



Autoethnographic Poetry, Bodily Autonomy Special Issue: "Damned"

Description





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AUTHOR'S MEMO

My poem “Damned,” the first publication in *The AutoEthnographer’s* Bodily Autonomy issue, is a work of autoethnographic poetry because it is the product of my confused reflection and internal conversations with the culture that raised me – a culture that teaches women to simply not expect bodily autonomy – and the culture I now subscribe to – a culture in which all persons regardless of class, color, gender, etc. deserve safety and dignity.

For years, I never labeled this incident as anything. So, in the weeks after I accidentally drunk told the story to my husband, a story I’d never planned to share, I was absolutely baffled by his reaction, and resistant when he and then mental health professionals labeled it as sexual assault. I did not want his consolation. I did not want to be called a victim. It felt absolutely fraudulent to attribute any of my behaviors in the aftermath of this event as PTSD. I must have been the weird one, the couldn’t-hold-her-liquor one, the cried-too-much-one, right? I was embarrassed and wanted to leave that all in the past.

“A hundred years ago, no one would have cared!!” I yelled at my husband when he insisted that what happened to me was not normal.

In my absolute confusion and even guilt in the face of these foreign terms people were using, I took to the web – reading blogs, magazine articles, even *Reddit* threads – and realized that so many other women go through the same experience of normalizing sexual violence for years until something prompts a new definition. Having spent many of my formative years in the church, I know too well how religious texts can be used to prioritize and protect masculine authority (particularly rich white masculine authority) at the cost of others’ voices and validity. What I didn’t know was how deeply those attitudes had impacted me, even years after I’d consciously eschewed them.

“A hundred years ago, no one would have cared!!” I yelled at my husband when he insisted that what happened to me was not normal.

But I am allowed to care what happens to my body. I know that now.

Damned

Stop
being dramatic – I just
became afraid of the sun
that summer after so much rain
he wouldn’t look at me
in daylight anymore. Then
every freckle was a threat:
melanoma, squamous cell
carcinoma, a body

not my own.
Time-drenched skin,
every vein, every rip,
burned under fading
dogwood blooms,
so I went to the river at night.

I think of him
and climate change equally,
still catch my breath
when I see an old Chevy Blazer.
Is it fear or....
I recycle and
begin walking endlessly, coated in SPF.
I walk everywhere and get better
at cursing men who stare.

I think of it
and climate change
equally. It is my fault.
I've used too many plastic bags,
went along with things for too long.
I didn't say no.
Eve's punishment was pain.
A man offered me knowledge, and
I nodded – I wanted to know.

Light streamed through a dirty window
and then –
The garden is burning.

There was so much blood
on his sheets
his towel

my hands
tugging my own silken ribbons of flesh out
alone in a mildewed shower.

The Amazon is burning.
California is burning.
The garden is burning.

Sin would make me
a crumpled flower,
so I didn't scream

when rose petals fell out of me.

Sunlight in a dirty window
and then –
I couldn't see, just held
my hands away to keep from
clawing like a crazy bitch.

Where are my hands.

I asked for
this.

Stop

being dramatic – I was just
I just

became afraid

of the sun.

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