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Famished: On finishing *Hunger* by Roxane Gay

By Amber Moore¹

Abstract

This poem was written in response to Roxane Gay's extraordinary new memoir *Hunger: A memoir of (my) body* (2017), which explores her experience(s) with fatness and living with memories of sexual trauma. In reading this memoir, I was struck by Gay's unflinching confrontation of the violence she endured and current lived experiences, but also, how she uses her vulnerability as a site for resistance. After reading this book in one sitting, I was moved to respond; as such, my offering is the following piece where I aim to capture some of my immediate ruminations after reading the final lines.

Keywords: poetry, Roxane Gay, *hunger*, sexual trauma, fatness, memoir

Introduction

Roxane Gay's *Hunger: A memoir of (my) body* (2017) in many ways, gets right up and close to your ear, and in hot breaths that tickle your skin, relays stories lived of experiences through the body. The entire work feels like a friend is sitting with you and letting down their guard, telling stories from childhood all the way up to this moment. She addresses a brutal sexual assault in her youth, and how this experience influenced her relationship with her body from that point onward, as she has struggled with her weight ever since. As such, the book provides an unflinching portrayal of fatness, of 'losing control,' and how weight has impacted her coming-of-age, how she moves through the world, is or is not seen, and how she thinks about cultural narratives about fatness.

I was initially drawn to this book because I heard it was a memoir about sexual assault. As a current PhD student studying literacy education, my dissertation project is aimed at exploring the potentially transformative power of sexual assault narratives in the literature classroom. As such, when I browsed Gay's new book in the Vancouver airport, I decided to take it with me en route to Toronto. What I didn't expect was to read it at a speed rivaling the plane; I tore through it in one sitting—no bathroom breaks. I was in tears by the end because while her story is wholly unique, it touches on so many issues that especially women experience, including gender violence, body image, shame, silences, and secrets. *This* is exactly what I want to share in a classroom—a story that comforts, confronts, and challenges me all at once. However, rather than flipping back through the book to start collecting my more usual academic notes, I pulled out my notebook and starting penning this poem—a piece that I hope captures how moved and compelled I was by it.

¹ Amber Moore is a PhD student at the University of British Columbia studying language and literacy education with the Faculty of Education. Her research interests include adolescent literacy, trauma literature, and feminist pedagogies. She also enjoys writing poetry and creative nonfiction.

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Our mental Instagrams² are far more confused than the real interface, the filters less flattering, with harsher colours.

And so,

Our digital bellies full, self-consciousness brimming, we turn back to books to intrude upon lives privately, comfortably, and in the evenings instead of thinking about good fats

in avocados.

While turning pages with greased fingers- from licking the tips to turn pages too quickly, not from scarfing Thinsations³- I wonder if slim folks will read

Gay's writing

and whether she expected a bestseller to climb up her skin, push out from beneath her fingernails, and if they are painted. If there's colour on those

flesh spades

- an allusion I expect an English professor like her to catch- I bet it's indigo, a rare hue I like because it

barely exists;

They call it the 6th colour of the rainbow, but that's ridiculous, like Gay's early excuses for the sons between trees. She needs an open field and a spotlight now- one that blinds.

Her body

is intense and full and I am left forgetting about how nothing is laid out as neatly as bones. Where do you perform if your body is your stage? What play do you rehearse?

Fill my popcorn bowl.

Add extra butter and make it salty. I am hungry for

Another act.

² Instagram is a social media platform.

³ Low-calorie cookie snacks.