for girls—immediately after birth, and for some boys, it is not uncommon to see these changes around puberty. bell hooks focuses primarily on this phenomenon as it affects boys. She calls it soul murder: "patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves" (hooks 2004, 112). As children, boys may not be consciously aware of their wholeness, but that does not stop them from behaving with that special freedom it grants them, to be carefree and genuine in their desires and understanding of self, nor does it stop them from detecting the hole that is left from the lack of its presence later in life. Soul murder begins the first time they are told not to cry like a girl, or worse, not to cry at all; the scalpel descends into the flesh. They have been betrayed, and unknowingly betray themselves as they internalize these messages. No man aspiring to this patriarchal ideal, of hierarchy, domination, power, control, compartmentalization,



and unfeeling, can be whole (hooks 2004, 229). Yet this is what is demanded of boys—or else be abandoned, beaten, ostracized, killed. Violence becomes constant threat to not only the boy-body, but now the engine of its movement into adulthood. "...many [men] victimize from the location of victimization. The violence they do to others is usually a mirroring of the violence enacted upon and within the self" (hooks 2004, 207).

What is not examined in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, is the cosmetic procedure and subsequent soul murder that is forced onto girls. Women are neither complete, as we continue to mistake the pain of dying as the pain of metamorphosis into womanhood. A woman may very well be a doomed word: forever trapped in a definition of identity that has assumed external perceptions of inferiority so intensely that it cannot separate itself from its oppression. Womanhood ascribes this painful process necessarily, no matter how one becomes a woman. Contrary to the beliefs of trans exclusionary radical feminists, womanhood does not discern bodies deserving of its pain by notions of natural versus artificial. Each process of entering womanhood begins its procedure in the same manner—by ingesting a series of numbing pills in preparation for the physic cut and starting with the most important one: you are in lack. The lack can change depending on the age of the patient and be adjusted as more pills arrive. But this is the essence: girlhood, womanhood, femininity, is lack. Once this lumpy, painful pill has made its way down the gullet and been digested, affecting your actions at every moment within and outside of your awareness, the remaining pain pills are prescribed. They convey supplemental information; you are longing for a man; you are delicate, weak, clever, but not smart like the men around you, quiet, polite, ugly, unfunny, a burden. You need that charming savior to love your unlovable parts, but first, you need to hide these lacks as much as you can. These "truth" pills numb your soul, increasing in intensity, until the final death blow is not registered as dangerous or fatal, but rather as simple and natural as a growing pain. The message rings; don't step outside of the center. If you fall out, push your way

back in; it's all you have. If you stay outside of it, that bright and telling light that clumps all patients together on display for whoever wants to pull your hair and poke your ass, "Doctor, her nose too, please," your insecurities won't need to be fixed anymore, because you are unredeemable. And this is the final pill; a fate in which men don't find you attractive, interesting, or worthy of their time and attention, is worse than the scalpel. It is worse than death.

The soul murder that women experience is another form of cosmetic surgery, an altering of the true inner-self in order to attain patriarchal standards of beauty and love. It lays bare this uncomfortable reality: you must inflict violence onto your soul in order to have most men. But, when chasing that man, you must remember that you'll never have him, not unless you are willing to live your entire life with that squeezing tension behind your ribs, located deep beyond your lungs, in your core, that compulsion to mold him. You will want to warm his rigid clay with your massaging and loving hands, because to you, love is tolerance for the sake of mutual change. You will have to accept his offensiveness, ignorance, indifference, lack of passion, idiocy, and control over you. You will have to politely ask him to remove his hand from your throat and praise him for asking "Is this okay?" as if he hasn't already decided for you. You will have to bury that feeling of pain when he smiles and you finally know that you are a chameleon. His smile is not worth it, although tempting, because in order to see it you will have to kill off the parts of yourself that make you who you are; you will never have him unless you embody his unspoken, unacknowledged demand and participate in his mindless soul murder, tarnish your golden voice, flay your skin longing to be touched, gouge and pulverize your heart longing to be seen. He does not want you, he wants your corpse. He wants the deadened shell of a woman, no longer a person. Sever your heart's desire. Then you will have him. This is soul murder: the invisible procedure, which seeks to make all men necrophiliacs and all women chameleons. It wants to make you hollow.

The effect of this procedure is that, when you are confronted with

these murderous men, who want to enact the soul murder they have undergone onto you, all the pills you have swallowed are brought to the surface, and all those early wounds are reopened for both you and him to witness. The fear of loneliness and hope that you can love him enough to revive his deadened heart surge from your wounds. Panic ensues. Stitches pop and break away. Some will let him murder them. It is not your fault no one told you; but it is your responsibility to stay alive. There is a difference between loving men in the pursuit of creating a new world, sparking a revolution of love, and killing yourself in order to become someone that a man would entertain. He wants you to do many things: become more lenient about your world views or else be patronized (or worse, abandoned), shave, let him cross lines in bed that you aren't quite comfortable with him crossing, ignore comments that rub you the wrong way, excuse bad faith humor, ignore his past, and give up your true desires so as to settle for whatever he feels like offering. He may not even realize that he is demanding this of you, and of that you may want to love him into enlightenment, but this kind of leniency, your feeble outstretching of hands waiting to be warmed with acceptance and mutual self-growth, can only work if he is also willing to be changed. Hiding your true self in order to keep him is not the path to helping men become more loving, whole beings. It is enabling their inadequacy and inflicting soul murder onto the self. It is the expectation for women to become chameleons—to turn any color for a man's time and attention. The rest of us not willing to turn unnatural hues, not willing to undergo the final stage of the surgery, that with a one-hundred-percent fatality rate, will wait and lament and suffer and hope. But we will not murder our souls for him.

Throughout childhood, wholeness is stolen from us and never guaranteed to return. Finding him that does not expect a corpse in his bed at night will be difficult. To truly help men into becoming whole and capable of loving again, and finding this for ourselves too, we will have to stay true to our souls and passions. We must try to bring men along with us, but we cannot get hung up on those who will leave when we show ourselves truly. It is not our responsibility

to drag kicking and sulking men out of their soul-graves. We can offer a hand, but they must be willing to take it.

My advice is this: don't let go of slow hands that seek to understand you, and be weary of the ones pulsing with movement swift and deciding. Drop them, the ones that want to murder you. Maintain a loose grip and release quickly, rotate lightly but never close your palm forever. Wait for the necrophiliacs to reveal themselves. Cancel your remaining surgery dates and remember, you are not a chameleon.

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***Private***  
Sara Sasani





*Be Strong Like Afghan Women*  
Anna Rabko

# ECOFEMINISM AND THE "UNDOMESTICATED SPACE" IN *JANE EYRE*

Heather Davey

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will; which I now exert to leave you" — Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (284).

During the nineteenth century, separate binary-gendered spheres were established that defined private and public spaces according to regularising gender roles (Lasser 2012, §1). This patriarchal ideology propagated the notions that women are ethically superior and naturally inclined to nurture (Lasser 2012, §2), which led to the claim that women were better suited to domestic duties, such as raising children and providing moral guidance to men and society (Ellis 1839 cited in Chapman 2023; Lasser 2012, §1-§2). Concurrent with gender segregation, patriarchal societies continued to restrict women's education, asserting that women could not comprehend politics, science or matters of logic (Dittmer 2023, 429). This assertion caused the perception that women's knowledge was limited to domestic tasks and subjective experiences (i.e., emotions and the sense experience) (Lasser 2012, §1 and §3). Consequently, the female sphere became synonymous with the private, domestic sphere, and the limits of the female domain restricted the accepted scope of female conversation, including women's writing, to the female experience: domesticity, morality and subjectivity (Dittmer

2023, 429–30). Further, the separate spheres construct prohibited women from crossing the gender boundary, preventing women from participating in political, academic or societal commentary beyond their roles as caregivers. Nineteenth-century literature (institutional and fictional) perpetuated, if not formalised the gender dichotomy framework into a cultural practice (Dittmer 2023, 429–30). For example, Romanticism bifurcated nature "into the masculine, a concept that functions as the master of nature, and the feminine, which was considered both part of and controlled by nature" (Mondello qtd in Dittmer 2023, 429). Kaitlin Mondello argues that gender segregation and the female-nature bind from Romanticism not only carried through to Victorian literature but instructed the gender roles in Victorian culture (qtd in Dittmer 2023, 429). Further, the female-nature bind from Romanticism triggered the ongoing representations of a nature-women kinship in literary history. The apposition of nature and female characters in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) both exemplifies and challenges the female-nature bind and the separate spheres ideology. As such, through the lens of ecofeminism, this essay examines how the female-nature dynamic in *Jane Eyre* facilitates simultaneous emancipation for women and nature and challenges Victorian societal norms, thereby expanding the middle-class female sphere from within.

Coined by French feminist and science fiction writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, ecofeminism expresses the connection between women and nature, and the inherent relationship between liberation for both (Buchanan 2018, §1; Cameron 1995, §1; Fontaine 2008, §1-2). d'Eaubonne argues that the oppressive patriarchal social structures and mental attitudes that subjugate women are likewise employed to dominate, oppress and degrade nature; consequently, liberation for one affects liberation for the other (Buchanan 2018, §1; Cameron 1995, §6; Dittmer 2023, 428; Fontaine 2008, §1–2). In her article "*Ecofeminism*" (2008) in *The Oxford Encyclopedia: Women in World History*, Darcie Fontaine explains that ecofeminism has roots in numerous movements, including "second-wave feminism, the green movement, and the

antinuclear and peace movements" (§2–3). These diverse influences caused many theoretical categories of the ecofeminist philosophy to emerge since the 1970s (§2–3). The two principal subsets are social ecofeminism and spiritual ecofeminism. Social ecofeminists argue that gender is a social construct, and that "the patriarchal hierarchy has associated women with nature...to maintain their subordination" (§3). Likewise, the domination of nature stems from a patriarchal social agenda that aims to extract and exploit resources to progress industrial capitalism (Buchanan 2018, §1; Fontaine 2008, §3). Therefore, the apposition and simultaneous oppression of nature and women is a result of social injustices rather than innate biological predispositions (Fontaine 2008, §3–6). In contrast, spiritual ecofeminist theory states that because females can give life, they are necessarily closer to nature (Fontaine 2008, §3–7). As such, males and females are biologically different and thus different by nature (Fontaine 2008, §3–7). Spiritual ecofeminists argue that women's oppression is a consequence of the misplaced "androcentric" belief that women's proximity to nature necessitates their oppression (Hall 2020, 83), or as Stacy Alaimo explains: "women is closer to nature and thus inferior, woman is inferior because nature made her so" (Alaimo qtd in Dittmer 2023, 428). Although this biological connection to nature is considered a cause of women's oppression, it also suggests a unique cosmological connection between nature and women akin to the theory of holism (Fontaine 2008, §3–7). This connection is thought to be the spiritual source of female power and the social source of female empowerment (Alaimo qtd in Dittmer 2023, 428; Cameron 1995, §2–5).

Even though the term "spiritual ecofeminism" was created almost a century after the Victorian period (Fontaine 2008, §3; Dittmer 2023, 429), spiritual ecofeminist theory can explain the portrayal of women in Victorian literature. An example of this is the dichotomous depiction of women as either "nurturing or destructive" that underpins Bertha and Jane's characterisations in *Jane Eyre* and reflects nature's conflicting characterisation



as "nurturing and destructive" (Dittmer 2023, 428). Bertha is characterised as destructive and capricious, often with reference to the effects of the lunar cycle on her 'lunacy' (Brontë 2003, 232). The patterned apposition of the moon and Bertha demonstrates how the internal and external forces of nature catalyse and reflect Bertha's descent into madness. By contrast, Jane is the moral centre of the novel and is characterised as nurturing, often owed to her kinship with nature (albeit with 'wild' or 'untamed' connotations equally reflective of nature) (Brontë 2003, 232). Further, both characterisations employ Romanticism's traditional emphasis on "nature as reflective of the inner being" that proceeded into Victorian literature to depict the female characters as embodied by nature (Dittmer 2023, 429). As such, this essay will focus on the correlation between spiritual ecofeminism and nature's representation as an ally to females in terms of self-expression, embodiment and defining nature as female space in *Jane Eyre*.

Within spiritual ecofeminist philosophy, there is scholarly debate about whether the female-nature affinity due to biological constitution empowers or inhibits female agency (Dittmer 2023, 428). If the patriarchy dominates nature and nature controls the female then, by nature, women have no autonomy (Dittmer 2023, 428–30; Hall 2020, 81–2). Further, the notion of a woman being embodied by nature in female-nature literary representations eliminates her subjectivity and, consequently, her autonomy (Willis 2020, 63–4). The disjoin between women and their agency is the reason why ecofeminists like Caroline Merchant argue that true female emancipation can only be achieved if there is a divorce between the female-nature bind (qtd in Dittmer 2023, 430). Although this debate highlights critical concerns about the consequence of nature's biological influence on women's autonomy in a contemporary context, the historical necessity for creating a cultivated female-nature kinship that enabled female liberation is understated in this ecofeminist argument. During the Victorian and pre-Victorian periods, women faced various forms of social oppression and inequalities (Dittmer 2023, 429–31), including

unequal divorce restrictions, coverture and education restrictions. At the same time, the female sphere construct limited permissible scope when writing within the female sphere. By creating distance between women and their subjectivity (Dittmer 2023, 429), female writers could more easily express themselves while operating within these patriarchal social constraints. The female-nature alliance offered women writers an avenue to explore, discuss and criticise patriarchal oppressions while remaining within their assigned sphere and protecting themselves by removing their subjective voices. Thus, using nature's embodiment as a narrative mask enabled female agency and allowed women writers to expand their gendered sphere from within.

The notion of innate female predispositions in Victorian culture filtered through to Victorian literature, evident in the contrasting characterisations of women as "mind/body, nature/culture, angel/whore, human/animal" (Dittmer 2023, 430). These characterisations are embodied by the female characters throughout *Jane Eyre*, each with symbolic significance. However, Jane and Bertha's contrasting but connected angel/demon characterisations offer insight into literary autonomy when considering Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's theory of 'the Other' outlined in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1980). Speaking of Charlotte Brontë's dyadic existence between "Charlotte Brontë, the woman" and "Currer Bell, the author," Elizabeth Gaskell explains that each personality within the host has "separate duties belonging to each character—not opposing each other" (Gaskell qtd in Brown et al. 2022, "The Life of Charlotte Brontë"). Analogous to Charlotte Brontë and Currer Bell's interdependence, Gaskell's "separate duties" within a host concept can inform the contrasting characterisations and responsibilities of Bertha and Jane if Bertha is viewed as Jane's 'Other' (Gaskell qtd in Brown et al. 2022, "The Life of Charlotte Brontë"; Gilbert and Gubar 1980). This notion is exemplified in the following extract:



I had forgotten to draw my curtain...The consequence was, that when the moon, which was full and bright (for the night was fine), came in her course to that space in the sky opposite my casement...her glorious gaze roused me. Awakening in the dead of the night, I opened my eyes on her disk...It was beautiful, but too solemn: I half rose, and stretched my arm to draw the curtain.

Good God! What a cry! (Brontë 2003, 232)

In line with the novel's gothic and fairytale undertones, the indication that the moon is a "full" "disk" (232) and the revelation that the cry belongs to Bertha later in the novel imply that Bertha has werewolf-like qualities (326–7). Further revealed, Bertha attacks Mason at the time of this cry (238–40), shadowing the unveiling of Rochester's plan to marry Blanche. The moon both diminishes Bertha's rational state of mind and implicitly catalyses her metamorphosis into a non-human, perhaps otherworldly animal. Bertha's mental and physical changes parallel the Victorian cultural views that nature affects female mutation, particularly female reproductivity, making women biologically susceptible to being irrational, unpredictable and emotional (Dittmer 2023, 429). In contrast, the moon comes as a warning for Jane (i.e., an ally), waking her to ensure that she is alert enough to help Rochester with the injured Mason, thereby casting Jane as the nurturing angel of the house (Gilbert and Gubar 1980). Bertha's violent, animalistic metamorphosis offers an emotional and physical release to counter Jane's conventionally feminine passivity towards Rochester's intended marriage. It is likely that Jane holds suppressed rage at this news based on her previous characterisation of Blanche as a woman whose "...mind was poor, her heart barren by nature... she was not good... tenderness and truth were not in her" (210), alongside her later confession of love for Rochester. Jane suppresses rather than expresses her rage because of the Victorian societal expectations that a woman is to be virtuous and discreet (Dittner 2023, 248–9).

Consequently, if Bertha represents Jane's "Other," her role is to express the internal rage that Jane suppresses. By leaning into the angel/demon, human/animal dualities, Brontë's speaker(s) challenges nature-female biological essentialism, suggesting that if women are mutable by nature, then that mutation will be an avenue for female self-expression. Therefore, by employing opposing characterisation as a rhetorical strategy, Brontë's speaker can freely discuss unconventionally feminine topics of the period, like bigamy and female rage, and challenge the misogynistic views on female biology while remaining safely within the female sphere, thereby expanding female sphere without risking perforating its boundaries.

Albeit a social ecofeminist, Stacy Alaimo argues that the biological interaction between humans and nature can be a source of agency for women rather than oppression, as nature is an active agent that is "invested with [the] potential" to "endow powers of agency" (Alaimo qtd in Willis 2020, 65; Willis 2020, 65). In her book *Bodily Natures* (2010), Alaimo suggests that humans and nature are biologically "intermeshed" allowing for "trans-corporeal" social communication; as such, nature "runs right through us [humans] in endless waves [as] water, air, food, microbes, toxins" (qtd in Willis 2020, 64 and 77). Alaimo further theorises that nature is a social actor that can provoke change rather than a passive object destined to be exploited by human beings (qtd in Willis 2020, 64–5). Alaimo's "intermeshed" concept is markedly similar to the theory of holism, which Iain Maclean describes in *The Encyclopedia for Religion and Nature* as "a philosophy of the relatedness of all things" (McLean 2006, §4). Preceding the Victorian period, Romantic poets developed a "specialized connection between humans and nature" that is "spiritual, consolatory [and] internalized," in which poetry was considered a "vehicle to unite with nature" (Chapman 2023, "Dorothy Wordsworth"). This relationship between poet and nature mirrors the definition of holism and Alaimo's "intermeshed" theory (Alaimo 2010 qtd in Willis 2020, 64). Where male Romantic poets desired to "control the natural world" to "rejoin...an idealized nature he has subdued" through "transcendental" poetics, female Romantic

writers "participate[d]" in nature's "unbroken continuum" (Mellor qtd in Pipkin 1998, 599). Like Dorothy Wordsworth in her *Grasmere Journals* (1771–1855), female Romantic poets used nature's embodiment as an extension of the self and employed nature to reflect the internalised emotions of the speaker through descriptions of the weather/landscape (Chapman 2023, "Dorothy Wordsworth"). Consequently, nature's embodiment became a narrative mask that shielded the writer and/or the speaker from her subjectivity. The Romantic era's 'nature as an extension of the self' is often patterned in *Jane Eyre*, as with Jane's description of nature following her engagement: "Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy" (Brontë 2003, 289). However, Brontë sometimes makes a subtle shift and extends the female-nature relationship by elevating nature's role to a character within the novel. An example of this is seen in the previous paragraph's quote that describes the moon as a feminised entity through the pronoun, "her" (Brontë 2008, 232). In this way, nature is sometimes a narrative mask but also an ally within the narrative, assisting Jane on her journey to female emancipation.

Aligning Alaimo's "enmeshed" theory and holism with the apposition of nature and women in *Jane Eyre* (qtd in Willis 2020), nature's connection with the female is agentic rather than oppressive. This idea is demonstrated after Jane escapes Thornfield Manor but finds herself destitute, homeless and rejected by all human society. Jane says:

I looked at the sky; it was pure: a kindly star twinkled just above the chasm ridge... Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult clung to her with filial fondness. Tonight, at least, I would be her guest – as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price (Brontë 2003, 363).

Nature is personified by the "she" pronoun, raising her status to the equivalent of Alaimo's social actor within the narrative (363). "She" is also characterised as "pure," "motherly," "kindly" and "good," "without price" (363). Given Rochester has deceived Jane and human society rejects and dismisses her as a "common beggar" (369), nature's characterisation in this quotation suggests a "trans-corporeal" or even reverent interaction between Jane and nature that depicts Mother Nature as more unconditionally empathetic to Jane than humans are by contrast (Brontë 2003, 363; Alaimo 2010 qtd in Willis 2020, 64). Although this scene marks one of Jane's most desperate circumstances in the novel, it is also arguably one of her most freeing, as Jane escapes bigamy and entrapment, which leads her to find freedom in self-reliance as a single, middle-class woman—an autonomy that was rare for middle-class women in the nineteenth century (Dittmer 2023, 428–430; Lasser 2012, §1–§2). By choosing to support Jane in her desperate but transformative state, nature becomes a figure of freedom, safety and allyship both socially and spiritually. Additionally, nature is given its own platform for agency, appealing social ecofeminists and spiritual ecofeminists alike. Thus, the female-nature dynamic in *Jane Eyre* represents female empowerment for middle-class women and implicitly highlights the necessity for and benefit of financial freedom and women's independence during the Victorian period, thereby expanding the scope of possibility for women when writing within the female sphere.

Along with a spiritual connection to nature, gendering nature and natural spaces was also established in the Romantic period, which carried through to the Victorian era and offered gardens as sites for women's freedom (Dittmer 2023, 429; Willis 2020, 68). According to Louise Willis in *Gendered Ecologies* (2020), due to the rise in "gardening culture" and the "culture of amateur natural history" in the late eighteenth century, "the association with moral and spiritual improvement meant that botany was an innocuous and appropriate pursuit for middle-class ladies" (68–9). As such, gardens became neutral environments that were in both the public and

private spheres, and because gardens were ubiquitous in Victorian literature, they became sites of liberation for female characters and writers alike (72). Although Willis' theory shows progress with gardens and nature becoming feminised spaces in Victorian culture, the representation of nature in *Jane Eyre* challenges the notion that cultivated gardens are sites for freedom. Rather, the representations of women and nature as wild and undomesticated signal moments of true emancipation for both (Brontë 2003, 48 and 479). This theory concerning Brontë's wild, undomesticated natural spaces perpetuates the "Brontë Myth" that Charlotte Brontë cultivated about the Brontë sisters and their isolated lives living in Haworth and the Yorkshire Moors (Gaskell 1975, 360). The myth created the personae of the Brontë sisters living an unrestricted, "wild" and "isolated life," possibly even a mystical life, as middle-class women in the Victorian period (Gaskell qtd in Brown et al. 2022, "The Life of Charlotte Brontë"). Therefore, although Victorian gardens symbolise spaces of theoretical liberation for women, Brontë's cultivated gardens symbolise another form of entrapment for women and nature alike (Brontë 2003, 48).

The contra notion that cultivated gardens symbolise entrapment for women is reinforced by Charlotte Brontë's critique of the cultivated spaces in Jane Austen's novels, as she states:

a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in the elegant but confined houses. (Brontë qtd in Gaskell 1876, 263)

In comparison, the cultivated natural spaces in *Jane Eyre* act as restrained precursors to either maturation or achieving an increasing level of freedom in each phase of the bildungsroman, whereas wild, unrestrained spaces occupy the true sites of realisation and emancipation in the novels – i.e., the moors (Brontë 2003, 363). Nature also becomes increasingly uncultivated as the novel

progresses, which parallels Jane's progression from repression to liberation. This observation connects *Jane Eyre* as a bildungsroman and a conceptual exploration of nature as a female space that uses spatial identity to inform self-identity. These ideas are exemplified throughout the novel, starting from the opening line where Jane is trapped indoors: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day" (1). Jane is entirely detached from nature, but nature is at once central to Jane's self-expression and, in this case, represents her most dissociated and entrapped self. Jane then moves to Lowood (52–3), marking her first significant advance in maturation and beginning her journey to freedom and self-reliance. Here Jane is offered gardening as a suggested pastime at the Lowood gardens, which she describes as:

a wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect...a middle space divided into scores of little beds: these beds were assigned as gardens for the pupils to cultivate, and each bed had an owner. When full of flowers they would, doubtless, look pretty; but now, at the latter end of January, all was wintry blight and brown decay... (Brontë 2003, 48)

Incrementally freer than at Gateshead, Jane is now amongst nature, rather than removed from it, albeit in a space that is still described as an "enclosure" and nature as "own[ed]" (48), suggesting that neither Jane nor nature is completely free yet. In contrast, Jane discovers the forest surrounding Lowood, which offers her her first true space of liberty. Jane describes the forest as "green, all flowery, its great elm, ash, and oak skeletons were restored to majestic life... All this I enjoyed often and fully, free, unwatched, and almost alone: for this unwonted liberty and pleasure, there was a cause" (76). In this uncultivated space, Jane is physically and mentally unrestrained. Alone all but with nature, she finds freedom in contemplation and allows the external world to inform her natural development. Likewise, nature is enlivened and "restored" (76), finding equal



improvement in an uncultivated space. As such, the contrast between cultivated and wild natural spaces in *Jane Eyre* reflects Jane's evolution from confinement to freedom, highlighting the interplay and interdependence of nature, Jane and freedom in the novel.

Jane and nature becoming increasingly expansive, wild, undomesticated and entwined as the novel advances. The entwined progression culminates in Jane's arrival at Ferndean Cottage, a place with "no flowers, no garden-beds...set in the heavy frame of a forest" (Brontë 2003, 479). As such, Ferndean Cottage is the most primitive and undomesticated space the novel presents. At this primitive location, Jane is likewise the wildest and most liberated version of herself, as she asserts agency and tells Rochester that "I [Jane] am an independent woman now" (483). The novel closes with Jane living a life she chooses rather than a life enforced upon her and in an equally unrestrained and undomesticated location. Additionally, the progression in *Jane Eyre* sees the environment becoming more expansive and Jane's proximity to nature's expanse becoming more entwined as liberation for each nears, contradicting Romantic literary tradition which gendered small natural spaces like individual plants or small streams as feminine and "beautiful," and immense spaces like mountains as masculine and "sublime". (Chapman 2023, "Dorothy Wordsworth") As such, not only does the female-nature bond represent simultaneous freedom, but the imagery suggests an implicit challenge of the patriarchal literary sphere, defining nature as a female space beyond the cultivated garden and small natural entities, thereby challenging the patriarchal ideology of nature and the female while expanding the female sphere.

In conclusion, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* employs the female-nature dynamic to confront Victorian gendered inequalities and expand the middle-class female literary and cultural spheres. By entwining Jane and Nature's journey towards independence, Brontë cultivates a literary allyship with nature that empowers and safely allows her to participate in social and cultural criticism, as she enters commentary on marriage inequality and female financial emancipation (amongst others) into mass publication

as a female, middle-class author in the nineteenth-century. The portrayal of women and nature as undomesticated, uncultivated and unrestrained not only challenges the patriarchal ideology that confined women to domesticity but also expands the possibilities for female self-expression within the female sphere. Brontë's treatment of the interdependent female-nature emancipation seen in the simultaneous progression to an undomesticated, unrestrained state for both nature and Jane, alongside her biographical commentary on Jane Austen's nature imagery, suggests *Jane Eyre* as a precursor to ecofeminism, using nature imagery and the female-nature affinity not just to expand the female sphere, but also as a vehicle to emancipate nature and women alike.

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*Dressing the Bride*  
Sandra Cavanagh





*Las Amazonas*  
Sandra Cavanagh



*Descanso*  
Sandra Cavanagh



# I NEVER LEAVE THE HOUSE WITHOUT EARRINGS ON

I don't know much about my grandfather, but I know that he loves me, apparently, for reasons I can't identify. It makes him happy that I am so smart and responsible and sweet. He probably doesn't even know my favorite color, but he loves me enough to put the fear of God into me for forgetting to wear my earrings.

I am 12 years old and have just started shaving and making a conscious effort to put deodorant on every day. I am 12 years old and have learned that it is not enough to be born a woman, but that conscious effort is paramount to effective gender presentation. I am 12 years old and am playing *Sonic Colors* on my Nintendo DS while sitting on my Poppy's living room couch. It's hot, even inside, and my thighs stick to the upholstery. Garnet and gold football memorabilia signify from every corner of the room that the patriarch of this family is a picture-perfect, gung-ho, Black, Southern man's man.

"Where are your earrings at?" my dad asks me. He's sitting to my right on the sectional. Back then, I had one small pair of rose gold hoops bejeweled with a trifecta of fake diamonds that I wore to school, church, and everywhere else. Or, at least, I was supposed to. My dad lets the question simmer, lets my heart rate play catch up, pulls back the whip.

"What did I tell you about keeping yourself together?" He raises his voice and eyes my grandfather. That's what he called it: "keeping myself together." Poppy chimes in from my left in his big chair.

"Don't make me have to whoop your behind 'bout that," he

threatens, and God's glory is restored.

I don't remember what either of them said or what I said afterward—I can't imagine how I could have said anything in response at all. I do remember drifting outside and to the side of the house, though, the angry summer sun cooking my forehead with malice, baffled at their cruelty. A part of me to this day believes that my dad made such an ordeal out of my forgetfulness to signify that he, too, was an unblemished representation of masculinity who will be damned if his little girl doesn't act like one.

Recently, after spending the majority of my youth ducking and dodging it, it's as if femininity has found me. Cutesy cartoon mascots and pastels and skirts I can't fit because my legs are too long now occupy an area of my mind that was once filled to the brim with apprehension. I love Hello Kitty, purple, and have been in search of the perfect midi dress for what feels like years. Now, when my dad sees me in a skirt and tells me how pretty I look, it feels more like a commemoration than a compliment. I'm a good girl. I'm a pretty girl. I've done good at being a good, pretty girl; I'm sure it's a great relief to him that his daughter didn't succumb to the devil's persuasions and instead succumbed to the obligation to perform, despite his being pleased with me being entirely inconsequential to my new appreciation for softer aesthetics. My dad is proud of my resistance against the temptations of nappy hair and bare faces and eating pussy, that his daughter is beautiful enough to be hooted at carside for wearing a tanktop and shorts in 90-degree heat, of how my hips and ass have filled out.

It's a strange thing—for a God-fearing man and father to three girls to tell his daughter that she is too modest. Whenever I wear anything that doesn't accentuate my figure, or isn't oversized in a specifically endearing and delicate way, or if my edges aren't laid, I feel that some intangible entity is taking marks, and that on Judgement Day, as my sisters in Christ ascend in their purest forms to salvation, I'll be left behind on Earth for showing up to the rapture in a pair of Target sweatpants.

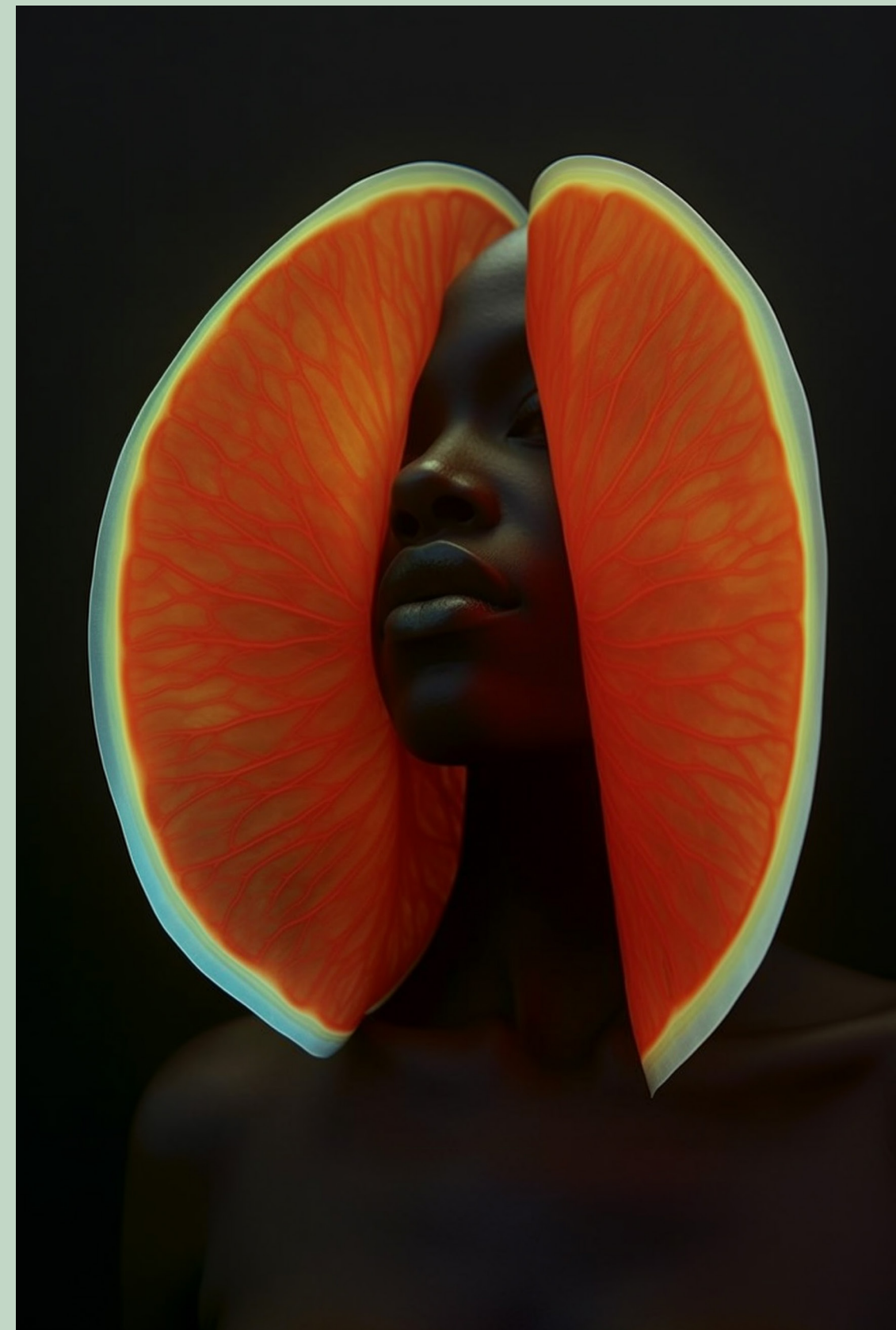
"If you gon' do this, make sure always have your hoops on and



do your lil' makeup," my dad told me. I am 17 and have bargained with him to allow me to do the big chop. He would later say that my new haircut was "becoming of me" and would gift me a \$200 pair of solid gold earrings without being asked, as he'd noticed that I'd voluntarily started wearing daintier and dangly things. I have yet to wear them.



*Naked Ladies*  
Kate Solveson



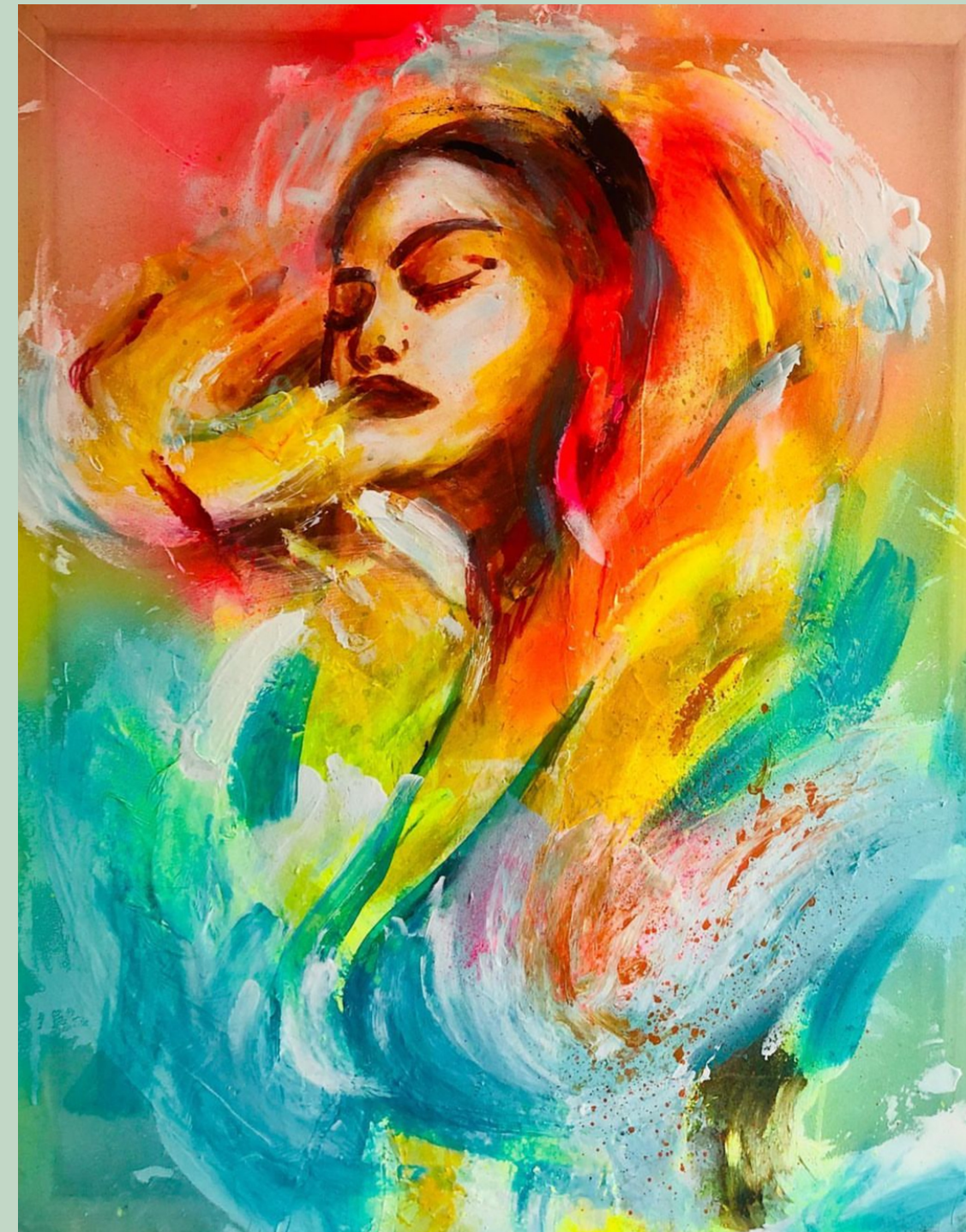
*Liminal Citrus*  
Natasha Burenina



# SHE AND I AS INSULTS

I remember the spit,  
 I remember how it hit  
 the skin of my face:  
 stained lace,  
 him trying to counteract  
 her tender embrace,  
 the vitriol on his face  
 as he hurled "LESBIANS!"  
 red under the skin and angry brow,  
 sweating with rage:  
 "LESBIANS!"  
 like a great stone,  
 that might sink us  
 to the bottom  
 of the neighborhood lake:  
 "LESBIANS!"  
 we didn't even know yet  
 "LESBIANS!"

he built a wall at our beginning



*Wild Waves*  
 Shiva Tamara

# MOTHER BEE

mother  
my mother  
that always knows best:  
smothers,  
goes west  
wild wild,  
turn  
turn on you  
turn around  
and go under now,  
go under.  
down down  
way

way  
down down,  
under,  
she lay,  
humble,  
you thought,  
innocent,  
I bought,  
into  
the  
delusion  
she offers  
on a platter

of gold  
and  
silver,

of honey  
trapped,  
like a bee,  
up,  
in the hive  
mind,  
that could die,  
poison does lie  
within her,  
let it be her  
let it wither  
big heat  
on a flower





**Untitled**  
Sara Sasani

# ELLA EVERLASTING

M.A. Dubbs

[she] *ella* is in the birth of her middle name  
and the expectations of her family,  
carrying *nombres*, all of them,  
across borders and time,  
charting lineage like constellations,  
tracing ancestors to lines and dots.

*Ella* is the domestic,  
living in walls and light  
and the steam that escapes from windows  
even when they're sealed.

*Ella* is nature  
when she thumbs pots and plants  
and thick hair with brush and butter.

*Tía, prima, abuela, yo,*  
we are all *ella*,  
sharing this body and mind  
and speaking through nods and laughs  
and forehead creases.



*Ella* is green wool blankets  
with hint of baby's breath,  
like crushed rose petals and sweat mixed with sand  
like well-worn leather  
and sun cleaned thin cotton lifted  
with a stifled sea breeze.

If you ask *ella* what her sign is,  
she will sing *yes*  
because she is and always was  
in *montañas*, in *mar*,  
in words and blood.

*She* is here in my veins, moving heart,  
standstill flesh, always movement,  
every *her*.



*Princess in Shining Armor*  
Erika Lynet Salvador



# AUTHOR BIOS

## S. A. Arleyn

S. A. Arleyn (she/they) is a writer of Cherokee descent living in New Zealand. She is currently completing an MA in literature through UVIC Canada in climate fiction, as well as doing humanitarian work through No Borders Rotaract and ESRAG. Her academic papers range from ecological psychology to feminist readings of Pre-Raphaelite art. Arleyn identifies as asexual, but deeply romantic, and these themes of emotional duality and dislocation figure predominantly in her poetry and prose.

## Hannah Burns

Hannah Burns (she/her) is a queer artist and writer from Florida, US. She lives with her partner and their two cats, Cheese and Toast. She is currently pursuing her master's in English after receiving her B.A. in English writing. You can find Hannah's other work and more information about what she's reading at @hannahreadslit on Instagram. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Emerald Coast Review*, *Screen Door Review*, *Nowhere Girl Collective*, and *StreetLit*.

## Courtney Chapman

Courtney Chapman (she/her) is a recent graduate of Lycoming College, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology and Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies with a minor in sociology. Courtney is from Warminster, Pennsylvania, where she lives with her family. During Courtney's classes, the work of Kimberle Crenshaw and other feminist scholars who pioneered intersectionality

inspired Courtney to utilize the lens in her research. Her paper, "Intersectional Analysis of News Coverage on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Individuals," is the culmination of the dual degree Courtney has earned. Courtney hopes to continue this type of meaningful research in her future career.

## Edith Reese

Edith Reese (she/her) is living, working, and sometimes writing in Milwaukee, WI.

## Jackie Toth

Jackie Toth (she/her) is a Jungian psychotherapist in California and a former academic editor. She is a research associate and an adjunct faculty member for the master's in counseling psychology program at her alma mater, Pacifica Graduate Institute. Jackie has been a lifelong closeted writer who is actively learning to hone the courage to bring her words into the larger world. Her personal essay titled "The Reclamation of Legacy: Journeying Through Grief and Praise as a Childfree, Middle-Aged Woman" was published in 2023 by the Jungian journal *Psychological Perspectives*. A lifelong feminist, Jackie is passionate about reproductive justice, radical grief theory, and reclaiming stories from the margins that have been exiled by patriarchal, pronatalist, heteronormative, and white supremacist systems.

## Kimberly Merenda

Kimberly C. Merenda (she/they) has her Ph.D. in multicultural women and gender studies, a master's in English, and a master's in women's studies. She is the managing editor for the Texas Woman's University book series, and she teaches university classes. She lives on a farm with her other-than-human animal companions.



## E.J. Mims

E.J. "Mims" Mims (they/she) is a non-binary lesbian, poet, adventurer, and PhD candidate. They are currently working on their dissertation exploring the relationships between masculinity, sexuality, and intimacy in male/male romance novels written by women. Mims has used poetry to express their deepest feelings since childhood and found that creative writing has allowed them healing and self-discovery. They dedicate their time to exploring the outdoors, sharing knowledge of Queer experiences, and expanding their mind through their continued studies.

## Kat Hennessy

Kat (she/her) began her passion for writing at a young age, making short stories and cartoons on printer paper. She has since continued to write essays and poems while studying international studies as well as gender, women, and sexuality studies at the University of Denver. She hopes to continue writing and learning about feminist theory in her post-graduation career.

## Heather Davey

Heather Davey (she/her) is an international student from South Africa pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English (Hons) and Philosophy at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. She is also a research assistant on Dr Alison Chapman's Digital Victorian Periodical Poetry project at the University of Victoria. Her academic interests include feminist theory, women's writing, LGBTQ2SIA+ writing and narrative ethics. She plans to explore the interrelation of these literary areas as her academic career progresses.

## Destiny Herbert

Destiny (she/her) is a writer of short fiction and poetry; her work exists within the sphere of the nostalgic and the macabre and the intersection of queerness and black womanhood. She is pursuing her Master of Arts in creative writing at the University of West Florida and hopes to either gain footing in the publishing industry or establish a solid reputation as a professional editor upon graduation. She appreciates a good horror novel, JRPGs, sweets, and nature walks with her puppy, Nova.

## Lachlan Woodson

Lachlan Woodson (they/them) is a southern queer and neuro-divergent writer and street poet. They were most recently published in InWeekly and the University of West Florida's literary and art magazine, the *Troubadour*. As a street poet, they have written hundreds of poems for folks, on a Smith-Corona typewriter, right on the spot.

## M. A. Dubbs

M. A. Dubbs (she/her/ella) is an award-winning Mexican-American and LGBT poet from Indiana. For over a decade, Dubbs has published writing in magazines and anthologies across the globe. She is the author of *An American Mujer* through Bottlecap Press (2022) and served as a judge for Indiana's Poetry Out Loud Competition. She recently won the 2023 Holden Vaughn Spangler Award from River City College MUSE.

# ARTIST BIOS

## Irina Tall

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art and also has a bachelor's degree in design. Her first personal exhibition "My Soul Is Like a Wild Hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology; in 2005, she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, drawing on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. She writes fairy tales and poems and illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns and animals with human faces. She especially likes the image of a man—a bird—Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: *Gupsophila*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Little Literary Living Room*, and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection *The 50 Best Short Stories*, and her poem was published in the collection of poetry *The Wonders of Winter*.

## Jess Self

Jess Self (she/her) is a contemporary artist in Atlanta, GA, who works with wax, wool, wood, and textiles to create mixed-media figurative sculptures. She received her BFA from Warren Wilson College and MFA from Georgia State University. She received the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation grant in 2024 and 2021 and a Hudgens Prize Nominee in 2022. She owns and operates her craft fair business, Heart Felt Designs, on the side and has taught at universities and workshops around the world.

## Caro Dranow

Caro Dranow (she/her) (b. 1998) is an emerging artist based in Bridgehampton, NY. While her creative practice spans diverse media, including painting, collage, printmaking, and sculpture, her work is primarily grounded in a rigorous love of oil painting that explores the relationship between nature and culture. Simultaneously colorful and cinematic, Caro employs classical oil painting techniques, layered along with expressive oil stick drawings to create her dreamscapes and figures. Speaking to a softness and resilience that she observes in nature and women, Caro challenges the historically male conventions of representation with a distinctly urgent and feminist perspective. At 26, she has been featured in premier galleries such as the Ethan Cohen Gallery and NewApostle Gallery in New York and was included in the 2022 Every Woman's London Biennial at the Copeland Gallery in London.

## Sara Sasani

Sara Sasani was born in 1985 in Tehran. She is a graduate of art and sociology research. He has collaborated with local and foreign newspapers, news agencies and publications for more than 17 years in the field of news photography and social documentaries. In addition to holding four solo exhibitions, he has participated in more than fifty group exhibitions and festivals in Iran and countries such as Trish, France, USA, Italy, Belgium, Georgia, Germany, England, India, South Korea, etc. and has won the first three ranks in prestigious domestic festivals.

## Anna Rabko

Anna Rabko (she/her) is a graphic designer and illustrator working every day, thanks to the power of coffee and never-ending inspiration that comes from the world we live in—using colours and surrealism as a universal language everyone can understand. Her education started at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, Poland,



with a never-ending love of Polish Poster design and continued in Kathmandu, Nepal, learning traditional Thangka painting. Rbako works with theatres and NGOs and collaborates with other amazing artists because how else can we tell how much we love and respect each other's work?

## Sandra Cavanagh

Sandra Cavanagh (she/her) was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her early life was pitched on a growing awareness of the prevailing political instability, an overbearing patriarchal society, and the dangers of state sanctioned brutality and censorship. Cavanagh read Social Sciences at the University of Belgrano and emigrated to California and later to the UK. She is a fine arts graduate from K.I.A.D, University of Kent. Since 2010, she's worked and resided in Brooklyn.

## Kate Solveson

Kate Solveson (she/they/he) is a local artist from Pensacola, Florida, who does subjective mixed media art, generally on black canvas. These collage pieces are made with acrylic paint and an open mind. While these pieces are created centered around an idea, the purpose is to make you look closer and think more. What does it mean to you?

## Natasha Burenina

Natasha Burenina (she/her) is a Ukrainian digital artist pioneering the use of AI tools to create innovative art forms. Her distinctive works have been featured in both solo and group exhibitions, highlighting her creative vision.

## Shiva Tamara

Shiva Tamara's (she/her) art explores the intersection of feminism and the representation of the nude female form. By reclaiming traditional notions of beauty, Tamara empowers women and challenges societal expectations. Their paintings depict the female body as a symbol of strength, resilience, and agency, transcending objectification. Each brushstroke celebrates individuality, diversity, and inherent beauty. Embracing the female form in its unapologetic rawness, Tamara's art becomes a catalyst for dialogue and a visual manifesto for gender equality.

## Erika Lynet Salvador

Erika (she/her), born and raised in the Philippines, is an incoming first-year at Amherst College with an intended major in statistics. In her free time, she loves to go down a poetry rabbit hole, discuss pop culture, and explore digital art and graphic design. You can discover her art at @bodeganierika on Instagram.

# ARTIST STATEMENTS

## Irina Tall

When you are like a bird imprisoned in a cage trying to break out, you are surrounded by doubts that are like burning masks, and you yourself burn, but when only ashes remain there, you are reborn like a Phoenix.

## Jess Self

I am an archetype. Or, rather, I have embodied a variety of archetypes (the seductress, the lover, the mother, and the martyr) throughout my life. In my practice, I create figurative sculptures made from life casts, embedded with or covered in wax, wool, wood, or mixed textiles, to ask—why do we cling to archetypes to understand ourselves and each other? By tapping into the power of archetypes, my identity becomes secondary to universally relatable ideas, helping viewers experience empathy and encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences and psycho-spiritual growth. My figures serve as anchor points to my own narrative and, through the familiar visual language of the archetype, give viewers the opportunity to find their own story within our shared mold. Following Jungian archetypes embedded in both the personal and collective unconsciousness, we experience and feel similar things, creating a connection or shared narrative experience. By using my own body as an archetype, I strive to facilitate an embodied and emotional connection with viewers through narrative shorthands, while also prodding at their validity.

## Caro Dranow

While my creative practice is currently grounded in painting, I consider my work inherently interdisciplinary. With a distinctly humorous and feminist lens, I explore the relationship between nature and culture through paint, in order to reimagine female archetypes. Ranging from large scale landscapes, to portraits, and genre scenes, I explore themes of eroticism, exploitation, and pleasure, in order to discover the possibilities that come from confronting societal myths as they relate to gender.

For the past three years, my focus was centered on landscape painting when, in May of 2023, a devastating fire destroyed all of my work as well as my studio. The gutting experience prompted a distinct shift in my subject matter as I turned inward for inspiration and began a new figurative series.

A self-proclaimed scholar of pop culture, I now approach the canvas as a site of assemblage. Drawing from a well of public and personal references when composing work, I am deeply influenced by experiencing girlhood in the early 2000s. I return to the glimmering hypersexualized depictions of women I absorbed as a child and paint to transform these flattened presentations of women into exalted and complex characters. Often using feminine tropes as a point of departure, I look to pornography, pulp fiction, tabloids, and film for further reference. I renegotiate and rework these lowbrow images to become sources for the figures I then render on canvas.

Often starting with a collage or faint image transfer, my paintings are heavily layered, leveraging the unique properties of oil paint to create illusionistic volume and tension with the source material buried beneath. The slow process of digesting and deconstructing the media that I consume has become as essential to my work as the act of painting itself. As I make art in an era dominated by mass media and the digital consumption of images, ultimately my hope is that my work offers a moment of uncanny pause with the women I immortalize in paint.



With a recent focus on depicting women in swimming pools and beach fronts, I explore the cultural relevance of these sites as symbols of not only wealth and status, but also narcissism and escape. Inspired by the surfeit and spectacle living on the East End of Long Island, I enjoy playing with the imagination of an overstimulated and desensitized audience. Commanding psychological space and drenched in color, I present visions of women and their bodies autonomously lounging, crying, swimming, eating, and moaning—satirizing a rarefied world governed by pleasure, with its own reflection.

## Sara Sasani

"Private" collection is a photo collection that I have depicted a certain period of my life. In this long-term collection, I started and continued this course in the following years, and I intend to continue it. Pregnancy was an unknown, complicated, dumb, and uncertain issue for me, even though I had read all the theories of theorists such as Freud, Lacan, and Krystal for more than a year regarding the issue of children and the relationship between mother and child. But this is a completely personal experience that no theory and thesis can describe and explain. But what happened to my body during pregnancy and after was very amazing and strange and unrepeatable. The changes and transformations in my physiology and body were happening quickly, and it surprised me every moment. I tried to photograph the body and what happened to it during pregnancy and after. This course is a unique experience for me. And my daily life has been considered in this collection.

## Anna Rabko, or Happy Borders

Feminism is my first hobby—to enjoy this time that we can spend together supporting each other, while sharing our stories, opening difficult conversations, and relearning old patterns. Art will always be my universal language to share my thoughts without translation—to show how I see and experience this life. We are all

united; we support each other unconditionally. We are fulfilled with love and respect to all women. We have the power to balance this world. We will always stand up for our rights!

## Sandra Cavanagh

I sustain a mostly figurative focus in reaction to current and historical narratives, including my own. Recent global events have led me to considerations of mortality and loss of innocence in transgenerational stories, the usefulness of art's centuries old regard of myth, foundational stereotypes, and the mundane occurrence of violence. Maintaining a consistent practice, I have developed a large portfolio of work including paintings, drawings, and prints. I take intervals with the painting of still life and portraiture. Interested in the pairing of form and message and formal variations on a theme, I have often worked in series, creating pictorial storylines with some urgency to exhaust the subject and form to the point of understanding or unburdening myself of it. The result is an annotation of feelings underscoring a dramatic approach to form and message.

## Kate Solveson

Taking your pieces apart to fit into a picture you don't feel comfort-able in. Expressing your identity. Disregarding social norms. Being confident in your desires, while being judged by others. Grieving the loss of who you once were, to become you want to be. Making memories that aren't valued as such until they are gone. Hoping for a flower to bloom in a storm of gold, instead of rain. Looking at the small parts, to see the whole. Searching, but stuck, like fish in a bowl out at sea. There aren't enough words to describe what this painting means to me.



## Natasha Burenina

In the artwork "Liminal Citrus," the contrasting combination of a woman's face nestled between two enormous citrus slices evokes a deep sense of concealment—reflecting my inner emotions. This piece speaks to how we often find ourselves in a liminal space, on the threshold of transformation, longing to break free from the shackles of the ordinary and embrace new possibilities. The woman's face, partially shaded and partially illuminated, embodies the duality of existence, where our true selves often remain hidden, awaiting discovery. The citrus slices, bright and tangy, symbolize vitality and resilience, reminding us that even in moments of contemplation and self-reflection, the world around us is full of potential. The sharp aroma and tangy flavor of citrus invite us to taste the bittersweet truths of existence.

## Shiva Tamara

Shiva Tamara's art explores the intersection of feminism and the representation of the nude female form. By reclaiming traditional notions of beauty, Tamara empowers women and challenges societal expectations. Their paintings depict the female body as a symbol of strength, resilience, and agency, transcending objectification. Each brushstroke celebrates individuality, diversity, and inherent beauty. Embracing the female form in its unapologetic rawness, Tamara's art becomes a catalyst for dialogue and a visual manifesto for gender equality.

## Erika Lynet Salvador

The artwork I'm sharing is an oil painting titled "Princess in Shining Armor." This painting subverts the classic "knight in shining armor" trope and presents a powerful female knight as a symbol of strength and autonomy. This piece challenges the "damsel in distress" archetype, too. I would like to advocate for a world where heroism knows no gender and for self-rescue, where every "princess" is her own savior.

