(Un)Spoken

Vanessa Barraco

University of Windsor

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(UN)SPOKEN

by

Vanessa Barraco

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Masters of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
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(UN)SPOKEN

by

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ABSTRACT

*(Un)Spoken* is a collection of experimental poems that explore various compositional techniques to express types of silence. Language is embedded with silence, for there are things or experiences that Language cannot say. When Language fails to communicate, silence speaks. This thesis finds what is possible in language, fragmenting and distorting Language so it can express unspoken experiences. The interplays between silence and language suggests inexpressibility, resisting structure and order so deeply rooted in Language. This thesis aims to give voice to what should be said, while also revealing the compulsoriness of silence to communicate what cannot be said.
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I SAY “I”
Hours

fingers dance on

pennies
for hours

print
penny ridges
into

fingers
prints

bumps and bruises
are ridges on pennies
remind

of skin

if

fingers
keep riding pennies
then

fingers
prints
could bleed
too

fingers
dance with pennies
because a ridge
rhymes with
every memory in
head
every ridge is a ridge is a ridge is a ridge is a ridge
and i
inch closer
to the surface
thoughts of
fingers
tips
friction heads and tails
stroking two pennies
the leaves
remind

you

of your hands

covering

hands over
heads and faces

fingers

prints

over hands and faces

they say if

a mosquito

bites

and
see it sucking

blood
pinch it
if only i
could pinch
a penny
Non-Disclosure Agreement I

i live in
document

backspace
enter

insert me in
pages
pushing me
in spaces where

words
squeeze me in
words
push me
to the borders

spread me
on paper
but I can’t
find me
anywhere
address me as
party
i am
part

trace
ink on paper
like goose bumps
on my skin

write every inch
of me
and thumb
    keep
thumbing me
like a child playing with
an Etch a Sketch
knob knob
    knobbing me
as the stylus finger
scratches
aluminum powder
from under
the screen
to edge solid lines
the mole on my back
the kp on my elbows and
the callus on my big toe
onto the screen

the knobs knob knobbing hands knobble and knobble
make me a lineographic image

Save as
what
and title
me
2.doc

file
i
in
files
If Mouths Could Move

my tongue chews on words
flapping,
batting the muscle
the stretches
out
to say

because
words fly
sticking
to the insides
of my mouth
words cloud
my voice
and
word clouds
smother
me
my tongue
tracing the language
of word clouds
in my
mouth
signing
our
words
on my palate
but
swallow
them
for me
You &

tell me to write

myself in

where

say

Signature

I

am not anywhere

so I

take an ant

running for my lamp

and place

it on the line where

want me

squish it

between

pages

like ink

blot

so
cannot
find me
anywhere
& I

you
tell to write in

where

you

say

Signature

am not anywhere

so my

take an ant

running for lamp

and place

it on the line where

you

want

squish it

between

your

pages

like ink

blot
so
you
cannot
find
anywhere
Tattooed

i
put you
on me
today
wrapped
around
my wrist
so when i
eat
i see you
and all i
taste
is you
and when
i
wash the dishes
you scrub
plates
with me
but soap
won’t run
you
down the
drain
ink
needs to
cover me
with you
so my arm
is painted
every colour
of you
you always asked
me
to shave
my arms
i let you
run
under my skin
so i turn
my blood
turquoise
your favourite
colour
pigmented
my lymph
nodes
like a dart
on the map
i feel you
heavy in
spaces
asking me to
go there
in the insides
of my skin
but
they do not
give
maps for tattoos

you always asked
me to shave my
arms
so
I grew them out
THIS IS (NOT) WHAT THEY SAID
“Disgusting” Female Body as Aristic Medium of Resistance
An ongoing project at the Getty Research Institute investigates the development and documentation of feminist performance art.

The recent U.S. election season, with its heated accusations, allegations, and statements, forces us to reconsider many things, but above all the place, treatment, and regard of women. We were reminded that in our society, women are still widely regarded and represented as passive objects for pleasure, available for use or disposal. Take the Los Angeles Times of January 22nd, which devoted several pages and articles to the recent Women's March, but did not hesitate to squeeze in, between the pages on women's protests, a two-page advertisement for Calvin Klein, which featured a half-naked, full woman looking passively into the camera on the one side and the picture of women's underpants on the other. (1)

As shocking as some of the statements that have surfaced over the last months are, they have led to one good thing: They have brought women's rights back into the spotlight—at least in the Western world—where they should have remained since the late 1950s and early '60s, when feminist movements raised awareness about inequality and systematic discrimination against women. During this period, the arts became an important vehicle for women in formulating and expressing criticism of existing conditions, both within society at large as well as within the art world with its notable problem of male dominance.

The development of performance art is closely connected with the articulation of feminist issues. Artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Barbara T. Smith, Eleanor Antin, and Harmony...
Hammond in the U.S. utilized the most contested but most readily available material—their own bodies—to enter the political arena. This politically charged art form is at the heart of a current Getty Research Institute research project I am leading titled *Performance Works: Documenting Feminist Ephemer al Art*, which examines the development, documentation, and archiving of feminist performance art. Examining the work of the aforementioned artists, whose archives are housed in the Research Institute's Special Collections, but also branching out to consider less canonical and younger, emerging artists, the project highlights an important collecting area of the Institute, which continues to gain even more significance in the light of present political developments.

Women artists’ use of their own bodies in their performance works triggered controversy in their earliest iterations and continues to elicit discomfort—as reactions to works by Schneemann, Karen Finley, Elke Krystufek, Vlasta Žanić, L.A. Raeven, or Marta Jovanović illustrate. Their art is deemed provocative, inappropriate, and disgusting, as the negotiation of their own (female) body counters the long-established codes of representation of the female form in Western visual culture and art history.

So, what are the violations that these women and their bodies commit and how do their bodies become active, political tools?

The standards for the depiction of the female body in the canon of Western art are well known and have been largely consistent over time. British art historian Kenneth Clark’s 1956 treatise *The Nude: Studies of Ideal Art* summarized the governing principles of the integration of the female form into art for men artists, deemed provocative, inappropriate, and disgusting, stab visual culture and art history.
Mostly concerned with problems of obscenity in the depiction of the female nude, Clark struggled to establish parameters for non-objectionable nakedness. For Clark, the naked female body per se is obscene; it is pure matter—nature—that requires the male artist’s genius to transform it into art and thus, ultimately, into culture. This can only happen by controlling and assigning a form to the wayward female body. The question of “containment” and boundaries is therefore crucial: the “boundaries of the female form control...” as Lynda Nead, who has published an excellent study on the representation of the female body in the visual arts, has put it.

The conversion of nature/matter into form/culture is congruent for Clark with the translation from the potentially obscene “naked” woman into the aesthetically pleasing, sublime, female “nude.” Many of the principles Clark established for the ideal female nude in 1956—the precise time when the body was lifted off the canvas and introduced into the three-dimensionality of performance art—remains valid for contemporary culture’s representation and understanding of the female body. It must be contained, enclosed, smooth, easy to look at and easy to handle, much like a statue or even a consumer object. In order to enforce these requirements, the female body has become much more encoded with notions of beauty and disgust than its male counterpart. These standards ensure that the body does not transgress its boundaries, does not make visible its interior and natural conditions, and, in doing so, remains passive and contained, both literally (in its form) and metaphorically (in behaving and presenting itself in what is regarded as appropriate for a woman).
Carolee Schneemann, whose work serves as one of the research project's case studies, was among the first women artists in New York of the early 1960s to activate her own body and use it as a political instrument in her artistic journey to liberate the female from historical and cultural delimitations. Trained as a painter, she introduced her body and her sexuality as a part of her work and its materiality, and, slowly and carefully, attempted to expand it and transgress its boundaries. In the notes to her series of performative photographs called *Eye/Body* (1963), she explains:

In *Eye/Body* I used my own body as an extension of my painting—a and as an aspect of the studio itself in which the works were made. [...]* I wanted to experience the expanding action, from that by which I had made the paintings and constructions to turning myself into an aspect of the work, physically, actually—to set my body in its visual realm, the kineic that ion of my works provide for the eye. Here space begins with the body, the eye is part of the body, the eye leads the body. (5) 

Carolee Schneemann, typed note. Carolee Schneemann papers, the Getty Research Institute, 950001, Box 80, album 5. © 2017 Carolee Schneemann / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

With the decision to lift the body off the canvas and into the realm of performance, she ultimately entered the political arena of feminist art. She writes: "In 1963 to use my body as an extension of my painting—constructions was to challenge and threaten the psychic territorial power lines by which women were admitted to the Art Stud Club so long as they behaved enough like the men, did work clearly in the traditions & pathways being hacked out by the men." (6)
initially not well received. She recounts her experience with *Eye/Body*: "I took the photo so as to Alan Solomon […] and remember that he said: 'If you want to paint, paint. If you want to run around naked, then you don't belong in the art world.'" (7)

But Schneemann was not to be dissuaded, and over the years created some of the most powerful and daring works of feminist performance art. In all of them, the body— with only few exceptions (8), always her own— is negotiated in a way that counters the "contained form" that Clark had established (and that we continue to consider) as appropriate for the female body.

In one of her most iconic works, *Interior Scroll* (1975), she infamously pulled a paper scroll out of her vagina, which contained text from a film she was creating at that time, *Kitch’s Last Meal* (1973–76), and read it out loud. She said of the work: "I didn't want to pull a scroll out of my vagina and read it in public, but the culture's terror of my making overt what it wished to suppress fueled the image; it was essential to demonstrate this lived action about 'vulvic space' against the abstraction of the female body and its loss of meaning." (9)

Contrary to the "contained" and passive woman's body of art history and culture, Schneemann gives the female sexual organ a voice, both metaphorically by reading the material she produces from the vagina, but also quite literally. She highlights the natural condition of her body and connects it with a a vagina,
Another work by Schneemann, which constitutes an activation of her female body and the transgression of its boundaries, is *Fresh Blood*—*A Dream Morphology*. *Fresh Blood*, which she first performed in 1983, refers to a dream the artist had, in which she accidentally poked a man's thigh with an umbrella, causing him to bleed. Schneemann linked the V-shape of the umbrella to the shape of a vagina, and the blood drawn from the thigh wound to the female menstrual cycle. She developed a performance (later transformed into the video installation *Venus Vectors*, 1988), in which she delivered a speech in front of a background of various objects in the form of a “V” and images of menstrual blood. Schneemann again chose a topic and a substance that transgress physical and social boundaries: The vaginal orifice as nexus between inner and outer worlds and menstrual blood as the substance manifesting this connection.

*Fresh Blood* turns the focus on one of the most important, essential functions of the female body, which, to this day, remains largely considered “unclean,” disgusting, and confined to the private realm. There are many other great examples of female artists pushing against the canonical idea of women and their bodies as passive, contained, beautiful, non-disgusting, and available. Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Paintings* (1965) are, as the title suggests, created by the artist squatting on the floor and painting with a brush attached to her vagina. Austrian artist Elke Krystufek masturbated in the public space of a gallery in front of an audience in 1994 (*Satisfaction*). Marta
Jovanović brought the metaphorical counterpart of what is often considered the essence of womanhood, but which must also remain hidden and private—the egg—out into the open in her 2016 performance *Motherhood*. She cracked 740 (chicken) eggs, a number corresponding to the fertile days in her life, one by one with a hammer and immersed her entire body in their substance to create a dialogue with her female body, its functions, and the social expectations attached to it.

Many artists employing such a direct approach and use of their own bodies were (and still are) criticized and labeled "narcissistic" not only by their male peers and male art historians, but even by female and feminist artists and scholars. It seems almost ironic that turning their own, beautiful bodies into active, political tools in an attempt to free them from male dominance and socio-cultural constraints would become one of the biggest problems for these artists. As feminist scholar Lucy Lippard had pointed out: "A woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she will with them, but it is the subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult."

Females taking authority over their own bodies and their natural constitution, activating what is supposed to remain silent, and brandishing what we have been taught is "disgusting," represent a threat to established codes, and therefore often face negativity, anger, vilification, or mockery. This helps explain the persistence of conventional modes of representing the female body and underscores the fact that women still lack ownership of and rights to their very own bodies.
considered "appropriate," "normal," and "desirable" for women and the female body, and how these bodies should be treated and represented. The transgression of the body's physical boundaries, as encouraged in recent "locker-room" dialogues, is sanctioned only within certain cultural and social norms. But culture, we must remember, has been equated by Kenneth Clark with "man," whose task is to tame and contain nature, i.e. "woman."

In a recent interview with Carolee Schneemann, which appeared in actress Lena Dunham's Lenny Letter, the artist shares a funny yet upsetting anecdote about her experience as a young female artist:

"Once I was walking with the poet Charles Olson in Gloucester [...], and he asked me what I was working on. I thought that was gracious of him, and I said, 'Well, I'm in essence a painter, but I'm working on introducing movement and text into my work.' And he was six foot four, so he looked down at me, and he said, 'Well, don't forget in Greek culture when the cunts started to speak, Greek theater was destroyed.' I said, 'OK, I'll remember.'" (12)

This anecdote now seems timelier than ever. It should prompt us to think about how far women remain silenced and their voices and bodies suppressed into a patriarchal theater played out on our artistic, cultural, and political stage. Women have found a voice recently, and we can only hope that the outrage that has prompted them to unite and speak up is accompanied by enough commitment and devotion to carry it on and make an impact on how they are perceived, treated, and depicted.
Notes

1. The constant public discussion of women's bodies, weight, and appearance, which has reached a new height with social media, is another worrisome aspect that illustrates the passive, mute character attributed to women.


5. Carolee Schneemann papers (referred to from here on as CS papers), Getty Research Institute, Box 1, folder 7, accession number 950001.


8. For example, *Chromedeleon* (1964).


10. See for example Donald Kuspit, “The Triumph of Shit,” in...
Time magazine has named "the Silence Breakers" - women and men who spoke out against sexual abuse and harassment - as its "Person of the Year." The move is most closely associated with the MeToo hashtag which sprung up as allegations emerged against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

But Time says the hashtag is "part of the picture, but not all of it." "This is the fastest-moving social change we've seen in decades," editor-in-chief Edward Felsenthal said. He told NBC's Today programme that it "began with individual acts of courage by hundreds of women - and some men, too - who came forward to tell their own stories."

The magazine illustrates the ubiquitous nature of sexual harassment by showcasing women from markedly different backgrounds on its cover. Two celebrities are featured - Ashley Judd, one of the first to speak out against Mr Weinstein, and pop singer Taylor Swift, who won a civil case against an ex-DJ who she said had grabbed her bottom.

They are shown alongside Isabel Pascual, a 42-year-old strawberry picker from Mexico (not her real name); Adama Iwu, a 40-year-old corporate lobbyist in Sacramento; and Susan Fowler, 26, a former Uber engineer whose allegation brought down Uber's CEO.
But many more people are identified as part of the movement behind the cover shot. BBC Trending: How 'MeToo' is exposing the scale of sexual abuse. Why women fear a backlash over #MeToo.

This “moment”, the magazine says, “doesn’t have a leader, or a single, unifying tenet. The hashtag #MeToo (swiftly adapted into #BalanceTonPorc, #YoTambien, #Ana_kaman and many others), which to date has provided an umbrella of solidarity for millions of people to come forward with their stories, is part of the picture, but not all of it...

“The women and men who have broken their silence span all races, all income classes, all occupations and virtually all corners of the globe.”

But, it says, collectively they have helped turn shame into outrage and fear into fury, put thousands of people on the streets demanding change, and seen a slew of powerful men held accountable for their behaviour.

Those featured include Tarana Burke, the activist who created the #MeToo hashtag more than a decade ago, the actor Alyssa Milano who helped it explode on social media last October, actor Terry Crews, a group of hotel workers who have filed a lawsuit against their employer, State Senator Sara Gelser, an anonymous hospital worker who fears losing her job if she speaks openly, and Megyn Kelly, the former Fox News journalist whom Donald Trump accused of having “blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever” after she moderated a debate during the presidential campaign.

Ironically, President Trump—whose election Ms Kelly said was a “setback for women” that helps explain the #MeToo movement—was named
the magazine explains, that the "mould was broken"

user-generated internet content.
The Silence Breakers’ Named Time’s Person of the Year for 2017. Investigations published in October by The New York Times and The New Yorker, both of them detailing multiple allegations of sexual harassment and assault against the movie producer Harvey einstein, sparked the sudden rush of women coming forward.
It is a testament to the size of the movement that the set of “Today” itself, where the announcement was made, had recently been the site of such a reckoning. Matt Lauer, one of NBC’s most well-known personalities for decades, was fired only last week after an allegation of sexual harassment from a subordinate. Other complaints soon followed.
THE REPLY

Ant

Meeting

Faneuil Hall, April 28, 1914.

Taking the chair Mr. Guild said:

I am delighted to note that Women's Suffrage was undisturbed.

It was the curse of Athens that caused the downfall of the city.

Now woman is the symbol of the position of the husband.

by desire from a soap exercise of love and guardianship and caution

State in action not merely in body but in brain man, that woman do best for country. George Washington probably had more influence on

Education and Learning Company.
STICKS AND STONES AND WORDS HAVE BONES
Bared

y•ou • sp(l(i)•t)

m•e • l(i)•ke a

w(i•sh)b•one

i s(a•id) • i co•ul•d

f•ly • y•ou

pl•uc•ked

h•(a(i)r) f•rom

m•y • ar•ms

do•nt gr•ow t(h•ere)

i grow every•(w•h•ere)
Choked

you put rubber in my throat
you filled with air
pushed your thumbs down and listened to me squeak your dog's toy for hours
Tie

you
b(r(a(i•ded)
(me (t)•o y)ou
(so w)e•(’)(re)
t•(ied) to•(ge(t)•he)r)
i am t•(her)e)
p(l•e(as)e)
b•r(u(sh) me
h(a•r)d
and b•reak
t•he k•not
that (h•ol)ds
me

you p•l(a)y
with h•a(i)r
(too o)f•ten
g(r•e•(as)e)
s•(in)king in
f(il)l•ing) my
str•(an)ds with
you can keep
grow•ing

but i

do•n(‘)t)
Sculpted

you
can’t
draw

you

say

write

write (is)t

write (o)n’t turn

like an

(art)(is)t’s can

so

you

make me

(make)(per) make

so you

write (it) all over me

im(g)ue
to words

imagine

(head)(in)gs

Trudeau Liberals Trod

and

(bod)ies

c(ov)er their
f•(e(e)t) on my

b•(r(east))

but wh•(ere)

am i

my right

(s(hould)•er

says

on t•hurs•day

it was

f•(our)teen deg•(r(e)es)

i

d•id n•ot k•now
You
kept a jar
of penises
on the table
scratching your fingernails
into the
wood
under
a lamp
(*)
your fingers
(scattered with
smiling Elizabeths
press cheek
to cheek
listening
on paper
leaves
(tell me how do they sound)
and she
ever sees

(au(d)i•(e)nce) with

the Q•(ue)en

(l•(is)(t)en) to what

she (h•e)(ars)

you like

that she

does not

•

anything
Mostly Water

Salt
devoured
my mouth
all I ever
tasted
was my
body
(r•(im)med
like
glass
Caesar’s drink
my fingers because I can swallow them (whole) and salty i's crawl down my face swallow (all)ow)
all of them

so no bruises

of me on the (ce•m(en)t)

floor

i keep all of

me •
WRAPPING MY MOUTH AROUND GRIEF
“I used your toothbrush today.”
I used you

us

used

us

use

I used you

your

our

your

your

used you

your
to rush teeth
too u
toothbrush too u
too too u
to ush
teeth to ush
    ee
tush iy teeth
iy bush to brush iy teeth
your toothbrush
iy teeth
    iy bush
ush

th
your
toothbrush tush ush ee
tush iy teeth
not just th th th th th th th th th th th

our your or I
tooth brush

rush  ush

your brush say

did i ush

brush your way

did your toothbrush say

I us ed your our

toothbrush today

to sooth the rush

i  i ushed

is ushed

i tot

your toothbrush today
“I just broke what you gave me.”
you at me
i at you
jam
you

je

je am
you
im me

im time im time
i be
broke
you r just im time
time me time me
i broke
ti me ti me
to the broke
im broke
the gave is broke
is the grave broke
I broke it too
I am gave
you at the gave
the grave
r u
  u
at the gave
the grave
i gave u the grave
i broke what u gave me

i same me
is the sum ov me
i the sum of me
or sum of me u
gave sum of me too
u gave sum of u

irok my arm
rokr my arm
u gave me      rok arm
to give you
to me
irok my arm
to be you
to be ar

u

roku im

my arm

to be ar u

im my arm

u are im my arm

whem i

roku

u roke im me

my arm

whem I rok

my arm

ru im my arm

uknot im my arm

ra know im my arm

knot u im ar

me

aknot im me

uruit

ukno me whem ur a knot

uknot u everywhere
everywhere
i rok every
everywhere
r u
to u
ok at u
everwhere
more u
i rok ever were
vor u
veer u to me
i rok more u more u
i rok more of u im me
i rok
what u
g ave me ave me
i
m
e
u knot
u r a e
am e
r u am e
r u
u r a
e
u be a e

i bark at oke
a tree
it bark at me
whem
am i
you yet

i rokt a tree
   knot im a tree
u were
tere at a tree
er e u i here u
rokt it akan
i kan

bark at a a
at me
i am the gave

it barkd at me
to rok im to you

r u not a knot
a oke a tree
r u
a every
a were
ever were
or
r u just a
gave
“I paint these purple too.”
the ips
the ips
o
pur
pur oo ips
the ips are purple
i oo

oo i
i
too purple
to se oo
i purple too

oo pur pur pur pur pur
the ips
ps
i

se purple to
in oo
oo purple
pain purple in purple
pin purple in oo
i pin purple
n i
pur purple
on the ips

    i pin oo
pin ur pain
in purple on

    oo in purple i se
on the ips the ips
ur ple
pese ples
ur ples

    se ples oo see the ples

i a i
an i s purple
t o o
u is purple too
an i is i

see oo

    ants pur

    in purple too

    purple the oor

the oor    the oor

paint purple

sour on

the    oor

the oor

sors purple

oos purple

purple sors

    in oo

se in

in the purple

these oo

tor the purple

oo tor the purple
hoo tor

tor the purple in oo

ur oo in the

the poothe oo

se in poo r

oo i se purple al

oo rple

ple

rple oo ur paint rple

too

oo rple

ple too pain

pin i in oo

pain rple in

i oo

paint rple in oo

tin oo
tint purple in oo
in oo i see purple
purple is oo
ese purple i
i  ese purple
ese i purple too
in the oor
i ot to paint
    oo
in the oor
hese oor i oor hur oor
oor is i

    purple too
oo ot to rot in purple too
“With deepest sympathy.”
How deep des it
so

sympathy
sews
yew
sews im yew
sews yew

how deep des it
sew
    yew
my thiyh
yer thiyh
sympathy
pits
pees
spits
    i spat in the dishes
sits
paths

pits in yer thiyhs
a hym
deep in my
thiyhs

how dew yew say
    hi
in sympathy
say hi
in sympathy
say hi

the path to sympathy
is y
emd im y
is the emd to sympathy
y
say y
im
    sympathy

pee sympathy
I am heaps
    im happy
seeds

I am the est
im sympathy

the sympathy map
is deep im pape a
add sympathy
im pape a
with
wet pape a
pat it amd wite
to send sympathy

with deepest
sympathy ad
sympathy math
add est to it
to the est of it
the est of sympathy
the pest ow it
is
mewsh
pape a
amd heawy thiyhs
deep im sympathy

I miss
tastes

I taste
sympathy pie
tew mewsh
sympathy pie
dies taste

tew taste You in sympathy pie
semd sympathy

deep past my thiyhs
the pest ow it is tew mewsh
tew mewsh yeses
yes
pat yes im me
sympathy yeses
met sympathy eyes

yet sympathy yeses
tew mewsh
I am tew
yew

tew yew with sympathy

tew mewsh

I am

tew mewsh
Loving Wife
of tender heart and generous spirit”
u lie
u lay
u lie

    near us
in our dirt
the dirt Wrote
rot
Wrote u in
said u Were
here
here is hoMe
near us

    Wif ur

Wife
she is

        Winging
in the dirt
she is

           inging
hoMe

eat ur heart
i eat hearts
eat 6 a dae
so ur full
    i nefer
full
    8 hearts
i 8 hearts
    i nefer
full
i aM 1
i aM
100 per sent
liguid
spit in My
ear
    i aM
open
    liguid
find a hole
and fill Me
    liguid
hoW Mush liguid do u need in a day
    1S0 ML
i aM 1 98th solid
    is that the it of u
u are an oven
somewhere in the pit of me

they say you go to ovens when you die

home is where oven is

i eat death

loud of ligorish

i eat air

it tastes live you

i am glouds of you

i put you in jar of glouds

pour some on my

pangates

for you are

.

you are

..

so

When I talk

When I
aM u

aM I only getting –

of u
SILENCE’S EPILOGUE
They Say

Silence is golden.
Silence is golden.
Silence...
Artist’s Statement

While writing my thesis entitled (Un)Spoken, I have found value in Julia Kristeva’s work, specifically, her book Revolution in Poetic Language. As I read through Revolution in Poetic Language and gathered points of Kristeva’s theories I wish to discuss, I was struck by in the first few pages of the book, which will help to introduce the complex subject matter I have decided to undertake in my thesis. Margaret Waller writes in the opening lines of the “Translator’s Preface,” a section of a book habitually overlooked, “the Translator’s preface usually begins by assessing what is ‘lost’ in translation and this preface will be no exception” (Kristeva vii).

Waller’s statement addresses how meaning is lost when translating Kristeva’s original work from French to English. Translating a text from one language to another means that words are rearranged, replaced, and go missing. A piece of the original text is lost or silenced in order to accommodate the new text. As a writer, I find it useful to think of myself as a translator, especially with regard to this thesis. My thesis attempts to translate messages that are unspoken or unsaid with poetry. I sound what is silenced because Language fails to say it. But my thesis is not simply about silence. It is about searching for possibility in language (poetry), not Language, so that voices have space and opportunity to express their unspoken, even if that means silence overtakes and fragments Language. My thesis consists of four sections, each generated by a different compositional procedure. Each compositional procedure is meant to show varied silences. Some of the issues that my thesis takes up are: silencing, attempting to speak through that silencing by bringing forward my own voice, traumatic experiences that are too difficult to express, and communicating gestures or somatic violence through non-phonemic typography. By exploring different compositional procedures, I search for ways to grasp onto language when language is out of reach for the unspoken.
The Genesis of (Un)Spoken

During the process of writing this project, I was provoked to go back to the reason that spurred me to begin writing. I have carried this with me for the past twelve years. Before I explain the reason, though, I think it’s important to note that it will be difficult to explain the impact this event had on me, for I am using ordinary Language to write this story. In order to get closer to writing these unsayable things, I would prefer to turn to the body of my thesis and my exploration of poetic language as I believe this language can say things that Language cannot. But I will attempt to explain the event using Language. When I was eleven years old, I found out my classmate and friend had passed away. It was the Summer of 2005 and my family was having a garage sale. Now thinking back on it, the images of me sentimentally looming over a sales table filled with my old clothes seems ridiculous. My grandmother, who lived on the same street of my friend, told me that there had been an ambulance at my friend’s house the night before. I remember standing in my white kitchen listening to my mother talk on the phone and saying “so she’s gone.” An autopsy was done and no results came back. To this day, I do not how my friend died. The question of “what happened?” is still unanswered, leaving pieces of this story, in many aspects, an unspeakable one. Over the years, I found myself redirecting conversations or leaving rooms so I could remain silent about the event. Talking about it seemed unbearable.

My interest in this project stems from my experience and makes me connect with others’ experiences as well. During the preliminary research of this project in summer of 2017, I came across an historical event that resonated with me. In August 1914 Germany invaded Belgium. Belgium was a neutral country during World War I, signed under the Treaty of London, but this neutrality was violated by The German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg claiming that the document was just a “scrap of paper” (Zuckerman 167). The German troops burned
down homes and executed civilians. Women, in particular, were raped and horribly mutilated. This event became known as the Rape of Belgium. In the United States, the Rape of Belgium was used as propaganda materials, showing women’s mutilated bodies on these documents. Because the Rape of Belgium was used as such, people began to dismiss this event as mere propaganda (Zuckerman 74-76). This makes this event difficult to talk about. Are we talking about reality or is it all made up? A treaty, meant to protect the rights and responsibilities of people, failed Belgium. A traumatic event that has been silenced in our history.

**Kristeva’s Symbolic and Semiotic**

Kristeva’s theory about the symbolic and semiotic orders is integral to her description of poetic language. Kristeva begins *Revolution in Poetic Language* problematizing how Language has been encoded for us, produced by a capitalist society that privileges formalizing and standardizing our culture (Kristeva 13). The problem that Kristeva has with Language is that it denies individual experience and refutes the body. A capitalist society relies on the body for production, consumption, and reproduction to continue the hegemonic chain of capitalist society. Under that system, the body is a lived thing devoid of individuality and experiences (Lowe 173). As a part of the social mechanism, Language must encompass all the values of capitalism by turning language into “self-contained, isolated islands:” static and impermeable (Kristeva 13). Kristeva argues that poetic language breaks from Language, allowing the body to release its direct experiences and desires (Kristeva 13).

What is Kristeva’s poetic language? Poetic language is propelled by the interrelation between the symbolic and semiotic that generates significance (Kennedy and Kennedy 42). The symbolic represses the drives of the body and opposes pleasure (Kristeva 149). The symbolic is formal Language — “one that involves syntax or mathematicization” (Kristeva 21). Logic,
reason, and ‘truth’ encompass the definition of the symbolic. Kristeva’s problem is that the symbolic, or Language, fails to provide truth because it does not tell the whole truths regarding bodily experiences. The symbolic can fail us. My thesis, specifically the section on erasure, seeks to uncover hidden truths within Language. In silencing fragments of Language, I break my silence and write a whole new text that elucidates what has been silenced in contemporary and historical literature.

In opposition to the symbolic is the semiotic. The semiotic takes place in what Kristeva calls the *chora* (Kristeva 149). Kristeva describes the chora in *Revolution*, “as ruptures and articulations (rhythms), preced[ing] evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality…analogous only to vocal and kinetic rhythm” (Kristeva 26). The semiotic is the energy of the body — sonic materials and gestures — that are not articulated in Language but are hidden in Language. The semiotic is fragmented and incomplete, making it difficult to read on its own as Language because it is inaccessible. When we read the semiotic, we struggle to ascertain meaning from it because we have learned that meaning derives from Language. We sense something when we read the semiotic, and our awareness of the semiotic heightens when we read poetic language.

*Kristeva’s Symbolic and Semiotic in Sina Queyras’ MxT*

Sina Queyras’s *MxT* represents and measures grief in a myriad of ways. In one of the final poems in her book, “Two Elegies for Grief as Jackson Pollock,” Queyras translates Pollock’s abstract expressionist painting style into a poem. One biographer describes Pollock’s painting style, what he called “veiled images,” similarly to how Kristeva describes the semiotic: “It gives the sense of a stampede, of a particularly sinuous, dance-like kind. It is all swirling, pulsating motion, with no geometry to it-no rectangles or straight lines or slashing diagonals”
(Toynton 35). Pollock’s painting style resists confining his works to conventional realism.

Pollock resists logic and order and structure, freeing his lines, just as experimental poetics resist poetic margins. Queyras writes the poem on two separate pages with a large blank space on the bottom of each page. On the first page of the poem, words are scattered across the page, seeming random, resisting the syntactical order of Language. In the last couple lines, she writes:

```
copse    of    bodies    a    portrait
of    bone    meaning    red
```

(Queyras 76)

The blankness among the words, “copse of bodies a portrait” registers the inexpressibility of grieving. When reading this poem, one can’t help but feel the material loss for the deceased and also the loss of words. Adjacent to “bodies,” the word “copse” is readily misread as “corpse” (Queyras 76). Spurring this slip of the tongue invites the readers into an interventive relationship with text, and invites them, too, to sense loss. The words in the poem do not align vertically, except for “copse” and “of” (Queyras 76). The varied alignment of the words heightens the chaos of grappling with and understanding grief.

On the following page, Queyras takes the same words from the first page and rearranges the letters within the words, taking the chaos further. The last lines of the second page appear as:

```
pecso    fo    seoidbd    a    irtoptra
fo    nobe    igenamn
```

(Queyras 77)
The poem rests on the final word, “igenamn,” letting it hang there in the midst of the white space at the bottom of the page. The word “meaning” becomes distorted but recognizable with the help of the more accessible poetry of the first page. The tangled “igenamn” resists clarity and understanding, and leaves the meaning of “igenamn” open-ended but still full in signifying. Queyras’ creative choice to end the poem on “igenamn” instead of “red,” which appears at the beginning of the poem, invites the reader to explain the inexpressibility of grief. Next to “igenamn” is “nobe” which can be read as “no be,” speaking to identity (Queyras 77). Is identity lost for the speaker? For the deceased? The ambiguity of the poem brings the unspokenness of grief to the forefront.

Queyras’ poem “Two Elegies for Grief as Jackson Pollock” exemplifies the symbolic and the semiotic working together. The symbolic lives in the completeness of the words Queyras chooses to use. The semiotic lives in the spaces where the body electrifies the page with crisis. Knowledge of what is sensed, felt, known when grieving is a “tangled mess” (Souffrant 54). There is no ‘logical’ expression/explanation for grief and Queyras makes the reader feel this while painting Pollock’s artistic style into poetry.

Similarly to Queyras, I have dedicated a section of my thesis to confining myself to certain words and using the letters from those words to write a poem. My procedure, however, is a little different. I begin a poem with a statement using the symbolic; it is clear and coherent, yet vague because nouns and subjects are unidentified. For example, the first poem begins with the statement, “I used your toothbrush today” (Barraco 51). Another poem in this section states, “I paint these purple too” (Barraco 62). The statements are placed in the middle of the page and stand alone. Information is scarce in these statements. Who is the speaker speaking with? The
reader does not know the answer to this question until they reach the fifth and last poem of this series and the statement reads:


Loving Wife

of tender heart and generous spirit

(Barraco 74)

This series of poems is about a widower and how he copes with grieving the loss of his wife. In all of the opening statements, the widower attempts to connect with his wife by resurrecting objects that belong to her and interacting with them to feel the presence of memory. Leah Souffrant describes this dynamic: “Seeing here is not a matter of the eyes taking in stimuli through the visual cortex, but rather the more complex operations of consciousness and memory and emotion that mix together to form what we might call ontological knowledge as triggered by art” (Souffrant 77-78). Not being able to see the primary-person stimulus or feel that stimulus, makes the widower rely on memory, and by performing memories, the widower can attempt to “see” and “find,” metaphorically, what is lost. Other gaps in information are missing within these statements, such as what are “these” that she painted purple and when and what time “today?” (Barraco 62). The reader is left outside of the poem asking for clarity when they will never know the complete truth of the widower’s experiences because the pain of grief makes it difficult to convey this information.

The poems go on to work through the Language of the opening statements and find possibility for expressions of grief on the page. For example, I use fragments of words to create misspelled words, which are nevertheless discernable phonetically. In attempting to recognize and pronounce words, the reader is encouraged to speak and to listen, to speak through the
silence of grieving themselves. In addition, by misspelling words, I open up possibility for words to have multiple meanings. For example, in the second poem, “I paint these purple too,” I write:

\[
\text{i ot to paint}
\]

\[
\text{oo}
\]

\[
\text{in the oor}
\]

\[
\text{hese oor i oor hur oor}
\]

\[
\text{oor is i}
\]

(Barraco 67)

In this poem, “oo” performs a wordless vocalization of anguish, but can also represent “you,” or render the dead body abject by signifying “ew” (Barraco 67). “Oor” can be read as “door” or “or.” The reader is aware of this indeterminacy as the language constantly questions but never answers. Definitively, in the last line, I write, “oor is i” (Barraco 67). The speaker questions self-identity because of their loss but also questions if the “door is i,” trying to reach out to what the door signifies: the “you” in this poem. The emotion at the loss of the person is so excessive, that the speaker wants to become the deceased so that they feel closer to “you” and do not have to feel the trauma of grief. Silence through death is a haven for the speaker’s excessive grief.

**The Body**

Kristeva’s theory of the symbolic and the semiotic is rooted in the body and how the body is ejected from or derived in Language or language. Other than the body’s importance in Kristeva’s theory, what value does it have specifically to my thesis (Un)Spoken. Peter A Levine writes in his book *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* that “what [we] do physically—whether experience pain, pleasure, success or failure— is registered by [our] bodies… [Our] knowing about the world, as [we] interact with it, comes from
the totality of [our] sensations, both external and internal” (Levine 134). From the beginning of our lives, we learn to understand our body and make meaning out of what we sense from it. When we are born, we do not have ordinary Language to communicate, since language acquisition does not begin until we are about two years old, so we use sounds, such as crying, to communicate our desires (Ryan and Singleton 33). As we grow and learn about Language, we communicate through it; however, as I have problematized, Language limits the ways our bodies can express our desires. Language does not encompass everything that our bodies feel and want to say. Our bodies feel. Our bodies react. And the question is: how do we communicate or translate that? What language can do this? This project aims to find a language that can write the body’s drives, and by using different compositional technique, I investigate language, searching for how poetic language can map the body.

The body is not simply a thing that we use to function in society, but we have a relationship between our “[bodies] and the ontological experience of the body as felt”, as Leah Souffrant describes (Souffrant 82-83). Souffrant explains that writing about the unsayable means acknowledging the “body’s urgent perceptions and language’s limitations” are connected (Souffrant 3). I attempt to articulate the urgency Souffrant describes through repetition, short lines, and gaps and spaces between words, creating a kinetic rhythm for the body to find words to say what it wants to say. While my poetry attempts to embody the body on the page, it is also important to note that I disembodify the body, disconnecting the body from ordinary Language and letting silence fill in the gaps when Language cannot speak, when Language fails to communicate. An example of how I use form and language to translate the body’s urgency is in the poem, “I just broke what you gave me:”

I am gave
you at the gave
the grave
r u
u
at the gave
the grave
i gave u the grave
i broke what u gave me

(Barraco 56-57)

Another way I represent the body in my project is exploring the ways we identify ourselves through our bodies and how outside forces, society, can make us think about our bodies. Nourbese M. Philip writes how women are taught to think about the female body as, “severely circumscribed in its interaction with the physical surrounding space and place…How then does this affect the making of poetry, the making of words, the making of i-mages if poetry, as I happen to believe, begins in the body and ends in the body” (Kinnahan 80). For women in poetry, it is about “mage” or managing the I, meaning that I work to identify myself through myself. Poetry “engages, undoes, and remakes” the body, simultaneously engaging and undoing language by distorting language (Kinnahan 8). In “This is (Not) What They Said,” I raise issues regarding the female body by mocking stereotypes surrounding women and their bodies. Society often views women’s bodies as disgusting and incomplete. The erasure technique allows me to erase what has been said and for more white space in the poems, the page appearing physically open and free for women’s bodies.
While this project deals with feminism, it looks at the issue of silence across the entire thesis. Another issue that I discuss in this project is the grieving process. Judith Butler writes about the body and identity in her essay “Violence, Mourning and Politics.” Butler is known for her theories on gender and body politics, but to find this essay shows the range of silencing that Butler theorizes, tying in the scope of my thesis about the unspoken. A question that Butler raises that seems to occur during the grieving process is, “who ‘am’ I, without you?” (Butler 22). When we lose these ties to each other, we do not know who we are or what we do. We lose a part of ourselves when we lose the other person and that is manifested on the page in my thesis through the fragmentation. In the poem on the previous page, “I just broke what you gave me,” the speaker repeats the “I” and “you” or “u” to find answers or search for who they are without their loved one. Questions regarding the deceased’s identity and the body are also raised. How do we think of our loved ones once they are gone? How do we view them, their soul and their body, now that their body is no longer a living thing? I use fragmentation in this section “Wrapping My Mouth Around Grief” to show this alienation from our bodies, whether it is the lived body or dead body.

**What Silence Says**

A provocative notion that I have presented in this thesis is that silence has the ability to say what Language cannot. I turn to Adrienne Rich, one of the most influential poets of the 20th century. Her essays and poetry are grounded in feminism but also engage many other social issues of the 20th century, such as Marxism, racism, and sexuality (Stein 1). Her poem, “Planetarium,” resonates Kristeva’s theory. She writes of, “an instrument in the shape of a woman/ trying to translate pulsations,” recalling Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic (Rich 303). In terms of silence, she profoundly states in her poem “Cartographies of Silence” an issue that I am

Language can do most things. See. Right here. Right now. I am using Language in this “Artist’s Statement” to discuss what I am doing in my thesis, but there are things that Language cannot do that silence can. Even in this essay, silence is present. Cheryl Glenn explains that this idea is possible because “silence is everywhere” (Glenn xii). Silence lies between words, letters, and in the margins of this essay but we generally do not consciously read silence in such a text.

Language controls the message rather than silence playing a visibly integral role in communicating that message. In contrast, Rachel Zolf’s *Janey’s Arcadia* addresses Colonial settlement in Canada and the displaced Indigenous peoples. On some pages appear a list of approximately five women’s names, boldly written in large handwritten font. The names are likely unknown to most readers; they are missing and murdered Indigenous women. What stands out, along with the individual typography, is the way the silence echoes around the words. Silence somehow says something. The silence speaks for them, for there has been little said publicly about each of those women except for names. While Zolf tries to give a voice to the names, she also shows the way that silence surrounds them and their histories and identity are lost. Who are they? What happened to them? Are they real? These types of questions are raised but silenced by histories that lack truth. In the poem’s elusiveness, “when the poet fails to give knowledge…there persists still the absorption of experience” (Souffrant 28).

Canadian writer Louise Bernice Halfe writes about what silence can say in her poetry book, *Burning in This Midnight’s Dream*. Halfe writes about the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, reflecting on the abuse that Indigenous peoples experienced while in the school system. In one of her last poems in the book, “Owners of Themselves,” Halfe writes:

I have encountered so much silence.
Even when people came before the TRC
their over-arching silence
to me
overwhelmed the tidbits they were capable of offering.
I kept waiting for their dams to break –
and hoping
that they wouldn’t,
not right then
not so alone

(Halfe 78)

Halfe witnesses silence and writes about its value. Silence says suffering. Silence protects. In front of the TRC, the people that came to testify are not protected there. Silence says what feels impossible to say. And for Halfe, silence is where justice can be found, for the silence says so much more about traumatic experiences than Language can. What is interesting in placing Zolf’s and Halfe’s poems in conversation with one another, is that I can imagine a person on the stand reading Zolf’s poem and Halfe bearing witness and remarking upon the poem in this poem, “Owners of Themselves.” There is so much lost in the silence and yet so much is said; “silence has a sound” (Picoult 46).

Because “[Language] cannot do everything,” I turn to poetry to reveal both silence and speech; I give a voice when silence is lost and also show when silence is compulsory. The first section of my thesis is a series of lyric poems. This section talks about silencing. Cheryl Glenn explains that silencing is not simply about white space on the page but about power dynamics between the written word and space: “The unspoken is a rhetorical art that can be as powerful as
the spoken or written word. Like speech, the meaning of silence depends on power differential that exists in every rhetorical situation: who can speak, who must remain silent, and what those listeners can do” (Glenn 9). On October 5, 2017 *The New York Times* published an article that accused Harvey Weinstein, Hollywood producer, of sexual harassment. Actresses, like Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd, came forward with these accusations, breaking the silence of their experiences. The article from *The New York Times* entitled, “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades,” says Weinstein forced women to sign non-disclosure agreements: documents that forced the victims to remain silent about what Weinstein had done.

In my poem, “Non-disclosure Agreement,” I write:

  i live in

    document

    backspace

    enter

    insert me in

    pages

    pushing me

    in spaces where

    (Barraco 6)

When I wrote this series of poems, I included large gaps in between lines that are spaces for the words “you” and “your.” The speaker silences the controlling “you,” the abuser in this case, to
show resistance to them. Refusing to acknowledge the abuser, the speaker resists the abuser’s control. On the other hand, I also negate the “you” to show the speaker’s silencing of the “you” with regard to the bind of the non-disclosure agreement. Although this concept may seem slippery, I want my speaker to feel powerful like they have a voice in this particular space of poetry even though they lack power. The spaces in the poem do not only lie between the lines but horizontally across the page after each line. The lines in this poem are very short, only containing one to three words. The body of the poem stays close to the left margin of the page, leaving less than a quarter of the page for the speaker to have a voice, showing the limited power of the speaker. The readers feel the speaker’s restricted voice. In this passage, the speaker constantly tries to explain where they are: “i live in,” “insert me in,” and “in spaces where” (Barraco 6). Echoing these lines, the substantial amount of blank space on the page explains that the speaker is in the material pages of a non-disclosure agreement. The speaker gives away their power by signing the agreement, as though they do not belong to themselves anymore but to the abuser and document.

Plunderverse

In his essay, “Plunderverse: A Cartographic Manifesto,” Gregory Betts explains that Language originates from culture and not from the individual. All people are born into Language or “thrust” into it, meaning that we are forced to use Language to function in society (Betts). From an early age, the individual is taught to speak Language. Language acquisition is a difficult process but a necessary one that allows the individual to begin to understand the world. Using Language restricts individual expression because words are shared and rules about Language that people subject themselves to are shared. Language, hampering complete individuality, is “a broadly cultural phenomenon: formed outside the control of individuals, but felt and experienced
by the individual members of the culture” (Betts). We all engage ourselves with the Language system. We immerse ourselves into society by learning to speak Language; we cannot function in society without learning Language.

Betts defines plunderverse as the practice that “makes use of the wealth and waste of [Language] by exploiting the unattended information in a source text. It makes connections and variations of a previous author’s words to create a different poem from the original piece” (Betts). During the process of Language acquisition, we learn Language by using other people’s words. Plunderverse exaggerates this idea by using a source text and finding possibility in it. The waste of [Language] is language that creates possibility and multiplicity. For example, puns are wasteful because they resist the logic within Language. The poet finds possibility in wasteful language because it creates possibility for different readings of a text. Plunderverse capitalizes on the wastefulness of Language by creating possibility of what has already been said: “Plunderverse limits its own expression to the source text, but attempts a genuine, divergent expression through the selection, deletion or contortion of it” (Betts).

Betts’ 150 plunderverse poems in The Others Raised in Me rewrite Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 150.” Betts reveals the wealth in wasteful language by constantly creating and recreating poems from the same original text. The title of Betts’ book, The Others Raised in Me, can refer to the poems that Betts creates that are raised out of the original text of Shakespeare’s sonnet. Betts’ twentieth poem plays on traditional love poetry:

will we
ever me
again?

(Betts 28)
The reader wants to say a verb, possibly “meet,” following the adverb “ever.” Betts does not permit the reader to follow the rules of grammar. Betts replaces the verb with the pronoun “me.” Betts, speaking back to Shakespeare’s romantic sonnet by playing on this cliché, instead decides to talk about the individual and pain. The cliché “will we ever meet again?” is not lost; the meaning is still in the poem even though it is not explicably said. The poem appears fragmented, especially in comparison to Shakespeare’s iambic pentameter sonnet. The fragmentation and the question of “me” suggests a fragmented identity; an identity that lacks clarity because the speaker cannot grapple with his heartbreak. Will the speaker ever be himself again after losing his significant other? It also plays on traditional love poetry and the feelings of the subject “me.” The vain speaker of Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 150” expresses his love for a woman unworthy of receiving his love. The speaker questions his love throughout the poem and the power the woman has over him. Shakespeare’s sonnet makes a spectacle of the speaker’s feeling and Betts gestures toward this with the “me."

Canadian author Jordan Abel uses plunderverse as a technique for his book *The Place of Scraps*. In the title of his book, Abel suggests that his poetry is a collection of fragments of another text, and something that is leftover or discarded. Abel’s book contains a series of erasure poems and collages, using as source texts Quebecois anthropologist and salvage ethnographer Marius Barbeau’s canonical *Totem Poles*. Abel’s manipulation of the texts found in *Totem Poles* makes us rethink the myth of the Indigenous body as a vanishing body. Barbeau, fearing the loss of Indigenous culture, purchased totem poles and sold them to museums. Barbeau’s attempt to protect Indigenous culture actually caused harm to the culture’s survival. The totem poles were markers of these people’s land and told stories about their ancestors and their people. They were a stamp on the lands, celebrating the culture of Indigenous people. Through the technique of
plunderverse, also called erasure, Abel revives and gives subjectivity to the Indigenous subject (Karpinski 23). Abel erases words, letters, and punctuation in his poems creating visual images of the totem poles. For example, in one poem Abel writes that:

```
this clan
,
covered the ground
,
covered
,'time

with
,

smoke

and


shadows

(Abel 71)
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Abel writes the poem starting from the right margin and slanting each line to the left-hand bottom corner, wishing to revert time and retell the Indigenous story by writing the poem backward. Surrounding the poem, punctuation speckles the page like ashes of smoke. The punctuation, as marks of silence, also speak through the silencing of the Indigenous culture.

Abel’s poems are not simply about the visual effect.

In another poem, Abel writes about the complexity of ownership with regard to Indigenous peoples:

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his

his

their s h is
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Abel breaks apart the word “his” throughout this poem with one word standing alone, “their” (Betts 13). Abel exploits the colonial histories written about Indigenous people and settler culture. The reader is called to remind themselves that Canadian land was founded by Abel’s ancestors and actually belongs to the them. The totem poles and their stories belong to them and not Barbeau. The histories of Indigenous peoples belong to them even though they have been rewritten to hide these truths. Words that point to identity, “i,” and being, “is,” complicate the idea of ownership and the histories of Indigenous peoples.

M. Nourbese Philip also uses plunderverse as a technique in her poetry book Zong! The slave ship Zong departed the coast of Africa on September 6, 1781 with 470 enslaved Africans. Since this human chattel was such a valuable commodity at that time, many captains took on more enslaved Africans than their ships could accommodate in anticipation of some deaths during the ocean journey. This strategy was used in order to maximize profits. The Zong’s captain, Luke Collingwood, overloaded his ship with enslaved Africans and by November 29, 1781, many of them had begun to die from disease and malnutrition. The Zong then sailed in an area of the mid-Atlantic known as “the Doldrums” because of periods of little or no wind. As the ship sat stranded, and breakouts of sickness caused the deaths of seven of the 17 crew members as well as over 50 Africans.

Increasingly desperate, Capt. Collingwood decided to “jettison” some of the “cargo” in order to save the ship and provide the ship owners with the opportunity to claim for the loss on their insurance. Over the next week the remaining crew members threw 132 Africans who were sick and dying over the side of the ship. Another 10 threw themselves overboard in what
Collingwood later described as an “Act of Defiance.”

Upon the Zong’s arrival in Jamaica, James Gregson, the ship’s owner, filed an insurance claim for their loss. Gregson argued that the Zong did not have enough water to sustain both crew and the “human commodities.” The insurance underwriter, Thomas Gilbert, disputed the claim citing that the Zong had 420 gallons of water aboard when she was inventoried in Jamaica. Despite this, the Jamaican court in 1782 found in favour of the owners. The insurers appealed the case in 1783 and in the process provoked a great deal of public interest and the attention of Great Britain's abolitionists. The leading abolitionist at the time, Granville Sharp, used the deaths of the enslaved Africans to increase public awareness about the slave trade in order to further the anti-slavery cause.

Philip uses as her source text the only public document for this legal case “Gregson v. Gilbert.” Philip describes Zong! as a “story that cannot be told” (Philip 199). The story of the Zong ship cannot be told because there is no information about the event other than the legal document. There are no names that can be traced as the literature of this case truly treats the enslaved Africans as cargo; they have no identity. The legal document is encoded with justice but fails to perform it. Philip erases the legal document to give voice to the enslaved Africans. She gives voice those murdered in the massacre through semiotic language. Sounds and utterances translate the silence but also speak through the silence. Philip asks herself in her journal, “What am I doing? Giving voice-crying out?” (Philip 194). Philip is both giving a voice and showing in that voice the trauma and silencing of the Africans. Philip’s poetry is the “sound of possibility, the sound of impossibility too” (Philip 55). Philip’s poetry creates the possibility for voices to be heard and stories to be told but also underscores the impossibility for voices to be heard and stories to be told because the legal document did not identify any of the enslaved
Africans. Philip invokes suffering through pauses and breaks in clauses, phrases and sometimes words. Through these textual ruptures, she is able to create acoustic scenes that echo the sufferings of the Africans. For example, in “Zong #1” Philip writes traces of the word “water” repeating “w” and “wa” across the page (Philip 3). Philip embodies the feeling of dehydration through incessant repetition, translating engines of the body.

I use plunderverse technique to speak for those who have been silenced, working with source texts that deal with feminism. American writer Audre Lorde talks about silence as a condition that women perform but that fails women: “I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't” (Biggs 135). In my thesis, I dedicate a section to rewriting women’s histories and perceptions of women in art, Language, politics, and media. For example, in the erasure poem “ear ours silence,” I take a newspaper article that talks about Time’s “Person of the Year:” “The Silence Breakers” (31). Barraco This original text supports women’s voices but conveys it using the symbolic. Poetic language offers another dimension of conveying that the symbolic cannot. This poem shows the way women have been silenced through sexual harassment but also as “Persons of the Year.” This poem shows the ways “women” have been talked about publicly, diminishing women’s capacity for intelligence as objects of the gaze. The poem also speaks through negativity surrounding women, highlighting the original text and its positive message. “ear ours silence” is a back and forth, a conversation between what has been negatively said and perceived and showcasing a newspaper article that writes positively about women.
**Non-Phonemic Typography**

I use non-phonemic typography (parentheses and bullet points) to illustrate silence. Parentheses and bullet points are silences because they are not heard in speech but are used in Language. I use non-phonemic typography to translate the body onto the page. The poems in this section deal with murder and domestic abuse. The speaker’s pain is felt in these poems through the typography. The non-phonemic typographies attempt to show the chaos of trying to access Language when Language is inaccessible. I create multiplicities of meaning by finding words within words, by breaking apart Language through interruptions of bullets and parentheses.

I have already discussed Rachel Zolf’s *Janey’s Arcadia* but the text is working in another way that is similar to my thesis. Rachel Zolf communicates suffering by literally translating a .pdf document using Optical Character Recognition software. This software reads the character of a document and turns the document into an editable document. The software, though, does not create completely accurate transcription. The software often misspells words, such as “was” translating to “coas.” Some of the the misspelled words are recognizable phonetically, such as “coas.” Other words are not as recognizable phonetically, so the reader must read the words around the misspelled words. In addition to misspelling words, the software inputs symbols similar to the non-phonemic typographies I use in my poems. In one poem, the software translates the original text to:

She coas a stupid
girl: she went and offered herself ]QiokiarCh>y
to someone ujbo didn’t cuant her

(Zolf 55)
Interestingly, the software fails to communicate when the text is given a piece of truth or evidence. Most of the other misspelled words are recognizable. “Who” translates to “jjbo” and “want” translates to “cuant.” The rest of this passage is ambiguous: who is she? Who is someone? When the reader comes close to finding an answer, they cannot retrieve it. In addition, the text suggests that whatever she offered, “Qiorkiar‐>y,” is an unspeakable thing. Was it her virginity? Something unspeakable for women to talk about. The symbol “>” points to the letter “y” punctuating the crying and question of “why.” Through the symbols, the reader is asked to reread the text in order to decipher what language is trying to say but cannot say.

In my poem, “mostly water” I write about domestic abuse. The opening lines read:

Salt

dev•oured

my mouth

(Barraco 47)

The bullet point works to break apart the word so that words within the word can be found and read together. The word “devoured” can be read as “our,” and phonetically “hour” “red,” and “read.” The words can be read in isolation or together. For example, “read our” could signify the speaker misreading her relationship with the abuser; “red hour” could be translated to “the hour of/for blood,” meaning that that speaker recalls a time when she was attacked and bled. The multiplicity of meanings that can be found within the poem provides some information for the readers but resists clarity. The reader tries to find meaning in the poem, formulating messages from the words within words, as I have shown above. The erratic puzzle-piecing the reader
experiences, trying to find messages within words, mirrors the speaker’s erratic mindset trying to
deal with pain and suffering from the abuser. The lack of clarity, specifically in this poem,
“allows the resonance of ‘screaming’ to be heightened. One’s own voice becomes estranged in
this moment of pain” (Souffrant 63). The non-phonemic typographies I use, such as the bullet
points, are similar to the “o’s” in Zucker’s poem “Here Happy is No Part Love,” a poem that
Souffrant analyzes in her dissertation. Souffrant reads the semiotic “o’s” as screams during
childbirth (Souffrant 63). The bullet points in my poems, silent in Language because they are not
spoken in speech, loudly articulate the pains and screams of the speaker. In addition, the bullet
points symbolize marks of somatic trauma, such as cuts and bruises. This series of poems
embodies violence and suffering by breaking apart words with non-phonemic typographies.

**Ending Notes**

My thesis, *Unspoken*, attempts to show the interplay of language and silence in various
ways. I adopt Kristeva’s theory of poetic language, which argues that the symbolic (Language)
and the semiotic (the desires and drives of the body) must work together to create poetry.
Through the interplay between the symbolic and the semiotic, I explore the possibilities for
language to write what cannot be said through Language. I explore power dynamics in silence,
who is silenced, who enforces silences, and who listens, and Language’s resistance to
articulating suffering and trauma. What can I translate onto the page that Language fails to? This
thesis searches for possibilities to answer this question.
WORKS CITED


NOTES

“ma bod Re is”: based on the online essay by Anya Foerschner, “Crossing the Line: The ‘Disgusting’ Female Body as Artistic Medium of Resistance.” Found on the blog *The Getty Iris.*

“ear ours silence”: based on the newspaper article “Person of the Year: Time honours abuse ‘silence breakers.’”

“he named o”: based on the newspaper article “‘The Silence Breakers’ Named Time’s Person of the Year for 2017.”

“Ant Meeting”: based on the 1914 original text source “Ex-Governor Curtis Guild at Anti Suffrage Meeting.”
VITA AUCTORIS

Vanessa Barraco was born in 1994 in Windsor, Ontario. She graduated from St. Joseph’s Catholic High School in 2012. From there, she went on to the University of Windsor where she attained a Bachelor’s in English Literature and Creative Writing in 2016. She is currently a candidate for the Master’s degree in Creative Writing at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Spring 2018.