Bodily Autonomy Special Issue: Poems for an Intimate Secret

Description

The AutoEthnographer

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Authorâ??s Memo

My abortion is an intimate secret, something for me to save me, but in this patriarchal hall of mirrors, this choice is distorted into a public spectacle. My poems for this special issue seek to document a history of my choice, not just personally but humanly, to use autoethnography to weave through the personal and the political, the body Iâ??m in, the landscape Iâ??m in, the time Iâ??m in.

Throughout my pregnancy, I hungered for a voice of kinship, proof that I was not alone in the hatred of my strange, bulging body. I looked for pregnancy poems that demonstrated my confusion and revulsion, finding nothing. Violence that I never knew was in me swelled in my head; sometimes all I could do was scream something primitive and thrash around and hit myself. My ADHD worsened. I had to take incompletes from school as my brain was exploding constantly. I had only met my partner less than six months prior to the pregnancy, and I found myself resenting him for having a penis, resenting my body for taking the peace I had found with him, within myself in those few months. His guilt and mental illness festered and often we were mad together. We fought a lot, but we also sought to reach towards each other with compassion. Our bond deepened, and we are still together and in love today.

I tried ending my pregnancy outside conventional means as Planned Parenthood was very dismissive when I tried to speak, gasp my truth in my autistic/ adhd selective mutism/ word vomit. They told me they couldnâ??t help me. They were shut down because of the pandemic and wouldnâ??t be open until June. I didnâ??t know that there were other clinics until my wonderful gynecologist began referring me to places months later. I ordered pills online from Access Aid first, but due to the horrific COVID outbreak in India and Bill Gates patenting and limiting reproduction of vaccines, which Indian pharmacists helped design, the pills came very late and heartbreakingly failed.

While I waited, I tried Vitamin C. I ran away with the pennyroyal I had bought as a teenager following sexual assault experiences. I swam and swam until I sunk. I contacted adoption agencies only to be rejected by the discriminatory parents (I suspect that it may be due to the mental health, neurological, and biraciality of the possible child inside me, information I gave to the adoption agency). I watched documentaries, did research, uncovered that link between abortifacients and midwifery throughout the world, inspiring â??Living Before it Quickensâ?•, examining how Christian patriarchal medicalization of the female body put an end to abortion access and how White supremacy permeated with its destructive and appropriating tendencies, literally stealing POC bodies. This then limited access to Indigenous womenâ??s body autonomy, denying their use of abortifacient herbs like Blue Cohosh as mere wanton mysticism. There was truth here. Just as there was truth in the tender assertion of cotton root for enslaved Black women, one of the few ways that they could liberate themselves. Ancient Chinese women too claimed their bodies as their own using Don Quai. Though herbal abortifacients are much riskier than todayâ??s medical and surgical abortions, they still hold validity and may require pharmaceutical consideration. These herbs were an attempt to define oneâ??s own body; this history needs to be treasured rather than ignored.

And who knows? We might be going back to these older remedies. In my poems, I wish to show that desperation seeks resolution. â??Serenity Prayer for a Miscarriageâ?• may be what many uterus owners have to experience now, this tireless and dangerous pursuit of the deadly miscarriage to put an end to this process that is sucking the clarity, meaning, and vitality from the person who would choose an abortion. People are going to die from these oppressive laws, actual people living in this world, people who have made connections, found love, who have hope for a better tomorrow, who want more than anything to build something for themselves and maybe the world too. People are going to die, and this risk increases for Black and Indigenous uterus owners and sexually abused children.

As a White woman, though my neurodivergence acted as a barrier to access and being taken seriously, I know it would be easier. I was so lucky to get pregnant when I did. My abortion officially took place two months before the Texas Heartbeat Bill went into effect. I was 19.5 weeks pregnant and 24 years old. I am so grateful for the love and gentleness I received at the Southwestern Womenâ??s Surgery Center. I would not be in this world without them.

I would have likely killed myself to escape that pregnancy.

Every person who has an abortion has their own story, but they all, if the choice was made fully and freely as their own, exhibited the courage of decisiveness. As a very indecisive person, being pregnant forced me to confront my body, to accept that I was actually in a body rather than just floating around in space. I could not ignore it. I could not procrastinate. I was trapped, but Roe gave me a key. It gave me a way out of that prison, and I am so fucking grateful.

Now though so many people are trapped in their bodies as if they were part of no transformation at all, as if they never possessed a history, as if limits, a ceiling that is reached at the womb, is all there ever was. My poems seek truth, an honest rebellion, evidence of a human being who makes decisions for their own body, that this is a thoughtful and deeply personal decision, one made for the self and with the self, a remedy, my goddess, a remedy.

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Image of painted woman by Geralt for Pixabay

Living Before It Quickens

Dedicated to the Southwestern Womenâ??s Surgery Center

The earth has a solution for everything.
Blue cohosh, birthwort, angelica: the makers
of angels. The unwanted dragged out, blood
and flesh, a transplanted pentacle from the body
composing it. I am not ready to be cut open.
My disrupted humors: phlegm and melancholy
assume my visage from the tomb that grows
inside me. Destiny says it does not have to
overtake. Because when all that I carry
is mud in my basket and donâ??t know enough
magic to turn mud into homunculi and donâ??t want
to repeat the mud I was made in,
abortion is the only loving action left.
Pennyroyal, Don Quai, cotton root: I must survive
the flea buried within. The mouth drinking the organ
tea. The womb reprieved by elasticity. The self
rejuvenating like a bottle of ipecac. I am responsible
for the only circle I have. What comes out
will leave a little more room for me.
The midwife calls, frees me from that gelatinous
opposition, and the priest accepts my penance.
Who declares my savior a witch?

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Photo of woman disappearring by ShiftGraphix for Pixabay

Serenity Prayer for Inducing a Miscarriage

If you were me, youâ??d want it gone too, want all the blue to make it empty. You are no match for the sky: life jacket against infinity. Undriven, unable to drive, ungraduated, unemployed, unmarried, unhealthy, unstable, unwilling to destroy the life of that partner still seeing you as capable. In the future, in a world cleansed of capitalism, in surround sound citadels where dreams and community and

universal design meet, maybe. But everything body is now. The pool water ripples. You are in a stew. Some may say you are baking. The water though doesnâ??t stop reminding you of your impact, halos blurring the belly bulgeâ??that uncracked egg somehow spewing yellow yoke. You have to pee again. You feel the sweet urge to take off your swimsuit and show the world your captivity, bouncing from building to building with the growing gravity you want to smash, leaving a stream of pee & cloudy discharge. You want to be found. Really though, you are blue & breathless, unbaked for loving, hurdling away from goo goo hungers like a wind-up doll with marching arms, the movement equal to not moving, or like the dead snake, stale on the surface, eyes blank & egoless, not fear but the wish to return to something after. The leftover blueberries wonâ??t fit in the cooler. They tumble into the pool. We live in a house of neglect. All that you have been namedâ??ADHD, Bipolar, PMDD, Autism, Slut, Victim, Failureâ??pours, no overflows into motion. The skyâ??s powder turns the doorknob. You want to be made uninhabitable. In your mind, you crumple the paper moon inside you like a tesseract, fold this time away as simply skipped. You swim a lap, body ripping into body ripping into nobody; then another and another. You wonâ??t stop until something comes out. You are in control. You have become water and everything else.

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Image of girl in swing by Suzanne Cipriano for Pixabay

Exorcism is Goodbye

I need you to understand:

it is not about who possesses what.

Itâ??s about not being able to handle

whatâ??s growing inside. The truth is:

I wanted you and didnâ??t want you.

You, AKA It, AKA Uncreature, expanded from me

like a luminescent tumor,

placenta splintering

my ability to speak or be seen

as separate. I went to a place

called Womenâ??s Crisis Center, thinking

this was for me: I am indeed in crisis.

I had already tried running away twice

to escape my body. R. had to drive around

for hours trying to find me.

He went with me to that â??clinicâ?•

to confront the unnamable:

Progesterone Poisoner,

crackhead chicken, unalive,

dancing under the influence

of my body, my Vyvanse,

my rainbow Nerds.

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They tugged me into a room,
him into another, filled my hands
with pamphlets and shame, him
with doubts he deleted: do you even want
to be with her? Here, weâ??re not
the focus. Here, adjectives and nouns
spin into smoothie. â??Iâ?• scattered
only vehicular in the gel-splattered wand,
turning me inside out on that screen
of moving un-feet.

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I am no mother. Iâ??m no murderer either.
I still mourn possibility: the ants I killed
or watched die. I vow to limit destruction.
How can I though take the breath of what has not
breathed? What would I teach
except an inheritance of screams?
It was made with love and tender
impulsivity, but our ADHD didnâ??t plan
for all the rogue endings. You are

potential for my impotential.

The disgrace I release

for future grace, but really itâ??s about you too.

There are too many sharp things

in our world for you right now,

Bubble Buddy. Too much Papa must pop.

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Mama must morph. Get into shape for you.

I must leave you.

You must leave,

so I have something left.

Little mango,

with love from not-mom and not-dad,

I squeeze you out.

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Photo of broken statue by JillianneR for Pixabay

Birthplace of Yama

When the pills fail,

my doctor holds me,

calls clinics as I lay

belly-up surrounded by

candles, rocks in the palms,

warmed sonogram gel

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unable to cure this rejection:

birth, adoption, abortion.

It is all too loud for me.

Too much. Too disabled,

too poor, too mad, too

body. The due date is my

destruction, the stabbed point

between love and what I refuse

to define me. Koan, carry me

to relief: what is my face

before I am born. Iâ??m supposed to

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ponder, but Iâ??m running

out of time. I hide my face

from the screen. A bleat

of unbeing bleeding

out potentials, shriveling

so many branches for the sake

of one obfuscating direction.

I am already the riddle: the body

divisible, dwarfed, anchorless,

by the unhatched. What if,

before I was born, my body,

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these dualized

lips, breasts, ovaries,

were defaced

as divided? This is the trauma:

the leap from innocence into

scrutiny. Symbiont free of

memory, do I owe you

an apology, an explanation,

a goodnight kiss as I trim

this branch for the sake of

all the others, for the part

of me that is unquenched

to survive? *I donâ??t forget you. I*

forgo you. I, the face, before

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and after those unrealized hands.

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Photo of woman by Darksouls1 for Pixabay

Subterranean Survival

You have run away,

the tent exhales you, the mosquitos

bite your thighs and you let them.

Itâ??s easier to just let them drink

and suck up their abuses until

serotonin tells you to scratch.

Cicadas, however,

would make music in your palm.

Five years underground

and they rid themselves

of the belief that skin

is memory, that what happens

in the body stays in the body.

They surface, they cling,

they hatch with a ribbed

xylophone belly. You wonder

if there is a bully

in them that remembers burial,

or do they just lock onto

love upon waking, embracing

telegraphy? You have run away,

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only to sit and listen to

the cicadaâ??s rub. You said nothing;

silence is not affirmation. Consent

does not begin with refusal.

You were just there, struggling with being

a sexed-up knot against

the wall, lips like abandoned

exoskeleton. You suck in.

Their Morse mouths moan

old origins and lost

hardnesses as they accept

their shedding. You want to stay

soft. That cage of the body

independent of its mysteries,

trade it for songs,

for touch, for recovery

of evolution.

Dust off the carcass

hitched to a tree

until youâ??re no longer

wrong, until you realize

you donâ??t deserve to be

bitten after all.

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