

ASHRI AND I: EXPLORING “KNOWLEDGE” THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

by

SIERRA RODGERS-FARRIS

UTZ MCKNIGHT, COMMITTEE CHAIR

JENNIFER SHOAFF

NIRMALA EREVELLES

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in the Department  
of Gender and Race Studies in the  
Graduate School of  
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2014

Copyright Sierra Rodgers-Farris 2014  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

A female protagonist simply identified as “She” remembers and relives acts of violence over a span of years and attempts to cope through poetry and an attachment to an imaginary ‘other.’ Through poetry She imagines Ashri and her kidnap, abuse, and descent into madness at the hands of Fin, connecting the pain of her own life with that of Ashri’s. This combination of poetry and creative non-fiction is not only about the relation between men and women but also about sharing truths through the retelling of real events. This thesis focuses on the issue of how “knowledge” is created and sanctified by social and academic structures. The story shares the knowledge and the theory explains why it is important.

## DEDICATION

To those whose pain is too much to bear,  
whose memories burn their eyes,  
but whose lives yet  
go on.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank those faculty, friends, and family who have helped with the complex process of fighting the meaning of knowledge while reliving those truths I don't want to know. I thank Brenda Hanson and Kathryn Bornhoft who read, read, and reread, and helped edit those moments most personal to me while staying completely academic in their analysis. I would also thank my committee; Dr. McKnight, Dr. Erevelles, and Dr. Shoaff, who helped me craft something that was both completely different yet meaningful. To Dr. McKnight who constantly reminded me that difference is not degrading, Dr. Shoaff who reminded me that being a nihilist was not an excuse to do nothing, and Dr. Erevelles who fanned the flames of my disability pride more than she will ever know. Last but most importantly I thank my husband, Brady Farris, who accepted me with all my illness and difficulties and yet still made me keep my shit together.

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
SECTION I (FIN-GETTING).....	3
ASHRI-REMEMBER.....	4
PLAYING HOUSE.....	5
FIN- MOTHER.....	8
ASHRI-FATHER.....	9
SWEATY.....	10
FIN-ANARCHY.....	20
SECTION I THEORY.....	21
SECTION II (ASHRI-THE CORE OF THINGS).....	26
HANGOVER.....	27
FIN-LUMINESCENT.....	32
YES YOU ARE.....	33
ASHRI.....	39
FIN-HATRED.....	40
ASHRI-STAINED GLASS.....	41
SECTION II THEORY.....	42

CONTENTS CONT.

SECTION III (ASHRI/FIN).....46

FIN-LOSING.....47

WHO AM I.....48

FIN-LOST.....55

ASHRI-SLINGSHOT.....56

REALITY.....57

SECTION III THEORY.....64

REFERENCES.....68

## INTRODUCTION

“It becomes evident that part of our contemporary crisis is created by a lack of meaningful access to truth” bell hooks

Bell hooks writes in her book *Teaching to Transgress* that education and access to ‘knowledge’ is in fact very restrictive in our society. It is treated as serious, dull, and a process that is to be mostly based in the memorization and regurgitation of ‘facts’ and ideas created by someone else and treated as legitimate because a third person, usually a supposed holder of ‘knowledge,’ treats it as such. In this thesis I hope to push outward the boundaries which regulate creative writing and personal experience as non-academic, making my own source of ‘knowledge’ as creative writing. The form of my thesis was not chosen simply because it was different but because the very form of creative non-fiction and poetry can tell a truth in ways ‘academic’ work cannot manage.

Creative work has much to teach people, particularly when the work is either true or expresses an individual ‘truth’ that would otherwise be very difficult to share. Creative non-fiction is a way to disclose, directly report, a moment of violence that shares so much more than other avenues. There are so many things lost in non-intimate accounts of violence that make up so much of the act; the smell of his skin, presence or proximity of help, physical illness and so on. Creative non-fiction also creates a link between the victim, the aggressor, and the reader that is otherwise lost. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Sarah Ahmed (2004) writes that “even when the experience of pain is described as private, that privacy is linked to the experience of



being with others” and this is why showing or re-telling a moment of violence, and not just mentioning the possibility, is important (29). Not only does it make more of a connection between the victim and the reader but it also puts emphasis on the existence of the attacker. She is not simply attacked but attacked by a person, a person who often disappears in many retellings of the violence, leaving the victim alone to take the blame. Laura S. Brown writes in her article “Not Outside the Range” that

battered women are not, from the frame of codependency analysis, the victims of random violence, rendered phenomenological helpless by the relentless behaviors of their abusers. Rather, they are “relationship addicts,” perpetually ill and forever in need of treatment, who seek out such relationships because of their illness (106).

By telling the event in the fashion seen above the pressure is placed back on all people involved, specifically the perpetrators, and shows how She came to be in the following situations. It is also important to show the entirety of the event and surrounding issues so the full truth can be understood within its context. Ladelle McWhorter (1999) writes “We seem to be left, then, with the view that truth is relative, that a proposition is true if and only if it arises in a discursive context in which it can be justified according to the justificatory rules embedded in that context” (45). To put it simply, an individual truth is only a truth inside its specific context and so She’s internal truth only makes sense inside the context of the violence.

Ashri also plays a very important role in the work. While She shows what physically happens, the people, places and actions, Ashri represents the internal change of She. Ashri is the physical embodiment of the abjection She feels after each moment of violence. As Julia Kristeva writes

“If it be true that the object simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when the subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the

outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, what it *is* none other than abject” (5).

Ashri is what is impossible, what exists inside She that cannot be pushed outside or acted on and so must be created in a world to which only She can have access. Ashri is the primal oppression; death infecting life. It is through Ashri that we see She’s coping mechanism and her anger, an intense emotion that is not always apparent in She’s life. It is for this reason that Ashri is from a ‘natural’ environment, a society that can be seen as stereotypically attached to nature. She attempts to imagine a place of innocence and happiness and finds it in the concept of the forest and nature where She will later attempt to find solace. While it is problematic, this stereotypical idea of a nature focused society attacked by one more ‘advanced,’ it is the context that surrounds She’s truth.

## SECTION I

### **Fin-Getting**

He loved her  
the only way he knew,  
not at all;

a tiny vase  
only getting out  
what he put in.

## Ashri- Remembered

She remembered the old women;  
The songs,  
The firewood smells,  
Men bellowing,  
The sweet liquors and strong dances.

She remembered the young men;  
The quarrels to make  
The girls laugh,  
Still too soon  
For love.

She remembered the smell of burning grass.  
Huts alight,  
The edges crisped  
And soft;  
Well-made bread.

The women gossip  
No longer;  
Mud roads quiet as a child  
Lost in the moments of waking  
Just after a dream.

She screams  
Yet  
She alone  
Remembers.

## Playing House

It was the running she remembered the most. Her pale and soft bare feet on hot black tar heated in the Southern summer sun. She remembered how the burning felt against the tiny soles of her feet as she tried to run fast enough that it didn't hurt; the black top pushed her forward. She remembered the pebbles that littered the tar, threatening to tear open the knees and elbows of those on little bikes bare of training wheels. Her father had once promised to buy her a new bike if She learned to ride it without those little white plastic wheels attached with shining metal. She had risen to the occasion by learning that very night and surprising a father struck dumb by his daughter's tenacity and his dwindling bank account. "Can you wait till my next pay check?" That moment would come later, several years later. For now She was just getting brave enough to ride at all and preferred running. For now it was her mother, whom she heard, yelling at the top of her lungs at her small child now half way down the road with woods to one side and homes to the other. Yelling in a way that said the woman was angry, mad at being embarrassed by a snot and tear covered child screeching as she shot out the front door and took off down the middle of the suburban road. She knew she must have returned eventually but was not sure if they had asked what was wrong as She gagged for air between cries. What She did know is that she didn't tell them and that they didn't seem to expect the painful truth as they had both been surprised a few years later at her intimate knowledge of sex by second grade.

It would be after this moment that She would find out she held an intense dislike for dresses but never forgot to put on her underwear again when she dressed herself. No matter how much her mother would try to force little frilly dresses on her, pink numbers with poufy matching drawers, She would cry and scream and make such a fit the woman would decide it was not worth it. She was more stubborn than her mother. She would soon become a "Tom

Boy,” the only type of gender bending acceptable in her conservative community, and become more interested in the trouble she could find outside than those she could discover in her room amongst her dolls. She had lost interest in her dolls after that day, secretly undressing Barbie and looking at her before pressing her plastic body to Ken smooth under area, even spinning their legs up beside their torso so they were nothing but crotch.

She would make a friend around first or second grade, another small broken seeming blonde girl with pale skin and tiny feet. She was one of five foster children living with a couple who seemed genuinely sweet, the father playing ‘monster’ by growling into the air duct exit from the garage as they all squealed and hugged each other from the top bunk in the boys room. Perhaps they had recognized the pain in each other but for whatever reason they shared much, even what it meant to be female. It would be this friend that would first explain to She how blood came from down there when you got older, that it would hurt a lot but only last a week. A week seemed like forever to She but her small friend said it wasn’t. Together they would play ‘house’ as each took turns, pressing the skin just below their waists together till the small bumps of their protruding hip bones rubbed together painfully. Her friend was better than She at pretending, holding her hand against She’s neck and shushing her without hurting.

---

They had been visiting friends; She was not sure exactly when but had figured she must have been around five. This was before second grade for sure but after kindergarten where she had been an apparently happy child, sporting a pretty dress her first day and showing her mom her own cubby. This left first grade, the same year she got her first UTI and spent what seemed like hours crying as she sat on the toilet and her underneath burned so intensely. She just wanted

someone to come check on her. She had waited for what must really have been fifteen or more minutes. She had not, for some reason, even believed enough to hope for the end of the pain but simply did not want to be alone. Once she realized it was not going to happen She had made her way out of the oddly large bathroom kept in the room and went to her teacher to tell the woman how it hurt. "I know, we could hear you." It was around then that it had happened, when she was about six, and that fact was likely what made the rest so hard to remember.

The event itself was still fuzzy but she remembered the feeling of her dress hem rubbing against her face, the fake lace eyelets rough and smelling stale of starch. They had been visiting friends, the adults downstairs and the children went to the master bedroom where overlarge furniture dominated the little room. One of the giant pieces was an entertainment center where a TV sat with its curved glass screen close to the edge of the bed where She sat next to a similarly aged boy, both their feet dangling off the edge. There had been two babysitters but She did not remember their faces, just that they were brunettes and possibly greasy but perhaps she was projecting that part. What She was not projecting was how the girls had become bored and wanted to 'play' with the two of them. She had not liked their game.

## **Fin-Mother**

He could hear— music  
a soft chiming of keys on keys  
-little fingers pressed to ivory.

He could hear it clear—each note defined and separate  
in his mind,  
like chess pieces on a board he didn't control  
just watched.

His mother had played  
often in his childhood—her fingers soft like petals  
on eyelids and each note as sharp as a coin  
dropped onto a tile floor.

He remembered little of her  
but for her pale skin and vacant pupils  
-large grapes with a bit of a polish,  
plucked from the stem and covered with great white linen sheets  
in the summer heat.



## Ashri-Father

The Days

They were like ice, mirrors hung from empty gutters  
They were inexistence wrapped in cellophane  
Crafted like every part of a world she hated  
They were pain with a smile, electrified lace  
Fruitcake on a silver platter

But when the days ended

The world split, retched itself open, for a few beautiful moments  
They were the space left to her, the gap between one ether and the next  
Raw annihilation where every color became one  
And Elysium was not so much painted  
As birthed itself into creation against the canvas of her imagination

It was here, in the obliteration night created, that she could see him  
Dancing like an ember through the leaves against her eyes  
Against those eyes she was beautiful again  
All magic and power shot straight to her being  
A sacred stone in her own hand

Against her eyes he was real

He was a breeze on her back, a promise strung in her hair  
He was one giant whisper in her ear, a lullaby from the ages  
He was every long harvest night, when every piece of serenity was strung together  
Collected and kept safe on threads made of twilight with red clay to make it stick

## Sweaty

She is looking at herself now, her own naked body's reflection in a strange mirror as she trembles more than usual. She is pale and red, her face a wreck with her hair sticking to the mess of wet covering her cheeks and tiny finger nail scratches starting to surface. She is breathing deep now. As an adult she will discover she has asthma but for now she can only look at herself as her rather large chest moves unrestrained about her body and suck in air as she attempts to cover herself with a blanket. It is rough. It is soft. It is from her boyfriend's bed. She soon gives up and lets the blue plaid cotton monstrosity fall to show her waist and hips. It is hard to believe she is just sixteen by the shape of her body and it is this curse that has transformed her from shivering cripple to a trembling Leda. As cliché as the reference is, She still feels witty for it. Despite their expectation for her to be dim, the school she stands only a few miles from has been rather good to her, despite its position in the wrong part of town. She knows her place as a girl from Woodlawn going to Northwest is an odd one; part country, part 'ghetto,' all awkward. What She doesn't get is her body; a nigh useless left hand and breasts to rival Jenna Jameson all in a town about physical ability and getting what you want. One day people will tell her She is lucky, blessed to be a 'pretty disabled' as if the term was all consuming and need not be supplemented with the word 'person.' When that time comes She will shift and speak as nicely as possible but now, as she washes her face in the sink with harsh ivory soap and watches the black eye shadow run down the drain, she doesn't feel so lucky. She is a vagina with legs, a wounded gazelle on the prairie. She is an easy target and it feels like every guy she has class with thinks he could be her one night Romeo.

Once She has freshened her face a bit she turns off the sink, already feeling the tightness begin. It is here she realizes the house is quiet, silent really, and she holds as still as she can. She

wants to hear him but all that comes through the walls is the voice of Johnny Depp introducing himself as Jack Sparrow, flashing a smile on a movie only recently released. This will be the sound track of the worst day of her life; a scraggily unwashed man wandering about in a half drunk manner She will one day realize seems to match her own gait. As the silence prevails over the house she dries her face and contemplates the shower behind her. It would be nice to wash the smell of him off but it isn't her house and that would be rude. She should really ask first but she doesn't want to speak to him. Besides, there is no conditioner and she will never get the knots out...or convince her parents she has a good reason coming home from 'school' with stringy hair and no make-up...damn.

She is sitting on the toilet now, the cold seat cover chilling her legs as she sits under a vent. She knows the day will never go away. She can feel it as she looks around. Her vision seems stunted as if a camera was moving in slow motion for dramatic effect and seems to have taken on a different hue. She almost feels as if she is floating. She can smell him again suddenly as if she were still in there, lying on his bed pressed down by his thin weight as he pushed at her legs and sweated all over her. He had been sticky and disgusting and it had been a miracle that she hadn't vomited on him right there, thought the effect would have been perfect. She will never feel the same about sweat and even now she wants to wipe herself off herself, in hopes she could regain the clean feeling she had started out the day with. In the future she will return to this feeling, as if time has slowed and she is separate from both her body and the world. The doctors would probably call it a temporary break with reality, or some other snooty sounding thing like that, but they will likely never know as she is not stupid and can already hear her dad saying 'it's not paranoia if they really are out to get you.' She doesn't want to end up in some padded room

with naught but a plaid blue scratchy comforter and the ability to name the violence; Forced Treatment.

---

It had still been early when she parked outside his house and made her way to the front door, finding him sitting on the couch red nosed and looking generally unhappy. They were both juniors at the same high school but he was decidedly more swift talking and fast dealing than herself, anxiously loud. As she had made her way inside she had found him sitting on the couch with a box of tissues and an X-box controller in his hand with his black haired best friend to his left.

“You ok?”

His friend piped up as he cheerily open fired on a new storm of Flood. “Yeah I am great.”

She rolled her eyes and looked as her boyfriend turned and sniffled deeply, as if on cue. “I feel like shit.”

She moved over and sat next to him, watching as his character was slashed by a giant glowing sword wielded by a rather swift alien. Why would aliens who can turn invisible have glowing weapons? Some game techie didn’t think this through. “Have you taken anything?”

“No.”

“Perhaps you should.”

“No.”

“Let me rephrase... where is the Sudafed?” She stood and made her way to the bathroom where she rummaged through under the cabinet and pulled forth a small and flat blue wrapper.

Returning victorious she made her way to the kitchen and found a glass after searching several cabinets. No please...let me struggle... I’ll find it eventually.

“I told you no.” As he spoke she stopped and looked over to find his face pinched in annoyance. She felt her body shift uncontrollably, spurred on by her nervousness. They had been dating four months but he still frightened her slightly and so now she reached for any way to convince him. If he agreed he couldn’t be mad.

“What if I add vodka to it?” She shrank a little bit as she spoke, poking her head around the doorway.

“Oh fuck that would be nasty...do it.” His friend turned and elbowed him.

“Fine.”

She returned to the glass and added water, letting the two white disks drop and fizz before taking the vodka from over the fridge and pouring a small flash. She said she would add it but not how much and with his stuffed nose he just needed the taste to think otherwise. Returning to the living room with the full glass of milky liquid she was greeted by a pause to the game and two interested looks. He knew this was going to be interesting like a boy does when he pokes a bloated dog corpse on the side of the road. He grabbed the glass and took two breaths before setting it to his lips and tilting it back, drinking large gulps fast in an attempt to pass the taste buds. Once done he made a gagging sound and pushed his hands to his face, looking as if he was going to be sick. “That was fucking foul.”

His friend makes a face and stands. “That is what you get for listening to your girlfriend.” She looks at him with a blank expression, knowing an argument will only get ugly fast. “Come on we got to go.” The friend grabs his bag and turns off the game before turning to the couple.

“Man I don’t think I am gonna go. I feel like shit.” He looks at her. “Stay with me.” She looks back at him, her bag on her shoulder. She needed to go and didn’t really want to stay all day, holed up in his house alone with him. He made her nervous by himself let alone when you mixed it with skipping school. He apparently saw her reluctance and looked at her, one eyebrow raised, and spoke with a faked guilt. “You did make me drink that stuff.”

“It was supposed to help.”

“So...it didn’t.” For a second she wanted to punch him but soon she felt her resolve wilt and slowly set the bag down. She had made him drink the medication and now he was going to be staying home, alone and sick. Being sick sucked and she knew it all too well.

“Fine.”

He stood and took her hand, pulling her on as he moved. She jerked up as he moved and followed silently. The stairs were only a few steps away and narrow with a wall on one side and a banister on the other. She held the wood bar as he pulled her up, each step making her back creak under her skin. Once to the top they made a left directly into a large bedroom that sat directly above the living room and was roughly the same size. An entertainment center of sorts sat in the center of the right side wall with a large TV and many small plastic cases, DVDs or games. Directly to the left of the doorway was a tall dresser and a closet beside that. Atop the dresser sat a rather fancy wooden plank with Steven Tyler’s portrait in mid concert, rag draped microphone stand and all. Aerosmith was her favorite band since her father had taken her to a concert last year so while on some trip to Disneyland he had bought it, supposedly for her, but had never given it to her. She just saw it occasionally sitting on top of his dresser with a few other knick-knacks and a dark can of Axe. Across the room, on the far wall, sat his bed with clean white sheets, a dark comforter, and no frame; it was just two linen clad mattresses plopped

on the floor with a night stand to hold his collection of butterfly knives, one of them a birthday gift from her.

His family, like hers, was military but his father had already retired and so now made a pretty good living. As her friends pooled money to buy breakfast and sewed up torn pants he took her around to play pool or Dance Dance games, cruising at night with his best friend boasting of conquests and gelling his hair. He would have likely been one of the first kids with a flat screen, when they eventually came out, had he not knocked up his next girlfriend to her apparent delight. For now he led her forward towards the bed and he quickly slipped under the covers, his nose red, and motioned for her to follow. As She moved to the bed and sat carefully on the edge he scrunched his face and spoke. “No get underneath with me.” She looked back as he flung the blanket aside, showing himself still fully clothed. Well in all honesty she saw nothing wrong with some snuggling, she was already skipping class, and it was fucking cold in his room.

“Let me put a movie in.” He stood suddenly and walked to the TV, looking back to watch her slip under the covers slowly. “Which one?”

“Pirates of the Caribbean.” She looked up from the crook of her arm where her head sat, seeing as he had only one pillow.

“Of course...Johnny Depp.” He turned and pushed the movie in, missing her scowl. The fact was that she hadn’t seen the film yet and had no opinion of the lead actor, only recently having heard of him. She did not appreciate the assumption but she let it slide as he turned around and made his way back with the remote in his hand. He plopped down and swiftly leaned back before flipping the covers back over the pair and clicking play. He reached his right arm back to cradle

his head as it set on the pillow and left the arm that separated them laying firmly at his side. His mattress was firm, too much for her back, and soon she felt herself wiggle in an attempt to get comfortable. “What?” He looked at her, annoyed and confused by the motion.

“Sorry, my back.” She looked at him and held still setting her head down to ease the crick in her neck.

As she relaxed his face softened, aware of her health issues. It was clear she couldn't see the TV like this without being in some sort of pain so he turned to his side. “We don't have to watch the movie.” As he spoke he rolled and looked down at her, his arms keeping him steady over her body. He was warm and the closeness made her sweat. It was sticky and unpleasant but she held still as he moved towards her for a kiss, pressing his oddly heavy frame on hers. As he pulled away he pulled up to his knees and held her by the shoulder. He pulled her up to a sitting position and before she was sure what was going on, had the bottom of her shirt in his hands, then over her head, then on the floor. She looked up at him topless with a furrowed brow and pulled at his shirt in an attempt to leverage herself. As she turned to stand, so as to retrieve her shirt, he removed his own and followed suit, taking this chance to attack her pants buckle.

She pushed at his hand, remembering her last visit with a sharp sick feeling. He had been pushing his luck then and had gotten both her jeans and panties around her knees before sinking a long nail clad finger inside her without the slightest warning. The pain had been immediate but the cuts took three days to stop hurting every time she moved her legs. Now as she stood in his room again she found herself suddenly naked and falling backwards as he let his own pants slip to the floor. She cringed as she set her hands on the bed, pushing herself up only to meet his face.



He moved forward, straddling her lap as he leaned one hand on the nightstand where two knives sat. His favorites. She looked over and froze, letting him lay on top of her with all his thin teenage boy weight.

“No.” She spoke quietly and pressed her hands to his chest. He was all over her, smelling of body sweat and too much Axe. She could feel her breath tighten under his body weight and forced in a full breath of air, wiggling underneath him as best she could without separating her legs. He lifted his chest up and reached down with one hand, using the other to hold his weight up. He grasped himself in one hand and prodded at the top of her, using one foot in an attempt to nudge her legs.

“You have to open.”

“No.”

He looked up at her for a second and looked back down, taking himself and slipping it into the triangle created by her legs and crotch before easing in and out slowly. He isn't nearly as close as before but his stink is far worse. The smell of his dick fills the room, so utterly different than the rest of him. She feels like she is going to be sick and just hopes she gets it on him, wipe the look off his face. He is staring at her as if waiting for her to scream of fight; he wants a fight and she knows it. If she does anything he will meet her energy with his own and he is far stronger than her...and so is the knife a foot from his hand. He lays flat atop of her again, raising one hand to hold her face as he pressing his lips to her and dropping the other under the covers to push between her legs. She cries out as he cuts her open with a jagged fingernail and bucks suddenly, her face starting to panic but as soon as he was on top of her he is off again.

She feels the cool air suddenly touch her sweaty skin and she doesn't need to be told twice. Standing She wrenches the comforter from the bed and wraps herself in it before running

out the door and to the bathroom across the hall. She gets inside and turns, trying to slam the door behind her but getting the blanket caught. She can hear herself scream as she suddenly pulls it free and shuts the door before clicking the lock. He is the kind of guy that would have a key so she immediately presses her back to the door and drops to the floor, bracing her feet against the white toilet in front of her. It is only now that she realizes her face is wet.

---

It will not take her too long to gather herself. The whole thing is spurred on rather well by how bloody cold it is on the second floor and how cold natured she is. She pulls the comforter around her tightly for what seems like forever but soon she will stand and make her way back to the bedroom, her clothes are there and she is not leaving naked. She will move slowly, checking her steps and positioning herself so as to best see oncoming movement till she makes it to the bedroom door. She will see him, splayed out with his hands behind his head and the sheet crumpled to the side. She will never forget the smell and the position is something she will later deem 'the man pose' and restrain a face palm every time she sees someone else do it. She will make her way across the room and sits on the edge of the bed where her clothes are piled and begins to put them on under the blanket till he complains of the cold and tugs at it. She will give it up but continue to dress herself. He will ask "Where are you going?" but she will not respond. He will remain silent now and not keep her from leaving; a thing she is thankful for as she finally arrives at her car and slips in. She will drive around town for a few hours, looking at dilapidated houses with cars in the front and parents moving around businesses, till it is time for school to let out. She will head to the high school and pick up her friends from the corner and they get in for the ride. She will borrow some make up off of one and fix herself back up to match how she

looked when she left her parents that morning. She will not want to have this conversation once she gets home.

She will wonder if she could have done something different but she will also know, once she has the words, is only from her socialization to blame herself instead of the man. She never tells her parents or boyfriends even though her reflex to shield herself and be distant when alone with them must seem odd. She is an odd girl and most assume it is a crippled thing and she hasn't the heart to explain that they just make her nervous. She doesn't know what he is or was thinking but she will know his best friend's point of view as he will soon go about making subtle remarks when he sees her, apparently having been told of the day's events. The best friend finds it funny but he finds many things funny that simply are not. Her friends, a group of large gothic style kids, will figure it out soon enough and will become rather aggressive to the group he hangs with, making her smile as the two groups jeer at each other. One of her friends will even go so far as to make a very specific threat of bodily harm to a boy who touches her and another will skip the threats and move straight to catching another kid coming off the bus. She doesn't see the power in this at the time but later it is clear. It creates an awkward system where she, as the least powerful, will command the power of others through a mix of friendship and an intellect she has discovered. No one touches her for the remainder of her time at the school and anyone she tells to shut up or fuck off does so. She has effectively become him now in a military town based off groups of close knit friends who move in platoon style hierarchies. Of course the status will fade before long and she will move to another school in another country but the poverty and physical focus of the town and school will stay, likely just recreating more Shes, hims, and the friends that surrounded them. It wasn't called a cycle for nothing.

## **Fin-Anarchy**

He remembers young days,  
When snow was the greatest of intrigues, lace on his finger  
It was beauty at its finest, every particle in its own place;  
Chaos restrained.

If he had to name her, it would be Anarchy,  
His snowflake plucked like a dirty water droplet,  
Salvation for a man dehydrated off of sameness,  
Suffocating off of a culture that was never enough.

She was confusion but he was her tamer  
Molding her, his hands pressed to her flesh;  
All power and knowledge thrust through a single word  
He was her commander and loved every moment.

## SECTION I THEORY

### **Outline**

I will be working on my thesis in three sections which will be broken up by common themes and story lines. This is the first section in which the stories begins, introducing both main characters and setting up the connection between them. This section is to be ultimately about loss and memory. It is in this section where the loss of family and innocence is placed, the actual space of loss where pain is located, and where future emotions and actions are anchored. She will be introduced as She recalls her first experience with violence as a young child then, in the second story, her second experience as a teenager. For Ashri this is where she and her antagonist, Fin, will be introduced as she loses her home and people to an attack by Fin and his army. It is here that the birth of both stories will be set, roughly. Ashri will recall her home which will seem tribal, with huts and fire-side singing, while Fin will seem to be from a more 'advanced' civilization. She will describe, roughly, her background as a military brat and thus her home space as one in constant motion but also speak of the Southerness of those spaces and her upbringing.

As stated before this section will be referencing the issues of memory and loss, specifically in how they are connected for both Ashri and She in remembering their loss. For She those memories will act as a path to understanding what has taken place in her life; where references to a future , what She *will* know, display how She will look back on events later on in her life. It is the memories that allow her to place her emotions and mourning in a specific place. For Ashri and Fin these memories will be a path back to a feeling of comfort and

belonging as well as feelings of discomfort at the loss of that place of innocence. Both Ashri and Fin will experience a moment of loss, both losing a parent, and so rely on memory to reconnect to that parent and the moment of feeling the comfort of being a child.

This section as a whole will begin with a poem from the perspective of Fin, named “Getting.” This is not so much to frame the first section as it is to frame the entire work as a whole and so it is set apart by a blank page in between. This short, haiku style, poem is to explain the overall way in which the women are treated, as inanimate objects whose purpose is to reflect the men. This is displayed by how the ‘her’ in the poem is likened to a vase, which only holds what another person places within it. While the poem is Fin’s, the emotion behind it is to apply to all men, and some women, as Fin is meant to act as an embodiment of all the men. In the same manner Fin’s opening poem is meant to apply to not only Ashri but She as well, as they are intricately connected.

The non-fiction short stories will begin with “Playing House,” where the She character is seen as a young girl of roughly six, and the initial violence She experiences is described. This specific short story will be told mostly in the past tense, as She remembers the event, and so will be told in a less linear fashion. The style of “Playing House” is meant to be more jumbled as it is told by the She character remembering back to a very young age, to an experience that by its nature is hard to recollect fully and subjectively. It will focus on those aspects of the event and aftermath that She remembers the most clearly and leave the rest to assumptions and contextualization. The poem that precedes this short story, “Remembered,” directly references the idea of memory and what one remembers and how one remembers it. Here Ashri will recall her home, assumed to be a type of village, where even possibly negative aspects of that life, such as fights, are remembered in a positive light as compared to the memories of destruction. These

two works together are to be the ‘loss of innocence’ where things go wrong. It is where She sees her life taking a dramatic turn and where much of her anger seems to stem from, thus explaining the later envisioning of violence and revenge through Ashri.

The second short story will be “Sweaty” where the She character is still young, sixteen, but old enough to adequately remember and analyze the event. This story will also jump about, going in between the story’s present and its immediate past which is when the actual assault takes place. She is in fact recounting the events which have just taken place as She attempts to recover from the emotional violence, thus making the idea of memory and remembering important once again. In this case the actual act of remembering has less effect on the actual telling of the story as all of it is present but simply out of order, but only slightly. In general this re-telling of the event She experiences is less confusing than the previous short story and will also show She’s attempts to understand her situation and the society around her, specifically the military lifestyle. The poem following this short story, “Anarchy,” is to act as a way of showing She’s ultimate defeat, or her feeling of being defeated. It is from Fin’s point of view and shows his opinion of Ashri and the place she plays in his life.

The poems in the middle “Mother” and “Father” are once again playing off memory as both recount an important figure, both of whom are now dead. While Fin’s mother died long ago, while he was still young, Ashri’s father is assumed to have been murdered by Fin in the very recent past. The addition of parental figures in this place is meant to reflect the issue of parents present or missing, in both short stories and how this affects She and how She reacts to the violence done to her. This is one point which will not repeat in future sections as it is only here, where She is a child or adolescent, that the presence of family is necessary or expected. The presence of parents is strong in the short story “Playing House” where memories of interactions

with both She's mother and father are shown along with how they fit in to what She remembers of the initial violation.

## **Issues**

Issues of memory and the process of remembering are prevalent in this section, as the place where trauma is anchored, particularly because the first trauma is one done at a very young age and so is difficult to remember. Martha Minow writes that

Research across a wide range of academic disciplines has produced a new consensus about human memory. It turns out that recollections are not retrieved, like intact computer files, but instead are always constructed by combining bits of information selected and arranged in light of prior narratives and current expectations, needs, and beliefs (28).

One can see this in the story "Playing House" as the very process of the remembering affects the story and how it is written. She seems to be piecing together what She knows factually, such as dates and regions of the country, and what She remembers more clearly, such as the action of running. This is pasted together with remembered feelings and other memories that are less clear, or too painful to be fully remembered, until a memory is actually constructed from the pieces. In other stories, such as "Sweaty," this issue of memory continues as each instance of violence collects, is added to those previous ones, until there is a permanent effect on She and her relationships. Minow quotes Micheal Ignatieff as saying "The past continues to torment because it is not the past. These places are living in a serial order of time but in a simultaneous one, in which the past and present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths, and lies"(28). That is just what the issue is for both She and Ashri as they both move along in their respective stories; neither ever become separated from that pain of violation which seems to be ever recurring. For She this reliving of the same violence over and over is most evident in her



imagining of Ashri who is physically captured by Fin and literally re-violated daily. She remembers her violation and places that pain in an imagined place where someone else, Ashri, experiences it instead in a type of projection.

The poems themselves also reflect this issue of memory for both Ashri and Fin who, in the most obvious example, remember their respective parents who are now both dead. Ashri also remembers her people, all now dead, and with every memory she also remembers her hatred for Fin because of his hand in their destruction. Her remembering them is important because, as Jean Baudrillard says “forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination itself” (16). This recollection of the literal extermination allows She to move on from her symbolic extermination without taking part in it by forgetting. It also brings up issues of collective memory as both Ashri and She are the only ones who know of/remember their violations and so the cycle continues to repeat itself (16).

Pain, the feeling and experience of feeling pain, is important in this section more so than the others because this is where the pain is freshest. As the piece moves on both She and Ashri will learn to ignore pain, physical and emotional, until there is a sense of numbness, but here in the first section that pain is still new. Sara Ahmed quotes the medical textbook *The Challenge of Pain* as writing that pain “is not simply a function of the amount of bodily damage alone. Rather, the quality of pain we feel are also determined by our previous experiences and how well we remember them, by our ability to understand the cause of the pain and to grasp its consequences” (23). It is this pain, the experience involving associations between elements of sensory experience and an aversive feeling state and the meaning attributed to them, which will act as a foundation as more experiences of pain collect (23). It is these experiences that will act as a space of meaning, the time and place where their future pain will make sense.

## SECTION II

### Ashri- The Core of Things

There were so many of them,  
walking about—delicately pressed, encased,  
every limb wrapped in ornate fabric.  
They were a people commanded by law,  
each step carefully contemplated till success was certain,  
they had spent more time wasted  
rather doing nothing, than chance a fall

She had lived a life so different.  
Each thought born unto her imagination was but a simple action yet to be done,  
a drum beat soon to be played  
like a prayer unto the flames. She had spent her days  
among a quiet people, each old woman a mother,  
and her nights running naked through the wet leaves of forest foliage  
holding her breast tight for comfort,  
her skin glowing like a fine radiating bark against the moonlight;  
a casing for her core

She had never realized  
just how easy that life had been,  
how utterly magnificent it was  
to live every moment like a dive before checking the water;  
a blissful cliff side plunge,  
holding onto those she loved the most and knowing the rest didn't matter.

She had never realized,  
and now, in a world of noise and ignorance  
where men and women flaunted their hatred like a medal  
and the death of every infidel is marked on a white man's white collar,  
she found herself lost amongst shepherds.

She never understood the beauty till it was gone,  
Smoldering amongst the dead

## Hangover

It was way too early for her to be awake but there she was sitting at a picnic table on a concrete porch, still cool under her feet. She sat with her forehead resting on the table edge, a piece of buttered and salted bread in her hand and a bottle of water nearby. The day before had been rough, mostly spent sweating in a hot Alabama kitchen that only half worked and had a walk in freezer that wound up being a break room. Her friend had been the cook and extremely stressed, eventually frying things in a borrowed wok with a towel over her head and murmuring incoherently. It was odd but thankfully she had been prepared for her friend's break down and was ready to maintain a schedule as others cooked. She had been given a reprieve from standing over the hot stoves and ovens due to her inability to cook, her apparently chronic light headedness, and most important the fact that tremors plus boiling hot oil equaled an ER visit. She was stubborn...not stupid.

After the feast had been served the pair plopped into chairs and stared at each other, the friend with her waist length mahogany hair braided back and she with her messy blond locks wrapped up in a large paint stripping cloth from Home Depot. She half wanted to get blind drunk and half wanted to snuggle and fall asleep. As she looked at her now sentence making friend it seemed they were in secret agreement. They smiled as the accomplishment hit them and suddenly the decision was made for them; as volunteers for clean-up arrived they were shoed out to the bonfire and affectionately named 'wet spot.' This was where the alcohol was flowing freely, seeing as it was the only place booze was allowed on the camp site. It was Alabama law that a trailer with electricity and water was a 'private residence' and had a certain area of ground included as a porch. With two RVs facing each other this made for a mobile party place. Sometimes it was good to be a redneck.

That was the last of her clear memory; the rest was a mix of flashes and empty spots like a collage still being pressed together in her brain. She focused, closing her eyes as she ate her bread, and tried to piece stuff together. Not fully remembering the night before was never good for a girl, particularly when she awoke with no underwear on and missing a dress. A day would come where she and her friends would laugh about the time she had gotten so drunk that she woke up still tipsy...with a thong in her bed...a thong she had not packed as well as having somehow managed to get herself out of a rather restrictive dress. They would all imagine her dancing around making squeaking noises between curse words and bumping into the other bunks, all in the wee hours of the morning, only to collapse finally in night dress onto her bunk. They would laugh eventually but for now she wasn't finding it humorous. As she sat with her butt hanging over the back of the picnic table seat and her still bare feet now chilled she tried to place everything. She had found the overdress in her basket of things where it had belonged but not her underwear, part of a pack that had been a humorous gift from her best friend in high school. "Now you can tell folks you're wearing my underwear." This was always a memory that made her smile, except today. Even then She knew she would never share the fact of her missing panties with her friends. It would start jokes She would never be comfortable with.

It was the upcoming jokes that made her think of him. He was a man not much taller than herself with dark black hair past his shoulder and a build that suggested waffle house and cheap beer. Many people had wondered how she had ever gotten involved with him but she knew why, without a doubt. It had been self-shame really. Her inner evangelical demon on her shoulder screaming she was a whore for having a one night stand with a man she had just met, drunk or not. Of course she hadn't known that while She had been drunk he had not been, at least not as much as she, a thing he had admitted to her on his own accord as if it had been amusing. She had

not found it comical. Of course this was also something she did not share with those friends who had whooped up a storm the next morning to see her skirt hanging outside her tent door. She did not know how she had gotten separated from them in all the socialization other than to help her sick friend back to her tent. That had been where it started and six months later she had convinced herself she was not a whore and had become fed up with him enough to end it despite her still lingering shame. He was the six month long one-night stand and the recollection would forever make her wince.

Her present situation left her alone, with him likely still sleeping. They had been apparently trying to work things out and so had spent the night socializing together, or at least that was how she had spent her night until she gave up. He had focused on socializing with everyone not her until she decided to go for a walk...or at least walked off for some reason. That was unclear and would remain so. One of her friends had described her ex as a 'penis with legs,' making her laugh and feel as nothing else needed to be said. She remembered not so fondly the time he took She to a female friend's apartment under the guise of needing to get something, and also having a key because he cat sat for her. Later She would be told that he and the friend had been 'intimate' and she could not help but remember being tongue gagged on what she then knew was his 'friend's' couch. This realization would not really surprise her and eventually she would simply fail to care anymore.

What was important at the time was that she could vaguely place him with her as they had taken a wandering walk through the woods behind the cabins. There the night was clear; the moon bright, and the only thing visible through the trees was the soft glow of the bonfire and laughter. It was one of those moment people talked about, when it felt real. She had glowed in the moon light for what seemed forever, feeling as if she really were back in the middle ages

with friends celebrating a victory...but it had only been seconds before he had appeared close to her, his round innocent face in front of her. He was suddenly interested in her, despite his apparent complete lack of interest as they had moved about in the smoke which had made her eyes and lungs burn. As she had been fighting off an asthma attack he had walked past her to escort a lady to the bathroom. Sitting with a growing headache in the bright morning sun she cursed him. "Like she couldn't see the damn thing three feet in front of her." Even after he had returned he stayed barely a minute before disappearing. She had apparently forgotten all this by the time she had reached the wooden clearing, having apparently agreed to his company, and was suddenly laying down and looking up, picking out Orion from the night sky as she always did.

The small, short, memory of lying on her back in a grassy field let her know she must have been well over intoxicated at the time. The mix of lying down flat and grass was not a mix she would have agreed to otherwise. She had metal in her back, two titanium rods from the base of her neck to her backside to be specific, and this left her with an issue getting up when lying down. She affectionately called it a turtle position and whenever she found herself in such a place a soft call of 'turtle' would bring a friend to help her to her feet. This at night, in a far off clearing, was not a good idea...particularly when mixed with grass, a thing she was allergic to and would begin to itch immediately upon touching. Even now she could feel the warmth on the back of her neck where the green shoots had touched; a small line of tiny red bumps that had formed in the night. She drank her water quickly to keep from her need to scratch, a counter measure used to ignore the conclusion she knew she had to make. She needed to focus on the fresh water, the faint plastic taste, and the feeling of it settling in her stomach. It cooled her insides as the crunch of the plastic emanated from under her unsteady fingers. As She set the bottle down, its middle crushed it on itself, she rubbed her face and tried to settle herself. What

she knew must have come next, what her sore lower parts told her took place that night, made her feel as if She was going to be sick.

## Fin-Luminescent

He was the antithesis—the reverse of himself—  
all hatred and condemnation— in a three piece button up.  
He was all taste buds and fingertips,  
a child with rules and technicalities in his back pocket  
like smoothed river stones chosen carefully,  
each shiny and wet to the touch,  
picked from street gutters—amongst the rubble.

He was necessity,  
blood sprinkled with lavender till the petals swarmed;  
tiny dots on a sea—smelling of peppermint hand lotion.

He was the finite, silky marbles gathered in a velvet sack,  
clear and cool against his lips,  
each the size of a perfectly round twenty cent piece  
and just as pretty—luminescent



## Yes You Are

It was one of those scenes you all know and feel in your stomach as what it means to be alive and young; two kids driving down the interstate with rock music going. They could have been the embodiment of young America, singing to the steering wheel and letting the wind rustle their hair. They could have been, but they weren't. Neither of them were anybody's poster child for young America, at least what they wanted the poster to be. They were dirty, hungry and droopy eyed with too much work to do and too little chance for rest. They were both crazy and they were both trying to ignore it. She was thin, or at least looked like she should have been as she bent over at the steering wheel and stretched her long sore fingers. He was strong, all fighting machine making money teaching Taekwondo to toddlers for dime store ravioli and the occasional dental visit. She drove the car at a steady speed of 75, cruise set to keep from her knee from locking up, and he switched the CDs with his mood, sometimes not bothering with but one song.

"Would you please stay on one CD for at least two or three songs?" She looked over at him with a sigh and slack eyes.

"Sorry. I wanted to hear all those songs. Here we go." He ceased to spin his head around at all the sights of trees and religious signs long enough to push a new CD in, Nickelback, with some kind of finality. She could live with that, but of course she could live with anything provided he not skip around like an impatient child. It takes only a few songs before she peeks over to see his hand float towards the track dial.

"Change the song and lose a finger." Her voice was flat but she gave him a slight grin to show she wasn't really mad, even though she was. He grinned wide and gave a 'whatever', setting his

hands quietly in his lap before becoming anxious and taking his new knife out to fiddle with. When he begins to flip it about in his hand she realizes she needed a drink, or a nap, but he can't drive as he has no idea where he is going.

“Why don't you take a nap? I'll wake you when we get there.”

“Naw, I'm not tired at all.” She feared as much but hopefully his peak would slack soon and he would mellow to a nice medium.

“I got to pee.” He states this more as a plea, gripping his legs a little tighter together. *Seriously? You are such a woman.*

“You just went....you are NOT getting another drink.”

At the gas station she sits and watches as he climbs out of the passenger seat and practically floats over to the convenience store. She breathes in sharply, taking her time in breathing out, as she relishes in her moment of quiet. He was in a very chatty mood, asking a million questions, but thankfully never stopped for an answer so she continued on as if not hearing him. She will feel bad later for ignoring him in her foul mood but as of now she is thinking she will go inside as well; he will putz around for at least ten minutes and she feels the need to socialize like a good girlfriend.

She passes him as he stares at an array of flavored chips and heads to the bathroom; she managed to find a place with stalls...great. She slips into a stall quietly, listening to the cleaning lady wash out the trash can in the sink and wishing she would go away so she could avoid being embarrassed by her tinkling. She takes her time pretending to set everything in specific clean and

flat areas so as nothing is contaminated and finally sits, reading the scribble on the wooden thingy jutting from the wall. It seems to be a wooden radiator cover. That's safe.

"Pay attention to your government. Don't let them take away your freedom of speech!" Written in a red marker write up of sharp corners, it was accompanied by a blue script of delicate cursive on the opposite side.

"Follow love and give peace a chance."

She finally can't wait any longer and goes, rolling her eye as the faucet turns off the moment hers turns on. The lady leaves and finally shuts the outer door, which had been left wide due to some unwritten law of gas station bathroom cleaners. Hello world this is my crotch. She sits back, reclining against the porcelain and lifting her feet to stare at the tarnished polish of her toes. Which is more idiotic of humanity; that teenagers write obscene things in high school bathrooms or that adults decide that a truck stop can is the place for deep philosophical speech? When she makes it back outside she finds him sifting through the chips.

"They don't have salt and vinegar."

"I wrote your number in the bathroom stall." She grins.

"Whatever, I wrote your number on my ass. Who doesn't have salt and vinegar?"

"This is Alabama not London." She reaches over and taps her finger on the BBQ flavored bag.

"Cadiz has salt and vinegar."

"Yeah well you also have two stop lights, a Food Giant, and a swimming hole. They have to make up for the patheticness somehow."

“Whatever.”

After making it to her apartment she is tired, needing her nap for the day, and he is beginning to come off his mental high so he will sleep soon as well. Before too long they both lie down on the bed and she sets her head on his shoulder, pressing her fingers into his shirt and side for comfort. He lays back, his head tilted slightly towards his chest so as to get a good view of the knife he fiddles with in his free hand. He is jittery and tense, his face severe, with lines etched deep and his eyes focused and cold. She presses her fingers deeper in a vain attempt to catch his attention but she knows he will not budge until he falls asleep and wakes up, his mood having leveled back to normal. Even when she presses her lips to his hollowing cheek, he stares indifferently. She sets her head back, getting more comfortable as her need for emotional comfort and affection will go unattended to.

“Are you ok?”

“Yes.”

“Are you hungry?”

“No.”

“Thirsty?” He sighs heavily and she drops it, setting her head back down and trying to ignore his fiddling. He is spinning his switch blade in his hand again, catching it in an upside down, or stabbing, position and bringing it up high as if the sight confuses him. *If he stabs me I am going to be so pissed!* It reminds her of that shower scene from the black and white horror she has never seen. He likes to watch movies, she does not. He won't do anything. Even if he did I

would rather not see it. She is sickly and he is a black belt so survival is unlikely anyway, besides, she hates horror flicks.

A few days later they are driving home, gone clubbing in a different town. She spent the night dancing like she couldn't feel pain and ignoring everyone staring at her. They could smell it on her; everyone can in a drug laden army town. He sang all night at Karaoke his closest friend next to him the whole way. Of course now the music has settled to a standard car stereo and some scratched CDs.

Don't ever say that to me again!" He snorts as he speaks and lifts his hand from hers, taking it back to his own lap.

"What! Why?" She jerks her head to look at him and then back to the road, the black top seeming to come out of a never ceasing dark hole as she presses her foot down. No need for cruise control.

"Think about it!"

"How about you just tell me instead of playing mind games with me!" Now she is mad too; she hates guessing games.

"I didn't know that is how I made you feel."

"You don't. That is just how I am."

"So I don't make you feel any better? I don't add anything to your life?"

They pass the glittering lights of the middle of town; bright signs pointing the way to commercialized happiness and street lamps illuminate gas stations. She reaches for the volume dial and makes the car a tiny bit quieter.

“Of course you do, but that has nothing to do with it. I have always been like this, even as a child.” He looked out the window as they made their way past town and onto the rural farming area of home. “I wish you wouldn’t bite my head off when I try to tell you the truth of who I am.” She relaxes as she feels his hand on hers again and barely stifles tears as he gives it a squeeze. “I have a question, but I want you to be totally honest. I don’t mean...”

“I won’t bullshit you.”

She breathed slowly for what seemed like forever but was only a few seconds of pure silence.

“Am I crazy?”

“Yes.” He looked over at her with warm eyes. “But so am I.”

She wants to go to sleep.

## Ashri

There are figures in the shadows and shadows in the people, moving fast like static in her mind at a low hum, a fly in her ear. They watch her for she is the last, naked and wild in her skin walking among them a hawk among rabbits, a sparrow tied to their finger.

There are spoils of war, left behind breathing a thousand last breaths in the mud, left to the bugs in their hair and under their skin. Each is now just a memory glistening in the rain to her, a sight lost to the sun for the victors live to write the books. She speaks dead languages to deaf ears, writes old runes on her arm and screams at men who don't care to understand her.

She is the lost but they are the dead, dressing her in cold cloth and clenched fists, broken feathers and smashed fingers. "Say my name!"—Fin— She hears the voice now even in her sleep, from the mouth of a mold covered corpse, motionless and calculating in his pressed suit and powdered hair. She wants him gone like week old meat. She wants him running in fear, he should fear her for she wants to burn him alive, bring him to life and make him scream like a newborn, for death should be life.... focused onto one second.

She is the last of her kind left to rot as a reminder of great victory, the wilderness tamed by satin and lace with the leaves pulled from her hair and heresy plucked from her lips. His satisfaction swells in him as he eats her, a little at a time every night, slurping wine off the flesh off her stomach while he offers her a straw. She is his decoration in the attic, wild and crazy. She is his self-absorbed gaze into the mirror but she will be his end, talons deep in his flesh; she will be his beginning, life burning bright for one second.

## **Fin-Hatred**

He hated her.

-the way she called to his soul  
a great shining star burning  
like the white hotness he poured into her every night.  
He needed her  
to quench the itch.

The moment he saw her he knew

it was him or no one for her.

Had had reached out

-a great paw from the back of a beast  
and grabbed her by the hair, shaking her like a victory bell  
-a claim on her body as she screamed his superiority.  
She would learn to worship him like they all should;  
on their knees and bleeding.

He wanted everything from her

-his private moon  
spinning about him with her arms out stretched and her head back  
creating a new kind of gravity meant only for him.  
He would build a whole creation on her stomach.

He would claim her body and soul,  
stain her innocence

-a new age swastika carved above her heart.  
He would make her a disgrace without him,  
a foul taste in the mouth of the righteous  
-their human sacrifice made real  
She would cry to please him,  
learn that his smile was her only hope.  
She would learn to worship him,  
-praying out loud in foreign tongues and getting no answer but his.



## **Ashri-Stained Glass**

She had him where she wanted him  
Knowing every little trick  
Every scratch on the stained glass window  
Of his mind  
-He was too broke for even his God

## SECTION II THEORY

This is the second section of the thesis and where a lot of issues arise that will continue on through the next section and subsequent end. As the middle section this is where the most change happens, where emotional and physical growth takes place to varying degrees among the stories. For the poetry this is where Ashri shifts from being scared and confused to hateful towards both Fin and his society, whom she blames for the death of her people. Ashri also begins to show symptoms of mental illness, losing touch with reality and an intense hate beginning to warp her mind. For She this section moves forward much slower, just as slowly as the other sections, but her own issues with mental illness arise. For She mental illness is less violent, being mostly based on depression, but still debilitating. This is where the two stories, Ashri and She, diverge from their similar beginnings. While Ashri turns into a violent, aggressive and hateful woman She remains rather demure, quiet and passive in the face of both her own illness and the violence of others. It is because of She's passive response to the violence against her, an inability to cope the way she would prefer, that She imagines Ashri as being so drastically violent in her responses.

Mental illness is a large theme in the overall work and is an issue still present in American society today, particular when considering problems of stigma and PTSD. Over history mental illness has been a mystery; what causes it, what does it means, and how does it fit into a society? Michael Foucault writes extensively on the issue of mental illness in his book *Madness and Civilization* where he describes it's complex history, and much of what he says can

explain both She and Ashri's issues. She's relationship to Ashri can be explained by Foucault, when he writes:

It is madness become Temptation; all it embodies of the impossible, the fantastic, the inhuman, all that suggests the unnatural, the writhing of an insane presence on the earth's surface... The freedom, however frightening, of his dreams, the hallucinations of his madness, have more power of attraction... than the desirable reality of the flesh. (20)

It is not her own life, even her own madness, in which She finds comfort but the invented madness She imagines for Ashri. For Ashri madness comes with a type of power; it is "glorified scandal" (70). In the short stories we see much less of the mental illness theme than in the poetry because of this link as She suppresses that part of her, as much as she can, and funnels it into Ashri.

For Ashri the first apparent onset of mental illness is in the poem "Ashri." The poem is named for the character, not given a second explanatory name as most of the poems, as it is the poem which most envelops Ashri and her predicament. In "Ashri" the maddening nature of her new life is made clear as the description of her place and feelings is so scattered, almost confused, as the poems makes jumps between stanzas. It is clear by the first stanza that Ashri is having some sort of break with reality, where the world seems to actually slow and she has a hard time differentiating between real and imagined, shadow, people. This soon turns into visions of Fin where Ashri hears his voice even when he is not present where she then realizes her hatred of Fin and imagines ways to destroy him. While She must continue to act in a manner deemed appropriate to society Ashri can be as crazed, violent and angry as she cares to be. No one expects much from Ashri and so she is, in a way, free from society's behavioral restraints.

For She mental illness is shown most in the story "Yes You Are" where She actually asks her boyfriend if she is 'crazy,' to which he responds that she is. This takes place at the very end

of the story but there is plenty that takes place in the story itself. She is seen as being very passive, overly so, as the possibility of being stabbed does not worry her; She in fact simply closes her eyes at the image of a knife. The passivity of She could be a simple expression of her personality, if it weren't for her moments of suppressed anger, a propensity for sleeping, and lack of care over her own life. These facts make it clear that She is not simply a quiet person but is in fact mentally ill, clinically depressed and showing or alluding to many of the symptoms. For She mental illness is not a place of power but a sickness of the soul, an "immobility which may reach the point of death itself...a violent opposition to itself, a movement which under the effect of its own violence abruptly achieves contradiction and the impossibility of continuance" (Foucault, 90). While Ashri revels in her madness She would hate her illness, if only She had the energy to hate anything.

Hate, the emotion of extreme againstness, has a powerful presence in this work and it is in this section where this hate forms or is realized (Ahmed, 49). Sara Ahmed writes that hate can work at an unconscious level but hate for a body, a person or group, is phenomenologically intentional. For Ashri the emotional pain of losing her family and people is turned to hate, an intense anger, that soon mixes with the physical pain of being raped and beat to create hatred towards a specific person, Fin. Ashri seems to come to terms with her hatred at the same time as her mental illness as it is at the end of "Ashri" that she apparently decides she want to harm him, burn him, "life burning bright." For She hate is not so clearly present in her stories but that does not mean this anger and hate does not exist. Ahmed quotes Aristotle as writing "anger is customarily felt towards individuals only, whereas hatred may be felt towards whole classes of people" (49). Despite this apparent disagreement with Ahmed this description of hatred explains She's lack of obvious hatred. She, for whatever reason, is unable to transfer her anger at the one

person, or more as the story goes on, to hatred for all men or even her society as a whole. Some of this might be due to her strong connection to her father shown in “Playing House” in the previous section; to hate all men She would have to hate her own father and that is not something she can do.

For She shame plays a much stronger part in her life as violence comes and goes. Shame can be a powerful emotion that Ahmed calls ‘self-negation;

Shame can be described as an intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself, a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body...shame feels like exposure—another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful (101).

For She hate is not really possible as to move from shame to hate She would have to accept and make visible the experiences which cause her hate and pain. The violence She experienced has been hidden, either never uncovered or kept quiet, and to reveal it would leave her open and alone to the allegations against her sexual nature that usually follow. In order to save herself from the emotional pain involved in recognizing, and thus making real, the violence She keeps her feelings inside and instead creates in her head Ashri who can hate and be proud in She’s place. This shame is also formed by She’s belief that her violence is not true violence, nothing compared to what she knows happens, and so feels as if She cannot complain; as if She got off easy. This is why Ashri acts as such an effective compensation technique; her violence is so extreme it cannot be belittled. This will arise more in the last section as She comes to terms with what has happened to her.

### SECTION III

#### **Ashri/Fin**

They were lost  
Both at the same time,  
Swirling in completely different atmospheres,  
One the planet, the other a moon

The world had suddenly lost its meaning to her  
But he had lost meaning in the world.  
They were suddenly nihilists,  
The antichrist of differences.

What was next?  
Their struggle had no end  
Even if their lives did.  
The age old game was beginning to get  
dizzy.

## Fin-Losing

What happened?

It seemed like seconds ago when he was in control.

He had been jeering at her,

Pulling her up in one swift motion,

grasping her hair like a goblet of bright red wine.

But now she was crazed and grazing

Among the people of his world like a beasts among berries.

She was utterly in control and he didn't know how.

She cackled at every strike and the ruler of obstinacy meant nothing.

--Who's your daddy?—

Fuck you.

She moved against him, wanting it with a strength that scared him.

She was meant to fear, cower and pray for forgiveness,

This was wrong but he wanted it more.

When did he become the beggar?

He needed her to cower like a bug among gods

But she laughed in his face like the Green Man, hidden in the trees

--Fuck you, you Druid pagan fae bitch—

## Ashri- So Close

Harder—  
God it was good  
What she hated at first she now craved  
Like the taste of methanol to a drunkard.  
He was all force and energy  
charging at her like a tank  
And she loved the fight.

--I love you—  
You should.

She wanted him to hit harder,  
punch her till she couldn't stand,  
Sodomize her with a sanctified candle stick so he couldn't pretend anymore,  
Act like he was his vomiting society's savior of a soldier  
-When he was really a puppet that she knew every string for.  
She wanted him to scream her name in return as she clawed  
Laughed in his face with the deepest pleasure she had ever felt,  
Every bruise a kiss  
and every broken bone an orgasm.  
He was so deeply below her it was hilarious,  
Scrambling about her beaten body  
-a starved boy to a priest.  
He needed this far more than she did and she knew it.  
She was a goddess among snakes,  
wild and fantastic.  
Undulating among the leaves,  
each crackle a symphony to the gods

--I will kill you—  
Me first



## Who Am I

Awkward. That would really be the way to describe the weekend the pair had spent in Tennessee, with a mutual friend. Most of the time She got along quite well with the man whom She shared a rather intense hobby with; they both enjoyed historical re-enactment, specifically creating a Middle Eastern persona, an alter ego of sorts, by re-creating historical clothing. They went fabric hunting, did research, drafted patterns, and watched wonderfully horrible movies. He had introduced She to things such as “Pissed off Transvestites with Knives” and the actress Divine. While they shared a few interests She and her friend were vastly different people, each with vastly different political views and tendencies. In fact he was a bit of a curiosity to her, an African American pagan who use to be a professional Dominate and yet voted strictly tea toting Republican. This had been one of those weekends where they had not agreed on something and it had turned into a rather uncomfortable conversation... which turned into a screaming match. Unfortunately she had not been the only one visiting him; She had brought a close friend whom had not taken the fight well. She had shared tears as he brooded in the living room, pacing back and forth across the slowly collected Persian rugs.

It would be the next day as they both rode back feeling a bit exhausted that they would talk about him, trying to laugh at each other and themselves in order to feel better. Forgetting was made easier with laughter. She had brought her friend, a vegetarian from California who was still a bit confused by the redness of the Alabama dirt, to meet the man more properly. She had only spoke to him a few times and had found him appealing, being a well-built ex-ranger with a good wit. When they had arrived She’s two friends had hit it off rather well and She had found herself with the spare guest bed all to herself. This was the basis for their amusement as they attempted to refresh themselves from the emotionally draining argument.

“Do you know how old he is?” She grinned while driving them both back down south toward their new ‘home’ town.

“Well not for sure...30s?” The veggie girl shrugged her slim shoulders and She barely managed to not blurt out her amusement.

“Nope...50”

“He is older than my mom.” Cali-veggie spoke stiff and wide eyed behind her thin framed glasses.

“He has a son.” She had grinned as she cut her eyes and bit her lip. “He is about my age.”

“Oh god he has a kid older than me?”

“Giggidy.” She nodded and held up her pinky and forefinger in a ‘rock on’ symbol and laughed.

The earlier conversation had not been as pleasant. Much of the issue had been part misunderstanding, part reluctance on his part to recognize her identity as a disabled person. Her own self identifying had been difficult and long, attempting to either ignore or outright deny her medical conditions and the social label that came with them. Now, as a woman of twenty six studying disability, is was a term She self-identified with and was proud of. Thus his view of her as not disabled, the famous “But I don’t see you as disabled,” made her mad. No one had ever cared before, never called him up to ask if she were cripple enough in his eyes before discriminating against her. She hadn’t given his info to employers before not even getting past turning in the application with nervous twitching hands and she hadn’t even known him in high school as boys watched her write, with her face close to the desk, and faked sexual noises and

looking at her as if she were performing sexual favors. He certainly wasn't there to advise the teachers as they did nothing about it.

"Do you see me as a woman?"

"Of course I do?" The pair had been firmly squared off then, standing directly across from each other a bit puffed up. She had long ago refused to be diminished, again, by a man but this was not feeling any better. While She stood tall in her anger so did he and so her smallness was less a state of mind as it was a fact of biology. He was taller than she was, and wider, and vastly heavier than her frame which wove between workouts and illness.

"Why?" Her anger was fueling her ability to ignore his now daunting stance, seeming to curve in.

"Because you are one!"

"Well I am disabled, whether you like it or not. Maybe if you didn't see it as being so bad it wouldn't be a problem." She had apparently flabbergasted him. He was now standing with a confused look on his face for a few seconds before it shifted to a blankness that She recognized as being beyond anger, to a point where one no longer cared. Suddenly She was glad she travelled with her gun but was not so glad that she had it in the backroom, next to his. He was faster.

"Have you ever been in a place like that?"

She slid herself back into the car after pumping gas and presenting Cali-veggie with a lap full of Airheads. She looks over to the gas station/market/restaurant situated off the interstate near Franklin Tennessee. It had been rather dark, a ceiling that seemed oddly low and windows

only in the front where little booths and tables lined a wall created to separate it from the mini-mart area. It had smelled thickly of burnt oil and overly done biscuit batter. The air circulation clearly needed work and She imagined the poor souls standing in the kitchen sweating their religion out over unbuttered cornbread and turnip greens. She had been hot over a stove before and knew the work it took was often underappreciated, where AC was a big window open with a breeze blessed by God. The body stuck to itself where ever the flesh sucked together with sweat and spilt liquids and for those with bodies that panted and beat to their own liking, it could be rough. As She settled back into the relative coolness of the car she grinned and spoke to her passenger. “Good thing we didn’t have to pee. I bet you would have to whip with a chunk if fried catfish.”

Cali-veggie snickered as she checked her phone. She had not really experienced many of the southern oddities, such as the propensity for fried meat, or meat like substances, which made the vegetarian like woman scrunch her nose. “I should have brought a skirt. The seam of my jeans is not my friend.

“He work you hard?” It had been a rhetorical question. She didn’t really want to know.

“...yes.” Ewww. “He was grumpy last night.”

“Good.”

---

“I put my straw in upside down.” She had been sitting in a restaurant booth the night before, next to Cali-Veggie with him across the table next to another friend, a thin woman with long blonde hair. She was rather tired, her breath shallow as She looked at her friend, the ex-stripper with soft

freckles across her cheeks. “Lord I hope that saying ‘you’re only as old as you feel’ is bullshit. If not I am screwed.” As She sat she shifted as her back popped from being seated in hard chairs and serving people most of the day.

The thin woman shrugged and she picked at a nacho appetizer. “I always figured it was right.”

He nodded, grabbing a chipped mounded with toppings but waiting to speak before eating it. “I always hear people complain and just think ‘suck it up’.” She eyed him for a moment as he chewed, letting a bit of her annoyance show, hoping they had misunderstood her. “A lot of stuff is just in their minds.”

“Excuse me?” She kept her voice low but her tone was not so subtle. She had been accused of ‘faking it’ many times through her life by teachers, other students, even doctors when she was as young as a year old. Thankfully her mother’s bullshit-o-meter was tuned enough to know better, but it had still taken till she was almost twelve before She was finally diagnosed. That was enough to annoy her but being recently ripped of neurological medication, cold-turkey, by a doctor a few months before her wedding and so left a fumbling, tremoring, barely walking mess on her way down the aisle had left her sensitive. This was a thing he would have known had he bothered to attend the event or even consider her disabled yet as a non-disabled person this had not crossed his mind.

His response had been a pleasant one and had honestly left both She and Cali-veggie a bit flabbergasted. Once they arrived at his house she had attempted the keep and the anger in but...didn’t work. The argument that ensued had been unpleasant at best and while she had

demanded his respect and acceptance of her identity it had not felt like anything close to empowering.

## **Fin- Lost**

It was  
quiet,  
seemed as if  
sound itself softened.

Was this madness?

A sudden slowing  
of the earth and palpableness  
of time.

It seemed the world could be both  
molded and watched  
simultaneously.

It was like he was God.

But then who was she?

## **Ashri-Slingshot**

She is mad, seeing colors where there are none and songs where she shouldn't be.

She is the kind of mad where everything is a hysterical travesty and in her mind all the people are chess pieces, bugs pinned to their own wall.

She is mad but since madness is defined by those who possess her than madness is her only refuge.

She is mad, but she prefers it.

She is mad because she has mimicked their words too long; a sprite lost in the lie.

She is not the past, or the future, but the present bent backwards and convulsing while dangling from a ribbon.

She is a possession.

She is possessed night after night by a man she does not understand and whom does not understand her in return.

She is his to do with as he likes, breathing on her like a dog over a carcass but that is about to change.

She is like fire, all hate and power forced into an inferno of chaos if only for a second.  
She only needs a second.

She wants to go all at once, shot from a sling and soaring into the sky and then down in a sudden arch of glory.

She wants them to scatter as she lands.

She wants them to fear her decent into the great abyss because they know she will do it with such splendor she will inherently pull them in with her.

She will command her own gravity.

She will hear her name rain from the clouds like the war they started. The sound that sears the eyes of her enemies like a rainbow of fantastic colors, each of them the same as each of them are hers.

She will die, but it will be beautiful.



She will define beauty and define it as a warrior does; taking as many with you as you can in your sudden decent to the gods and showing them all that you were worth more than there gold or their opinions’.

She defines beauty as knowing herself so well that her own soul burns her skin; a suicide of what they thought they knew but a birth of the truth they cannot deny.

She knows that by the day’s end their souls will be shaken and that makes her smile. She smiles because while freedom has been renamed she will reincarnate it. It will live not as a phoenix but as a hooded man because no one can command death.

No one can command death but her. On this night she has made a deal with the devil and their children will weep of the day they took her like jackals for she hunts them like dogs. She is the victory; a failed conquest with lungs, blood and feet.

She dances because she can, shoeless and singing songs with broken cords.

She is not the last, but the culmination of her people into a single flesh; the soul of a society screaming out in song that they will not fade.

She will not fade because her enemy will tell stories of her, a boogie man for the ages if the boogie man where a woman with sharp teeth and sharper spears.

She has claimed her prize, wearing their flesh on her head like a hat.

She doesn’t know the difference any more.

She has forgotten madness as she has forgotten everything.

She made her deal with the devil and now it is time to pay her dues.

She has gotten what she wanted, to go all at once and then fall like a comet into the abyss.

She is triumph incarnate

She is the warrior

She is beautiful

She is dying

She is

And she sure as hell was

## Reality

I suppose I was never really sure there was a problem when I was a child, a kid, then a teen. I assumed everyone was like I was; tired, anxious, angry, sad, and most of all constantly terrified. The first time I didn't know what to call it and I still don't. I can't even remember most of it; the harder I try the harder it becomes. The fact is, deep down, I don't want to remember. I don't want to know who those two brunette girls were when I was, what I imagine, was roughly five. I don't want to know that there is a man roughly my age out there with a justified hatred of women; pushing down his memory of what those teenage girls thought was entertainment. Most of all I want to forget that image of a summer evening sky between two picturesque columns of middle class homes and the woodland that lay behind it that replays over and over in my head until I'm too drunk or medicated to care. The sound of my own feet as the pain of my wheezing and gagging was far more freeing than that of my mother screaming for me to get 'my ass back' or the look of pure anger as I arrived back covered in my own mucus. I didn't know PTSD was then and even as I hit my teens my frequent trips to sleep on the floor besides my parents' bed, my intense hatred of dresses and skirts, and a general 'bratty' nature seemed normal.

The next times I was sexually assaulted I was seventeen. I was, as many girls are at that age, self-conscious, guilt ridden, and lacking a shred of self-confidence. So when my sick boyfriend urged me to skip school and stay with him I eventually agreed. Besides, every good southern girl knows you are just there to take care of your man and to refuse was unacceptable. Feminists have an event called "Take Back the Night" to fight rape culture but when my boyfriend tried to rape me then it was in the middle of the day with the sunlight illuminating the whole damn room. The day made the room hot and he thought my stiffness was not horror but modesty and so lifted the thick cotton, plaid, cover over his back, turning my nightmare into a

furnace for everyone to see only two blocks from my high school. Even once I got away, my virginity graciously intact, school wasn't even out yet and so I had nowhere to go. I drove around for what must have been a few hours in my car with the windows down trying to dry the sweat the spring heat kept replacing until it was safe to drive the thirty minutes home. I don't know exactly how long it took me to get to that shower but I am still trying to clean off the smell.

Even then, growing up in one army town after another, I didn't think I could have PTSD. That was for soldier's and people who went through 'real' trauma, not a teenage girl who cried herself to sleep, took showers religiously, and gaged herself with a toothbrush to feel just a little bit better. The fact that I couldn't so much as eat a slimy food and had night and day mares of being raped, either by strangers or men I knew, so real I shook in terror for days meant nothing. By the time I was in my freshman year of collage I was still too frightened to go out that I often went hungry for days before I managed to sum up the courage to buy groceries. It took a year of practice to make ordering at fast food places manageable. Even after I was diagnosis with Great Depression things didn't make since and realizing there was something (else) wrong with me didn't help. I felt disconnected and not in a poetic way, but the way where you feel yourself floating and everything seems to move around you literally. I couldn't feel the curtain and I pushed it back and the night sky seemed fake. It was as if I could have slipped right through the cold glass window and I would never hit the ground if I were to fall from it. I was in a horrifying matrix and nothing was real anymore. I would later learn this was akin to something of a break with reality, where I could not feel or smell things and both my emotions and thought process was scattered and uncontrollable yet I refused to seek medical assistance.

Being disabled from an exceedingly young age was difficult enough on its own, Cerebral Palsy mixed with chronic back and pain problems as well as a seizure disorder till the age of

thirteen had left me feeling as if every birthday was simply one year closer to death. What was even more difficult was going from military doctor to military doctor in order to be correctly diagnosed and then treated before discovering there was nothing they could do. I became more of a guinea pig than a patient, a case used to advance careers and a basis of papers; once, at the age of ten, even being filmed shirtless while a doctor physically examined me for the sake of her career. If there is one kind of person I do not like now, it would be medical professionals and I didn't much care if I needed to see them. Sitting in strange beds as doctors poked and prodded, going to sections of children's hospitals named with themes like 'Jungle' or 'Safari' before entering rooms named 'Giraffe' or 'Monkey' where play grounds waited for all the sick shivering children introduced themselves by name and affliction before calling first place on the swings. It was through these years that I learned to fear needles, obtained a true to the definition phobia that still lingers, and a distaste for being asked probing questions. I can still remember, verbatim, the requested motions each neurologist needed to see. Hands out, to the sides, to the front, thumbs up, now down, now make a fist and don't let me pull your hand away. The way they looked at my body as I walked down the hallway and back, checking my legs back and hips for oddities. I already knew I was one big oddity, a walking medical textbook.

Once I was in collage I was not totally free of the medical minefield but was more in control of when I wanted to see a doctor....or friends for that matter. I tried living near others, getting an internship at a church where I would live in a separate room but share the church as a whole as a sort of common living area with the pastor, other interns, the secretary, cleaning crew, and members. It was here that sounds of bats in the attic kept me up at first before becoming a sweet sound that erased the unnerving silence that scared me. It was here that I received a call from an ex that threatened to murder me, with specific detail, after I told my then boyfriend on

him for slamming my head into the wall. My boyfriend was a Pistelerro and had become very angry, scaring the pants off my ex. The same biker who I would later take care of after being slapped once, pushed several times during an apparent common drunken stupor where he soon passed out at a party where I was then left alone with strangers. I would manage to get him home where he would grab at me and throw up all over himself, choking on it before I would roll him over and clean him off. Even at the church the interns were not friendly; changing the schedule to meet their needs then blaming me for ‘forgetting’ my duties, looking at me as if I were stupid, making fun of my ‘feminism,’ and making my exclusion apparent to as many as possible.

Afterwards I preferred a one person apartment; even living in a dirty flea filled three room number rather than share my space with anyone other than my two cats. It was here that I began to drink to relax, calm my nerves and help me write. Where I returned to shower off the feeling of disgust after being raped in my own drunken stupor and where I experience my first break with reality. It was where I broke up with a boy who then said he hoped I died alone and in pain, and where I slept fitfully between nightmares before finally asking my father for a gun.

To this day I hate the smell of sweat, that of a naked body particularly that of a man’s lower half sticky with itself. It is gag inducing and every time a friend hugs me when moist I can see their smug faces again. I don’t eat slimy foods. Brussels sprouts, cabbage, ill-cooked greens, they all make me feel as if I will vomit. Just a look and I can feel the slickness in my mouth and I can’t deal with it anymore. I keep the fan on at night and sleep nude to keep from being too hot, even walk about in my underwear in the summer and shower with the water as hot as I can stand it so the air feels cool when I step out. I avoid doctors and their prying male hands unless absolutely necessary, refusing to make appointments until my pain threshold has been obliterated. Even as I sleep I need my dog or cats with me because it feels safer than being alone,

even when my husband is right next to me...especially when my husband is right next to me because like many girls I have a type. A type both my husband and many of my ex-boyfriends fit and so at night, when I get too warm and it is dark I just can't tell the difference.

It was bright

The feelings of ecstasy deep in her horror.

She remembered the old days and wanted them as fiercely as she pushed them away.

They were the days she kept a knife in her room and dreamed of things that made her scream in the morning.

They were the days that made her into the 'her' she was now; necessary like drinking water till you vomit it back up all over again like an abject cleansing.

She sparkled like purification.

She smelled of moon light in the afternoon.

On summer afternoons she could see both orbs tagging off in the sky, flat on her back and holding hands with God's Manna.

She doesn't even attend church now...but neither do I.



### SECTION III THEORY

This is the final section of the work and so where everything comes to a head, where the violence and stress of Ashri's experience mix with her growing hatred and mental instability to bloom first into a need for revenge and then the realization of this need. Revenge is the main driving force for Ashri, wanting to both inflict similar pain on Fin, as he did her, as well as show his society, the people she no longer had, that she was more powerful than they gave her credit for. There are also instances of strong religious reference, specifically to Christian doctrine and a nature based paganism. For Ashri it is Fin's Christian like religion which is violent, where Fin finds himself focused on not only being a hero but receiving a type of sanctification or spiritual uplift. It is paganism, or even a nature based mythos, which is linked to Ashri. This is not very different from how we see women attached to the concept of nature, 'Mother Nature,' and is also reminiscent of the gendering often seen in nature based mythical creatures such as fairies, wisps, and banshees. Fin and Ashri are opposites, each representing their own realms, and while this is over simplified it is how She imagines it.

For She this is where her life does not so much come to an end as simply continue, her future shaped by her past. This is shown by the way the piece as a whole ends, with a short story piece that summarizes her life up to that point before ending with a specific reference to how it still affects her through PTSD. The last piece, named "Reality," is also written in a first person narrative style to purposefully link the She character as being myself and so the stories being true. This piece is meant to be separate from the rest of the stories, to act as a sort of ender, and so separated by a blank page. It is important that She be linked to myself less because of a wish



for recognition on my part and more because it is important that the reader realize that each of the stories are not events in the lives of different people but are in fact happening to the same, singular person. Even the most hopeful person will admit that violence occurs but to realize that all of this takes place to one person means the reader must look deeper into the why. How can this take place? It is my hope that this realization will force a person to consider larger issues of society, such as a culture of violence and misogyny, that makes these violations not only exist but so prominent in the life of a single person.

The way the She story line ends is also purposefully written to provide no real end to the piece, no real resolution. This is done because of the way violence often repeats itself in the mind of the victim far beyond the moment of victimization. Brown writes of how many people who experience violence, particularly those during childhood, will not recall the violence until much later in life. Nancy L. Rosenblum, in her article “Justice and the Experience of Injustice, writes:

The trauma of violence, especially when it is personalized and designed to be humiliating, has distinctive characteristics: reoccurring terror, difficulty controlling anger, difficulty sustaining relationships, loss of desire to live. These point to some psychological obstacles to reconciliation and repair. They also point to some complex needs survivors have for assistance in remembering safely and recovering the capacity for agency if they are to break out of the cycle of hatred.

The process of emotional and psychological healing is complex and requires the recognition of the violence to be truly successful. For this reason the effects of pain can continue for years until it is faced, or even be permanent if healing is never sought. This is why we see the suicide of soldiers who have been out of combat or even active duty for years and why soldiers from Vietnam are still being diagnosed with PTSD or other illnesses. One example of this is the article “Don’t Call Me a Survivor” where the author, Emilie Morgan, recalls her continuing difficulty with dealing with day to day life after her rape. The author is unable to simply ‘snap out’ of the

mindset the rape put her in and so relives the pain often. This is why She finds no 'silver lining' or moral at the end of the piece; in real life violence such as the ones She experienced rarely have one and to create one would not only be false but irresponsible.

As for the issue of revenge Rosenblum says it perfectly when she writes "Avengers feel perfectly justified in wreaking destruction—they feel liberated to become persecutors in return. They owe debts to the dead". In large part it is not for herself, at least not just for herself, that Ashri seeks revenge but for those who were slaughtered by the people whom Fin lead. It is Fin whom Ashri blames for the death of her people and her family and so it is Fin who must pay retribution for those deaths. She owes it to her people and to not avenge them would be a greater betrayal than she can imagine, it is a debt she owes for living. For She this feeling, a love of a lost people, is an inward embodiment of the future She feels was lost when she was victimized. The future free of mental illness, fear, and pain that was permanently lost not only once but over and over with each violence that stacked as if to add insult to injury.

Religion also appears a good deal in this and the second section, with issues of holiness and godliness appearing sparingly. While all work is affected by the author, conscious or not, I must admit the somewhat aggressive reactions of Ashri towards the Christianity style religion present in Fin's society is built pretty substantially off my own opinions. What is important in the way religion plays a part of the poetry story line, as it is absent in She's world, is that it seems to pour fuel onto the fire that is Fin's need for violence and power. In many societies religion is a structure that can hold vast amounts of power for those who take part in the dominant doctrine, but it also can, and often has, been a hierarchical structure of oppression for those of a different religious belief or even denomination. While this is not the basis for Fin's actions towards Ashri and her people it is the force which makes his actions acceptable in his

own society and provides a sense of calmness to his life that we do not see outside of his poem “Mother” in the first section. Ashri in return references Fin’s religion as well as the violence she feels comes with it. This is most apparent in “So Close” where Ashri sees Fin as a ‘savior of a soldier’ who violates her with a ‘sanctified candle stick.’ For Ashri Fin’s violence and his religion go hand in hand but she also recognized her own possibilities as being outside of the hegemony; she is the ‘priest’ to his ‘starving boy’.

While Fin is sometimes compared to organized religion, such as the symbology present in “Stained Glass Window,” Ashri’s symbology lies heavily in the realm of paganism or mythos, depending on your beliefs. In Fin’s poem “Losing” Fin calls Ashri a “Druid pagan fae bitch” which references a cornucopia of myths and old earth based religion. Pagan is a bit self-explanatory as it is often used to describe any religion not the dominant one but most often used by Christian doctrine to reference Wicca or other similar earth or ‘Mother’ worshiping religions. Druid and Fae are both geographically specific to the British Isles, specifically Ireland and Scotland where there have been a complex mythos of different creatures such as Banshees, Water Horses, and Sidhe all of which fall under the umbrella of Fae. Druid is an old earth worship based religion of which little is known but is believed to have been one of the common religions in the isles before the rise of Christianity and is referenced in tales of Arthur. While Fin is not one likely to be well educated in these issues it does make clear in thoughts on Ashri as a being, admitting her possible power over him and her likely preference for violence (Fae lore speaks a lot of their general shenanigans but also intense malice). Whether Ashri is pagan is never stated but seeing as it is Fin who creates her place in her society, it doesn’t really matter.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Sarah. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Brown, Laura. S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminists Perspective on Psychic Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995. 100-112. Print.
- Foucault, Micheal. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Vintage Books. 1988. Print.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.
- McWhorter, Ladelle. *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. Print.
- Minow, Martha. *Breaking the Cycle of Hatred: Memory, Law and Repair*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Print.
- Morgan, Emilie. "Don't Call Me A Survivor." *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation*. Ed. Findlen, Barbara. Emeryville: Seal Press. 2001. 33-39. Print.
- Rosenblum, Nancy L. "Justice and the Experience of Injustice." *Breaking the Cycles of Hatred*. Ed. Martha Minow. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. 100. Print.