

Isabella Spiritoso
 Dr. Brooks
 Global Haiku
 07 November 2018

She Persists: The Voices of *#FemkuMag*

windstorm
 I wonder if I still have
 a voice

Vandana Parashar, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 4

This haiku captures the complete essence of why I chose this topic for my essay. Women throughout history have always been silenced and oppressed, whether it was by societal expectations, by familial expectations, or, bluntly, by men. To be dainty, soft-spoken, obedient, modest, codependent, and domestically-inclined are all ideals that have been imposed on women. These gender roles have left many women feeling powerless or voiceless, like Parashar. However, *#FemkuMag* edited by Lori A Minor has given all women, including non-binary and transwomen, an outlet and platform to reclaim their voices and be heard.

This first poem by Vandana Parashar really struck a chord with me when I read it. The first line is a simple one-word opener: "windstorm." Right off the bat, that one word is able to set the mood; it gives a feeling of coldness and bitterness. Also, I feel a loss of balance and direction when I read the word "windstorm" by picturing just how physically intense and moving a windstorm can be. I feel that this word is the perfect introduction to the subject of the haiku. In the next two lines, she comments on feeling like she has lost her voice. I believe that the unstableness and the coldness offered by the imagery in the first line helps the reader to image what exactly this loss of power feels like to Parashar. It creates the picture in my head of a woman stranded alone in the middle of a barren field as the wind tries to knock her down and after a while, she can't find her grounding or her voice. This wind, whatever that may literally be to her, is something that chills her to the bone and attempts to sway her, possibly in her actions, thoughts, and words. After standing this storm for so long, she feels as though she doesn't have her own voice anymore.

his freedom
 the way to control
 me

Radostina Dragostinova, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 4

This haiku is very emotionally gripping from start to finish. From the first line, I could infer that the author lacked freedom of their own by the fact that they were discussing someone else's freedom. I find the contrast between the word "freedom" in the first line and "control" in the second line be very compelling; this juxtaposition gives an unsettling feeling to the poem before it even introduces the subject in the third line, which also adds a feeling of suspense. I like the way she isolates the word "me" in the third line. By giving the subject of the poem, "me," a line of its own, Dragostinova is drawing attention to the word and giving it its own space to live and breathe separately from the rest of the poem. I interpret that separation of "me" from the phrase to be a place where she is fully discovering and processing just what that means to her and how it affects her. Whoever the man is that she is referring to, I can only imagine that he is someone that she is either close to or is surrounded by often, considering he has the ability to assert his dominance over her. Regardless of their relationship, this is clearly a very personal issue that has affected the author, and that is also highlighted in the fact that the word "me" stands alone in the haiku.

cleaning dirt
 from under my nails
 his unsolicited advice

Hannah Mahoney, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 4

This haiku, like the last one, focuses on the power dynamic between men and women. In this situation, the man has made a comment about the author's appearance. This is a huge issue in today's society; the idea that all women should look a certain way, as well as the normalization of commenting on a woman's appearance when she has not asked anyone's opinion. I picture the author scraping under her nails with a clenched jaw and pursed lips, and perhaps she is feeling a mixture of slight embarrassment and rage on the fact that this man felt it was his place to critique her appearance. I have a clear image in my mind of this moment, as well as a clear feeling that I get in my chest as I read this haiku; I feel irritation as I hear the voice of a man in my mind making an uncalled-for remark about my, or any other woman's, appearance. I think the word that I am drawn to the most in this haiku is the word "unsolicited" in the third line; this word is what brings the feeling of irritation and rage to poem because it confirms that the action she is doing is not for herself, but for a man that couldn't keep his thoughts to himself. "Unsolicited" is a key word in this poem that sets the tone, because otherwise, the lines about cleaning dirt from under her nails are just words about a mundane action.

after sex
 he tells me
 I'm a whore

Martha Magenta, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 5

Following in the theme of the last haiku, this one is about a man speaking his opinions on a woman aloud when it is not asked for or necessary. The infuriating thing about this one is that what he is saying is super ironic and completely hypocritical, considering he is judging her for partaking the sexual act that they had both just done together. This poem's message is very reflective of today's society in how it portrays the double standard that women are held to; men are rarely judged or ridiculed for their sexual lives, yet women are seen as licentious for performing the same sexual acts as their male counterparts. The structure of this poem helps contribute to its effectiveness in conveying its message. The opening line is crucial because it establishes immediately that this moment is happening after these two people have had sex, which just prepares the audience for the hypocrisy of what he tells her in the last line. The last line is extremely powerful because as it stands alone, it appears to be a statement about how she perceives herself. However, with the background of the two lines before it, we realize that the reason she may perceive herself that way is because that is what has been projected onto her.

no more grey
 I finally call it
 rape

Tiffany Shaw-Diaz, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 4

This haiku is a powerful example of a woman reclaiming her own voice through haiku. I think the imagery she uses with the color grey is very effective in the first line because it briefly places the audience in a place of uncertainty to start out; grey symbolizes mixed feelings and double-sidedness. After she declares it is no longer "grey," she claims that she is going to "finally call it" something in the next line, which is indicative of her finally taking control of her own situation by making the choice to call it what she knows to be true. Lastly, the third line is concluded with just the word "rape." Like Dragostinova did in her poem, Shaw-Diaz leaves only one word in the last line in order to draw emphasis to it. In doing this, she is giving this word

room to process individually in reader's mind. Also, in this poem in particular, it is very important that this word remains alone in the last line, because this is also indicative of the author making a clear statement that she will not sugar-coat; this is how she truly takes herself out of the "grey"

life after trauma
even the tulips
cry obscenities

Tiffany Shaw-Diaz, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 4

This haiku is written by the same author as the last one, Tiffany Shaw-Diaz, and I thought that they accompanied each other well to tell the story of her struggle to find power in herself again after she had faced trauma. Though I am not completely sure, I am going to infer that the trauma she refers to in this poem is related to trauma she discusses in the last poem for the sake of analysis and comparison. I find this poem to be powerful because it expresses how those who are suffering from trauma and are recovering will still find reminders of their pain in even beautiful and mundane things, like tulips. When someone has been abused, sexually or not, it may affect them in any and all areas of their life. However, some people going through this may feel that they are alone or that they have lost the power in their life. Shaw-Diaz is an example of a woman who has taken back power in her life by making the decision to share her story and use her voice to write haiku about her trauma.

mockingbird –
so many things
I'm tempted to say

Julie Bloss Kelsey, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 2

This haiku does a good job at setting up its mood right away. In the first line, there is just the word "mockingbird" followed by a dash. A mockingbird is just a creature that repeats what it hears and mutters completes gibberish. This idea of something mindless babbling about nothing is enough to put the reader in the mood of the scene. The author then goes on to say that there are so many things that she is tempted to say; no doubt, these things would be in response to the blabbering of the mockingbird. However, it is important to distinguish that she said that she is tempted to say these things, but possibly didn't because she would've felt that it wasn't her place to speak her mind. This is a thought that has affected many women throughout history and kept them from reclaiming their true voice in the world, the voice that they would have had and used if they were not affected and influenced by society. This poem does a great job at capturing the feeling of any person who has ever felt that they couldn't speak up because their thoughts weren't worth speaking, and it does so well at this because of its metaphor in the first line.

personal boundaries
hestandstoclose

Robin Smith, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 1

This haiku illuminates an issue in society where men who are pursuing a woman will be negligent of her personal boundaries, and because women are expected to be polite, they will often be too afraid to speak up for themselves. This idea sort of ties into that of the idea in the last haiku, where women feel that it is not their place to speak their minds, even when it really is. The haiku is very straight forward in the first line by telling the audience exactly what it's about, then, in the second line, the haiku goes on to create the mood of the moment in the poem. I believe that this haiku perfectly captures the feeling that people feel when their personal space is being violated. Smith captures this feeling by putting no space in between the words in the second line; she also bolds the letters which visually adds more pressure in between the letters in the line.

By the lack of a third line, it can be assumed that this situation had no resolution, which is appropriate for issue that the poem is trying to convey. In this haiku, Smith displays how women are often put in uncomfortable situations by men, but they feel that they are unable to escape them because of social expectations they are held to.

depression...
my male shrink tells me
I need more sex

Robin Smith, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 1

This haiku represents the opposite issue that is being presented in the haiku by Magenta. In Magenta's haiku, the woman is being ridiculed for being too promiscuous while in this one, the woman is being ridiculed for being too prudish. Obviously, the most disturbing part about this exchange is that this is coming from her shrink, which is a person who should be able to help you work through your mental health issues, not add to them. Regardless, though, of who is saying this to the woman, this is the other end of the spectrum on how society views women and their sexuality; some people believe that women are too modest and need to be sexually active. The side of the spectrum on which criticism lies doesn't matter, it is the fact that it is being made at all that is the issue. In this haiku, Smith sets up the first line with word "depression" followed by ellipses. The separation of this word plus the trailing of the punctuation seems to be almost the period of time that she waits for an answer from the shrink after she tells him her issues and she waits for his advice. Though the next line sets her up to receive the help she needs from her shrink, he instead tells her in the third line that she just needs to have more sex. This haiku is effective in capturing the annoyance and helplessness that the author must have felt after seeking out professional help and waiting for answers only to be told to do what society has already been imposing on her, which might be something that has contributed to her mental health problems in the first place.

the wildflower grows from a hole in the brick she persists

Robin Smith, *#FemkuMag*, Issue 5

Finally, the author of the two previous haiku finds power through her struggle in this last haiku. This haiku, like this first one, captures the reason I chose this topic, however, this one does it in a different way. The very first haiku by Parashar is about a woman who felt that she had lost her voice and possibly the will to find it. In this poem, Smith writes about a woman who has found out how to keep pushing on, despite the struggle that she has been faced with. This poem not only creates a strong overall feeling, but it provides the reader with a very clear mental picture, as well. She describes the woman as a "wildflower" that is "growing out from a hole in the brick." This image of a flower, something that is generally perceived as delicate, pushing through a brick wall, a huge obstacle, is incredibly inspiring. This implies that the flower, which represents women, is stronger than it is perceived and has the ability to overcome obstacles in life, even if they may seem daunting. By using only one line, Smith also helps to further the feeling of persistence, almost as if this flower will not stop or break for anything in its path.

Lori A Minor has done an amazing job at uniting women of all kinds in her magazine *#FemkuMag*. This magazine has given women from all different backgrounds the opportunity to speak their truths and have them be heard. In the magazine, women have been able to discuss the struggles that they have faced in their womanhood, but they have also been able to write about how they overcame their struggles. *#FemkuMag* is doing a superb job at publishing well-written haiku, as well as giving voices back to people who may have not found them otherwise. I look forward to reading more issues of *#FemkuMag* in the future and seeing what else they do on their journey to unite and empower all women.

Works Cited

Minor, Lori A, Editor. *#FemkuMag*, <femkumag.wixsite.com/femkumag/>. Web. 6 November 2018.