

2023

Elevating our Voices: An Exploration and Demonstration of Modern Feminist Poetry

Kelly Knutelski

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.assumption.edu/honorstheses>



Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

ELEVATING OUR VOICES: AN EXPLORATION AND DEMONSTRATION
OF MODERN FEMINIST POETRY

Kelly Knutelski

Professor John Hodgen

English

A Thesis Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements of the Honors Program at Assumption University

Spring 2023

INTRODUCTION

Many of us would agree that thirteen was an uncomfortable age. Puberty took its place and you became more aware of every inch of skin you could pinch with your fingers. Girls giggled and whispered as boys walked by. The boys made sure the girls were looking when they got ready for their three-pointer that rarely made it in. This sounds fun in theory but it led many of us down a dark path of exclusion and insecurity. Cliques formed and standards were made. Teenage girls made sure to buy clothes that their friends wore, squeezed in a 15-minute ab-workout when clothes were a little snug, and counted calories when no one was looking. Looking back now as an adult, I wish every girl had the right resources to adjust their thinking for the better. However, many girls were lucky enough to find solace elsewhere.

At that age, I didn't catch on to too many trends, such as posting lip-syncing videos to a popular app. I was also perplexed at all of the girls that had a collection of poems by their bed called *milk and honey*, written by Rupi Kaur. I didn't bother to peek inside when I spotted it on the shelves at Barnes & Noble. It was just another trend that everyone seemed to follow and I wanted no part in it. As the years went on, I saw Rupi Kaur's poetry reposted on my friend's Instagram stories. This woman was not a one-hit wonder after all. I noticed how her poems had accompanying drawings with absolutely no capital letters or punctuation in sight. I had to investigate further and went down a rabbit hole of empowering one-sentence poems and some never-ending paragraphs that produced a tear or two. Kaur wrote about body image, love, violence, relationships, and trauma. That's what the thirteen-year-old girls I went to school with needed. They found confidence and comfort in Kaur's poetry when they couldn't find it anywhere else.

Rupi Kaur belongs to a long line of modern feminist poets. These writers used their voices to stand up for the women who couldn't and still continue to do so. As decades have gone by, poetry has adapted to the times in terms of style and content. I've been lucky to live in a time where I can look at the effects of feminist works throughout history and live out the life that women dreamed of when the movement of modern feminist poetry began. Poetry continues to be a voice for women who have been silenced or feel isolated in their struggles, including myself.

This project is a culmination of an interest in women's studies and a love for poetry. After two workshop-style classes in creative writing and poetry, I was sold on the power of written works. Friends and family seeing themselves in the poetry or crying by the last stanza is rewarding beyond reason. Modern feminist poetry is the literary genre that I am contributing to with this project. It's the most effective sphere to write in because sharing my experiences with body image, relationships, and mental health has the ability to reach others in effective and emotional ways.

This paper is formatted with several pages of background information on two poets, Rupi Kaur and Kim Addonizio, who have greatly contributed to modern feminist poetry within the past decade or two. This background will serve as a supportive feature for my portfolio, the main goal of this experience. The themes of Addonizio and Kaur and their poetic techniques inspire my collection of unique poetry. These poems represent the ups and many downs already lived by a twenty-two-year-old woman just trying to find her place in this beautiful, yet dark and twisted world.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Modern Feminist Poetry

In the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, second-wave feminism was hard at work with the women's rights movement, as women used multiple platforms to fight for equal rights and opportunities. One of these platforms came to be known as modern feminist poetry. The poets who belonged to the movement touched the hearts of women from all walks of life and awakened the desire for change. In her journal article "Reading Women's Poetry," in 1972 Nancy Hoffman wrote, "Many women have accepted that they are 'tainted, not the world' and that they are powerless. There are few female poets that have developed the confidence to go past it." That confidence spread through society as women slowly realized that their voices deserved to be heard and that they needed to fight for themselves.

The concern of what makes literature "feminist" is a difficult one to answer. It's a question that will most likely never have a consensus among scholars and readers. However, Roxane Gay, author of "Bad Feminist", highlights what makes a novel feminist in her article "Theses on the Feminist Novel" and these guidelines can also be applied to poetry. Gay says feminist literature is "not just about who we are but how we live." The female experience is what readers can relate to and eventually leads to change. One of Gay's focal points was that the work "illuminates some aspect of female condition or offers imperative for change, makes a bold statement in the interest of women." It's called feminist poetry because it has the goal of feminism, which is to contribute to the fight for equal rights among women.

There were many trailblazers of the modern feminist poetry movement. Some of these well-known names include Adrienne Rich, Lucille Clifton, Audre Lorde, and Maya Angelou.

Their poetry was different than what was previously seen during first-wave feminism. Female poetry during the first wave was symbolic, yet revealed the personal lives of women with honesty and a personal voice that broke a massive barrier. The revealing of women's experiences early on set the foundation for poets in the second wave. The trailblazers of what is now known as modern feminist poetry created more complex work, layered with figurative language (Juhasz). These women combined their outer and inner experiences, providing others with readings more relatable than ever before. These female poets weren't afraid to use taboo words and talk about their bodies. They created new standards for how women thought about themselves and what they could share with others. In her journal article "Transformations in Feminist Poetry," Suzanne Juhasz, observed that these female poets wrote: "towards creation of a viable present and a possible future." Unlike the women from the first-wave, modern feminists saw a possibility of change and fought for it by touching upon every sensitive nerve of any reader. Today, feminist poetry is about successfully living in the present and altering the future, an attitude that is seen throughout Kim Addonizio's and Rupi Kaur's work.

Confessional Poetry

The category of poetry in which writers share their personal feelings and experiences emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. M.L Rosenthal coined the term "confessional poetry" in 1959 when reviewing Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*. What made his poetry different was how he "removed the mask" most poets wore, according to Rosenthal ("Confessional Poetry"). Lowell wrote on themes of marital issues, mental illness, and generational struggle. The confessional poetry that came after Lowell differ in themes and style depending on the writer.

Confessional poetry discusses matters of deep feeling and emotion during certain experiences. It is known as “the poetry of the personal or ‘I’” (“A Brief Guide”). These poets typically write in an autobiographical manner that includes actual people and events that occurred. The images confessional poets describe reflect the experience they’re sharing with the reader. The writing is direct in speech, rarely including symbols or abstract ideas. However, there is not one way to write confessional poetry, despite sharing the common theme of personal experience. John Berryman used characters which he told his life through, rather than putting himself or “I” into the poem (“A Brief Guide”). In contrast to what people may think, confessional poets, do not just throw all of their thoughts onto a page and call it a day. They’re precise with their word choice, style, images, and rhythm, in order to fully craft their poetry into a personal experience that is deeper than a diary entry, capturing every aspect. Poets, such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton followed in Lowell’s footsteps, as well as Elizabeth Bishop and Adrienne Rich, even though they rejected the label of “confessional poet” (“Confessional Poetry”). The literary movement of confessional poetry was thought to have ended in the 1970s, but the concept has bled into many styles of contemporary poetry, such as that of Kim Addonizio and Rupi Kaur.

Kim Addonizio

Now the author of seven poetry collections, two novels, two story collections, and two books on writing poetry, Kim Addonizio is a well-accomplished poet who writes about her experiences through life in a style that varies from poem to poem. Addonizio was born in Washington, D.C. in 1954 to a sportswriter and former tennis champion. She earned her Bachelor’s degree, as well as her Master’s, from San Francisco State University and has since

stayed in the city (“Kim Addonizio”). Addonizio began her writing career in the 1990s and has since had her poetry translated into several languages. Her awards include a Guggenheim, two Pushcart Prizes, and being a finalist for the National Book Award for her poetry collection *Tell Me*. Her most recent collection *Now We’re Getting Somewhere: Poems* was just published in 2021 (*Kim Addonizio*).

Addonizio’s poetry is known for its humor, courage, and imagery. Her style ranges from free verse, sonnets, and sonnenizio, her own invented form inspired by the paradelle structure. Common themes in her poetry range from relationships and depression to addressing social injustices. Her expression of emotion and experience classifies much of her work into the confessional category. However, in a 2011 interview with Susan Browne, Addonizio revealed “...this bugs me, the whole ‘confessional’ brush with which I’m tarred...I don’t give a shit about ‘what really happened,’ because it’s confining to stick to it.” Addonizio does not label herself as a confessional poet because she wants the freedom to write about things that are made up or amplified and makes it known that the poem's narrator is not always her. Despite dramatized events and people in her writing, feelings are still portrayed and readers are able to relate. Addonizio likes to keep her poetry at a balance of “poetic language” and clarity because she revealed in the interview that “I end up as frustrated as you” when poetry is too “obscure.” She further expressed her love for narrative because it tells a story rather than saying “this happened, and then that happened.” Addonizio is a storyteller that is not afraid to speak the hard truth.

The Poetry of Kim Addonizio

It is just as important to demonstrate Addonizio’s work as describing her style. Upon reading Addonizio’s poems, I discovered a common theme of bringing the speaker in and out of

a poem by relating one experience to another. In this excerpt of her poem “New Year’s Day,” she recalls the girls she went to school with when she spots a cow in a field:

I walk across the fields with only
A few young cows for company.

Big-boned and shy,
They are like girls I remember

From junior high, who never
Spoke, who kept their heads

Lowered and their arms crossed against
their new breasts.

The poem ends with a return to her place in the field. This technique captures a very real experience when you are in one moment and can’t help but reflect on something entirely different. Addonizio uses one image, in this case, the cow, and uses it to make the connection to a broader point. This same tool is used in her poem “First Kiss” where she connects the “drunk, drugged look” of her first kiss to when she breastfed her daughter and her “mouth gone slack and her eyes/turned vague and filmy.” “New Year’s Day” expresses the grief of youth as the speaker reminisces on their past and the lonely stage of their life they now are in as they’ve grown older with experiences, good and bad. Addonizio’s imagery is a strength in this poem as it brings the reader into two very separate, yet related worlds.

Strong imagery is a consistent feature of Addonizio's poetry. In "Onset" she describes "watching that frenzy of insects above the bush of white flowers." We can clearly imagine this exact scene that we've all seen during springtime. In the same poem, she brings us into the grocery store where she can't stand "the wrapped stacks of Styrofoam cups" and "the shelves of canned beans and soups, freezers of identical dinners." Not only is Addonizio providing imagery, but she is giving a complete contrast of nature in the first line of the poem and the unnatural view in the grocery store.

Addonizio does not reveal her themes within the first line of her poems. She makes us work for it by walking through strong narratives. Within these stories, the social issues she addresses and the experiences she shares slowly appear. In this excerpt of "Quantum," we see a contrast of those struggling and those who find it hard to walk by them:

on the sidewalk, cutting the space around him with a tin can and saying *Uhh! Uhhhh!*

Uhh! over and over

is part of it, and the one in gold chains leaning against the glass of the luggage store is,

and the one who steps toward you

from his doorway, meaning to ask something apparently simple, like *What's the time,*

something you know

you can no longer answer; he's part of it, the body of the world which is also yours and

which keeps insisting

you recognize it. And the trouble is, you do, but it's happening here, among the crowds

and exhaust smells,

and you taste every greasy scrap of paper, the globbed spit you step over, your tongue is

as thick with dirt

as though you've fallen on your hands and knees to lick the oil-scummed street, as sour
 as if you've been drinking
 the piss of those men passing their bottle in the little park with its cement benches and
 broken fountain. And it's no better
 when you descend the steps to the Metro and some girl's wailing off-key about her
 heart—your heart—
 over the awful buzzing of the strings, and you hurry through the turnstile, fumbling out
 the money that's passed
 from how many hands into yours, getting rid of all your change except one quarter you're
 sure she sees

Addonizio takes us on a walk through the streets of what seems like a busy city. Every image is picture-perfect in our mind as we see a man shaking his can, asking for money, and a girl singing to make a living, while the speaker carries on with guilt. Later, we are given the contrast of a perfect apple held up to the speaker's city view from their home and the image of them eating it as "you realize you're eating him now." The "him" is all of those people in the poem. Addonizio is making a statement on the lack of support and sense of community when people are struggling. We are too focused on ourselves and despite our guilt, do nothing.

The poetry that Addonizio writes is also relatable in the darker truths she is not afraid to share. The poem "Verities" is a hopeless, yet comforting piece about the reality of hard times. This short poem does not try to provide hope in the struggles she expresses:

Into every life a little ax must fall.

Every dog has its choke chain.

Every cloud has a shadow.

Better dead than fed.

He who laughs, will not last.

Sticks and stones will break you,

And then the names of things will be
changed.

A stitch in time saves no one.

The darkest hour comes.

Addonizio does not leave the reader with any doubt that everyone experiences dark times in their lives. This voice is comforting in the aspect of shared experience; however, the tone is as dark as the theme. We cannot help but look behind our shoulders at the last line, “The darkest hour comes.” This poem makes our skin crawl with the images produced. Yet, we are left with the comfort that this experience is given to us all at some point in our lives.

The topic of struggle is furthered through other poems of Addonizio’s where the experience seems much more personal. In this pantoum titled “A Childhood,” she reveals the way the men in her immediate family treated her and her mother:

Our drinks came with paper umbrellas.

My mother put on tennis whites.

My father went to the bar

the way he always did.

My mother put on tennis whites.

My brother threw me against a wall

the way he always did.

I believed in my guardian angel.

My brother threw my mother against a wall.

I walked in my sleep.

I believed in my guardian angel.

I woke up far from the house.

I walked in my sleep.

My mother read fairy tales and sang to me.

I woke up far from the house.

My mother was old, my father dead.

My mother read fairy tales and sang to me.

My father and brother crashed through the door.

My mother was old, my father dead

along with my guardian angel.

My father and brother crashed through the door.

I went to the bar

along with my guardian angel

and our drinks came with paper umbrellas.

Not only is this poem an example of Addonizio's love for structured poems, but it also demonstrates her ability to address trauma through writing. She provides moments of distress and as the readers, we make conclusions, such as assuming the speaker is experiencing abuse in this specific poem. The form of pantoum emphasizes specific actions and images more than once. By using the pantoum structure, Addonizio is demonstrating that trauma is not linear as the impact can be reflected in different moments in one's life. The effects of such experiences are seen as the line at the beginning, "My father went to the bar," changes to "I went to the bar" by

the third to last line. Addonizio takes this formal structure and tweaks it to provide truth, that trauma rarely has a happy ending.

Kim Addonizio takes readers through stories of relationships, struggle, and social issues. Her poems are confessional in the experiences and feelings she represents in her narrative and structured poems. Addonizio's writing allows women to feel spoken for in a world that is afraid to listen.

Insta-Poetry

Social media poet is a title that has taken the spotlight in the past few years and has reshaped what it means to write poetry as it reaches audiences on modern platforms. According to Lili Paquet, academics overlook the genre for the lack of merit, but “fail to consider the rhetorical importance of audience reception.” Social media users scroll by and sometimes read poetry that other users repost. Unless you already read poetry in your free time, the average person does not come across poetry in a space other than in a classroom.

Instagram poetry is a combination of self-help and literature. Paquet adds that the content it offers actually “contrasts the superficiality of the social networking site,” despite the criticism the genre often receives. The self-help aspect tackles the mental health issues that come from social media, providing a healthy balance. Insta-poetry is literature that speaks to the lives of the current generation through modern platforms that are frequented daily.

Rupi Kaur is one of the biggest voices on Instagram and, therefore, is a target for criticism on the style of Insta-poetry, which is usually very short and to the point. In his article “On Rupi Kaur and the Question of Authenticity,” Sadaf Ahsan defends the style of Kaur, which includes the use of lower-case letters and strange line breaks, by addressing these aspects as

“quirks reminiscent of the social network they inhabit... While that simplicity can belie its own complexity, it’s also easy to imitate, which is why it’s become synonymous with social media poets.” Kaur’s work contributes to the definition of Insta-poetry and has sparked a trend of accessible literature.

Rupi Kaur

Rupi Kaur is a well-known name in the world of modern poetry. This generation of social media users come across Kaur’s work while scrolling through their feeds. While some roll their eyes, many dive deep into the rabbit hole of the Instagram star’s account. Her life began in Punjab, India, where she was born in 1992 and then moved to Toronto, Canada four years later. Kaur studied rhetoric and professional writing at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. During her college years, she began posting her poems on Tumblr and Instagram (“National Poetry”). Eventually, in 2014, she illustrated and self-published her first poetry collection, *milk and honey*. However, she did not appear in the spotlight until the following year when Instagram removed her post of a period stain on her bed and her pants. This picture belonged to a series that she made for a project in her rhetoric class. This led to Kaur vocally questioned society’s opinions on the female body, which brought her a following of women who had also been silenced before. Her Instagram has now reached 4.5 million followers and Kaur spent the last year or so documenting her world tour experience. According to her website, along with her three poetry collections and a self-guided writing exercise book, Kaur self-produced *Rupi Kaur Live* on Amazon Prime Video in 2021. She has turned into a celebrity that walks carpets at important events. Although she has grown to success, she continues to produce poems full of feeling and female experience.

Every poem of Kaur's looks different from the others. One poem can be only two lines while the next one could be a long paragraph. Some end with what could be called the title in italics while some do not. Most of her poems have corresponding drawings that tell many stories. Kaur's style is free verse with lower-case letters replacing what would normally be capital. This minimalistic form is straight to the point. However, it is not difficult to see where the criticism comes from. Her work goes against rules of grammar and the beloved complexity of poetry studied in the classroom. In his review of *the sun and her flowers*, Jeremy Noe-Tod responds to the frequent criticism, "Kaur's style is artless and therefore sincere... This is poetry that aspires to be message rather than music – and it is a potently direct and feminist message." Like the many feminist poets that came before her, Kaur removes her mask in her writing. She wants the reader to understand the urgent message of her poems. Anyone can read her writing and immediately relate to it, which is the reason for her large audience. Ahsan furthers this point as he argues, "In her work, [young brown women have] found themselves, and if that isn't the job of poetry – online or offline – I'm not sure what is." Kaur writes for herself and for other women to feel seen and spoken for. Poetry is a form of communication between the writer and the reader. Kaur just makes it crystal clear.

The Poetry of Rupi Kaur

As mentioned before, Kaur's style is well-known for its minimalistic form. She rarely uses punctuation or capital letters. When she chooses to title a piece, she adds it to the end of the poem, italicized, giving a name to the point being made. Each poem, also, has an illustration to accompany it. Almost all of Kaur's poems featured on Instagram can be found in one of her published collections. When posted online, she adds paragraphs to the caption, sharing her

personal experiences related to the poem. Her style that has become associated with her work can be meditative in its simple form as it leaves the reader to digest the few lines they are given. This poem, found in *milk and honey*, is a great example of her style:

i thank the universe
 for taking
 everything it has taken
 and giving to me
 everything it is giving

balance (159)

This poem reads as a practice of gratitude. As the reader, you cannot help but feel that if you say it ten times, you will manifest good in your life. The single word “balance” at the end, demonstrates the importance of this reflection by giving it a name. The lowercase letters and lack of punctuation give the poem a personal touch as if we, her readers, wrote this ourselves for no one else to see. It feels like our deepest thoughts are on the page, a truly confessional account. The simplicity of this poem is effective in delivering a message that has depth to it but is also easily comprehended by the reader.

According to Kaur’s website, in her writing, she “touches on love, loss, trauma, healing, femininity, and migration.” In many of these themes, she is directing the message toward women, who make up most of her audience. Some of her poems address the female experience directly, while it can be assumed in others. Kaur has many poems on the topic of relationships, showing the good and the bad. This poem, belonging to *sun and her flowers*, shows never-ending love:

when death
 takes my hand
 i will hold you with the other
 and promise to find you in every lifetime

-commitment (186)

Here, Kaur expresses the power of love and its ability to last beyond life, which she refers to as “commitment.” We assume that this is about a healthy relationship with a person that cannot be let go. The reader cannot help but either yearn for this kind of love or think of a love they already can describe as this. Despite her many romantic poems, Kaur does not fail to be honest in her work. She wants readers to feel seen in their traumatic experiences, ones that many feel isolated from. This next poem shows us the other side of what may seem like a healthy relationship:

you were so afraid
 of my voice
 i decided to be
 afraid of it too (17)

This *milk and honey* poem can be applied to many situations, even as general as the day-to-day female experience. Yet, many may take this in the direction of unhealthy relationships where women feel that they cannot defend and speak up for themselves. The strength of this poem is reflected in the decision to leave out a title. The words speak for themselves. Kaur is a brave poet, not afraid to tell her audience exactly how it is.

Kaur is known to produce a mix of hard truth and encouragement. These poems can be what you expect in a self-help book, such as this one from *milk and honey*:

if you were born with
 the weakness to fall
 you were born with
 the strength to rise (156)

These poems are inspiring to those who struggle in finding the light in a dark space and lack this encouragement in their lives. These words of wisdom also come in a more direct form, tackling social issues, which makes Kaur an agent of change. In her most recent collection *home body*, she does not hold back in her views of the world currently. In this poem, she addresses what it means to live in an inherently racist world as a woman of color:

by virtue of living
 in a racist world
 nonblack people are
 raised to be antiblack
 we are all taught that lighter is better

-undoing (145)

Kaur understands the social climate of the world right now, especially in the Western Hemisphere, and takes it into her own hands with honest reflection. She speaks a truth that others are afraid to admit. This poem seems surface-level but reading it multiple times brings a deep understanding of what it means to be black. Kaur concludes this work with an action of change, “undoing.” The virtue of this racist world has to be undone to see true equality.

As Kaur is considered a modern feminist poet, it is important to demonstrate her ability to transfer her feminist ideals onto the page. She uses her experiences to justify her beliefs and push

for change. This poem, included in *home body*, demonstrates her anger and passion on the subject of the female experience:

you look tired he says
 i turn to him and say
yeah i'm exhausted
i've been fighting misogyny for decades
how else do you expect me to look (147)

Kaur uses the simple interaction with a man and turns it into a fight against the patriarchy. This technique is much like Addonizio's when she turns from one scene to the next to deliver truths about being a woman. Kaur writes to fight oppression against women in all areas, whether it is to share a space with others or to inspire change when others are afraid to. The range of content she accomplishes allows any reader to find themselves within her work.

Kaur does not shy away from sharing her own experiences, especially when it comes to traumatic events that she has gone through. In 2016, a year after professionally re-publishing her poetry collection *milk and honey*, TEDxKC uploaded a Rupi Kaur talk titled "I'm Taking My Body Back." In the video, she performs a spoken word piece about sexual violence. This excerpt demonstrates Kaur's ability to put such trauma into words:

I asked where we were going, you asked was I afraid, and that's when my voice jumped over the edge of my throat, landed at the bottom of my belly and hid for months. All the different parts in me turned the lights off, shut the blinds, locked the doors, I hid at the back of some upstairs closet of my mind while someone came and broke the windows. You, someone, kicked the front door in, you took everything, you, someone, took me.
 (2:17)

These vulnerable words are full of emotion whether you are hearing Kaur's own voice in the video or just the reading with voice in your head. In this talk and many other instances, Kaur has spoken out about trauma she has gone through in her life, such as being raped by her uncle. She shares these experiences in her writing to represent the women that relate to her and in a sense provides them with closure. In the excerpt above, the comparison of her body to a house, allows the reader and listener to understand the traumatic event, whether they went through it themselves or not. Kaur brings light to the reality of what women experience, the good and the ugly.

Rupi Kaur's minimalistic style emphasizes clarity. The purpose of her poetry is easily revealed to the reader. This style allows her poems to be accessible to the average reader and reaches a new audience through social media. Kaur's themes of relationships, violence, and hope in her confessional poetry provide women with a safe space where truth is welcomed

Comparing Addonizio & Kaur

Modern feminist poetry comes in different forms, which is demonstrated by the contrast of style between Kim Addonizio and Rupi Kaur. Addonizio appreciates lengthy, dramatic narratives that take a few reads to fully grasp and dapples in structured poetry. Kaur, on the other hand, goes against the rules of grammar and has poems that range from one-liners to a hefty paragraph. She is very literal and direct in her language, while Addonizio uses imagery that brings the reader into a world that slowly reveals a truth.

In her 2011 interview with Browne, three years before Kaur published her first collection, Addonizio revealed that she is easily bored when "poems seem to make the same moves over and over" and lack some form of narrative. It's difficult to wonder if Addonizio would appreciate

Kaur's poetry or not. Kaur shares the bravery that Addonizio has but has flipped the world of poetry upside down. With almost forty years between them, there is also a generational gap to consider. However, Addonizio is not afraid of experimentation or pushing against boundaries, which Kaur has done from the start of her success when she posted the photo of her period. Addonizio herself has had scandalous covers for some of her collections, such as featuring women in lingerie. Their honest view of women is also shared in their similar themes. Kaur and Addonizio both write about trauma, relationships, love, and several other aspects of the female experience. It's possible that Addonizio could be impressed by the new form of poetry that Kaur brings to the literary scene. In her interview with Browne, Addonizio added that the audience of poetry is "relatively small...It could be larger." Because of Kaur, the poetry community has expanded immensely. Both Addonizio and Kaur are modern feminist poets, as well as confessional ones, because, despite having different styles, they have the same goal, to share their experiences and make a change.

PORTFOLIO

Introduction

After analyzing Kim Addonizio and Rupi Kaur's poetry, and noting their stylized techniques and themes, I created my own portfolio of poetry. The first five poems are inspired by Addonizio's work and the following five are inspired by Kaur. The final set that closes off the portfolio are five poems that are based on original themes and techniques. This portfolio serves as a contribution to the literary world of modern feminist poetry.

Poetry Inspired By Kim Addonizio

Addonizio's poetry ranges from structured poems, such as sonnets, to long narratives. Her themes address relationships, trauma, and the unique female experience. This section of original poems borrow Addonizio's use of narrative to convey truth, forming connections between two experiences, and pantoum-styled poetry. These five poems reveal themes of identity, relationships, and mental health.

Just Like the Movies

Scratchy, creaky seats - once red, now gray.

My feet propped on the silver bar, leftover popcorn

Crushed by excited soles spotting empty seats in the herd.

My drink is half-empty and it begins.

-

The Joker has Batman pinned to the ground.

To my left, a little boy is crying into his cape.

Don't worry, kid, he always gets up.

It's his movie for god's sake.

Red, green, and white face paint drip

Into Batman's bloodied eye. He slackens.

It's only been thirty minutes.

My fingernails dig into my palms.

The silence creeps into everyone's skin.

He's not getting up. Batman always gets up.

The camera follows the murderer, but it's me,
And I'm leaving a bruised version of myself behind.

Well, I paid, so I should stay.

It's the bad guy's movie now, intrusive thoughts win

This round, death of the good is a reality now.

I guess I've found my new favorite superhero.

-

With no hero in sight, the villain takes their place

In the little boy's eyes, no longer naïve.

I can't help but cheer and scream for the bad guy

Who sees a world that never was good.

Under That Heavy Weight, I Could Barely Breathe

Under that heavy weight, I could barely breathe,
My shuddering body only allowed small bites a day,
Soaked-through pillows at night and inflated eyes in the morning.
But my stomach looked smaller, and I liked it.

My shuddering body only allowed small bites a day
Draining every ounce of strength from my bones.
But my stomach looked smaller, and I liked it.
I thought my anxiety could lead to a longing success.

Draining every ounce of energy from my bones,
Suffocating thoughts and constant worry beat on my heart.
I thought my anxiety could lead to a longing success
If I just stopped eating all together.

Suffocating thoughts and constant worry beat on my heart.
My guilt hides empty bags of chips and ice cream containers.
If I just stopped eating all together,
I'd probably be happier without.

My guilt hides empty bags of chips and ice cream containers.
Constant cycles of absence and binge.

I'd probably be happier, without
Those illusions of wandering eyes and evil thoughts.

Constant cycles of absence and binge,
Soaked-through pillows at night and inflated eyes in the morning.
Those illusions of wandering eyes and evil thoughts.
Under that heavy weight, I could barely breathe.

Slovak America

To me, it's different.

A world of judgment, never spoken,

Unless it's in your own home and defended by love.

How can I not help but feel invisibly judged sitting in the in-between?

I was born here, but it feels wrong to say I'm *from* here.

I hate proving my half-assed fluency, but I want to show off my "difference."

I'm not Polish enough, but I also can't relate to friends with

A great, great grandfather from Ireland.

Words of self-hate and comparison define my worth.

So, I struggle to run in a maze made by my ancestors,

A maze without a solution.

Spring

Fragrant lilies fill my nose with Easter Sunday.
Green grass pokes at my thighs, dress above the knees.
The slight chill is welcomed by small, but fast feet.
Buzzing starts at my ear and the stripes are in sight,
Persistently blocking my view of a happy day.
Just like she did. Nagging at my ear until I paid attention
Or standing in front of me until I was annoyed.
At the snap of her fingers, I would position the spotlight for her
And mute my world when her monologue approached.
Our playdates and my birthday sleepovers were
At her command, Barbie's boyfriend chosen
By her blue, Big Brother eyes.
As our bodies changed and tassels moved to the left,
Drinks were forced on every occasion, and I was shot
Down when I wasn't feeling it that night.
Sober was not an option.
I'd leave my best friend's house crying
Knowing that I was stuck.
So, I let the bee buzz through my hair,
By my ankles and on my dress
Because if I tried to end it,
I'd find myself with a silent sting
On this beautiful day of spring.

Preserved Sunsets

Oranges, yellows, purples, and reds paint ombre petals tucked between
Parchment-covered pages under the heavy weight of stretched elastic
and colorful records organized beneath its vintage but new player.

First held by gentle hands belonging to a red flannel

As the softest brown eyes watched my childish excitement awaken for the hundredth time.

Your gifts remind me of what it feels to be five again

Picking the prettiest dandelions in what always seemed like fresh-cut grass
Running to give them to Mama so she can place them in a tiny cup of water
by the kitchen window beside lopsided Mother's Day cards and
scribbled stick-figure family portraits made by wide, wondrous eyes.

Tears and tantrums followed the withering flowers as years went by

And my room slowly emptied of dollhouses and bright colors.

The grass began to poke the bottoms of my calloused feet as I passed

Yellow weeds that couldn't compete with an expensive bouquet in a fragile vase
That only brought sadness as its beauty faded, painfully slow.

Those little feet would run if she knew she could press her pretty dandelions, so I

Preserve paper-thin petals for a love still new, as I slowly revive my love for her

As we dive into the soft petals' eternal sunset, hand in hand,

Running on pillowy sand toward a gentle tide kissed by the sun,

Hoping that it never truly sets.

Poetry Inspired by Rupi Kaur

The Instagram-famous minimalistic poetry of Rupi Kaur is known for its lack of punctuation and capital letters, and italicized titles at the end. Her poems range from one line to packed paragraphs. She does not hold back as she addresses themes of sexual violence, relationships, and mental health. The next five poems were written in a format that resemble Kaur's style and are centered on the topic of mental health.

butterfly stickers hide
what i don't want you to see
but battered wings need recovery.
tears take them down into the drawer
and they shake.
begging to be set free
- *disguise*

no one knows it's there
a tiny hole at the bottom of your soul
except for you.
you feel the wound with every
step you take
flinch you feel
and salty tear
stinging like the first day
you felt it.

- *i'm okay*

cotton feels paper-thin

sugar tastes bitter

flowers are lifelessly grey

voices sound prickly

the world smells empty

- *before medication*

big waves crash and drown me
low tides bare unwanted thoughts
calm waters hide lurking creatures
but movement between all three
is a dream of rare ecstasy
- *riding waves*

sticks in my nest poke and prod
as i've grown these few years
no fresh wounds or scars as expected
the drop is no longer so high
i'm growing up
ready to fly

- *next chapter*

Unique Poetry

The last five poems of this portfolio are ones that embody the female experience in a way that is unique to my own style of writing. These are reflective of my own life, the struggles and the moments of peace I've experienced. I present these with not only the intent of contributing to feminist literature, but also to share my voice with others.

Twenty-One

Heatwaves of euphoria and body glitter break through the sunroof,
 3am lights of a never-ending tunnel melt away scars from her skin
 Readyng herself for the next round of cheap tequila and sour lime.
 She disappears back into the night, and I'm left in the empty tunnel,
 Sober and sad.

Dear Twenty-One, you're a champagne-popping age of heart-
 break as my tired eyes strain to stay open before the good music even comes on.
 I'm not sitting on the curb waiting for stability and my Uber.
 I wouldn't even know what directions to give, because
 My definition of "lost" is much more hopeless than any drunk girl's.
 Her dreams could reach mountains, but why should I bother?

My sleep is haunted by men hunting me down never-ending halls

And my own weakness as I fight to find the strength

To push my legs up everyday steps that should be easy.

I'm busy, but inactive in what truly matters to me.

“You're still young, you have time.”

So please tell me to slow down because I'm moving so damn fast

And shoving every ounce of a sad and dreary hell down my throat

Pushing my untapped potential further from reach and starting a storm that

If grown too big, might wash away every ounce of who I am.

This tunnel I'm sitting in is my limbo and that revolutionary sunroof

Is my one-way ticket to those moments full of ecstasy and power,

Those soft spots in the grass where the sunlight leads all the butterflies to my tender skin.

Warm winds and waterfalls, soft coos and a white light, passionate storms waiting,

to awaken my lost, youthful soul.

slow burdens

It's hard to sit down and just think

After months of a buzzing brain,

Without a thought in mind.

Time didn't feel free before.

It was limited in space, something

I had to buy or lose more for.

Now I sift through bad shows and boring taglines,

What should feel like a luxury,

But isn't.

The slow things feel like a burden,

Something I wish I wanted

But "no time" is a hard habit to break.

Acceptance

Skin soft to the touch, a stranger to the sun.

Lashes never wiped with aggressive oils.

Nails healthy, hair untouched, and tummy proudly filled.

Gentle tugs at the corners of a mouth, joyful to see its reflection.

Innocent acceptance of the beauty of a unique soul.

A pink mirror, framed with golden butterflies, sees

Kind caresses of cushioned hips,

Soft gazes at a button nose and tiny ears,

Loving words kissing the tips of a pure mind,

Decisive acceptance that this life is worthy of love.

No worries about the speed of the pen,

Filling bright white pages of a life comfortably unwritten.

Empty slots in schedules for time to think,

To discover, the workings of an inner voice.

Comfortable acceptance of the unexplored.

Skin to dirt, walking through forests so pure.

Observing the calm colors of clustered wings,

Crickets and croaks, the only pins dropping in the silence.

Warm beams and breezes kissed with pine,

Natural acceptance of a world of beauty and hope.

But that angelic and pure soul is infested with deceit,

Tainted by a world of wandering eyes and bars far from reach.

Full of suffocating noise and steel fists crushing what love and beauty is left,

Leaving the now-frail soul to think it'd be easier

To accept its lonely and empty fate.

seasonal souls

As rain wets pavement in crisp, cool air

Among openings of green bulbs at the ends of newborn stems,

Nests and burrows feel the comfort under golden skies.

Sweet smells and comfortable warmth

Become slow days and unbearable heat

as petals begin to scourge and sear.

Yet, as the trees resemble warmth in every color,

Their thread turns into blankets for the earth below

Comforting the grief of fragile stems, as their petals begin to fall.

Under heatless skies and glittering cotton,

They bear the freeze in harmony

Waiting to paint their souls under gold once more.

Paradise

Creedence Clearwater Revival spins off of the vinyl.

Leaves of a marbled pothos adorn the overflowing bookshelf.

Greens and oranges live in this room,

Lit by shining gold and spinning disco balls.

Market flowers replace candles.

A woman spins *freely* on the oriental rug.

A space to make daydreams reality

With old pictures and strumming guitars.

Another decade

A time and place

Far from the tainted today.

REFLECTION

Writing, especially creative writing, has always come easy to me and is something that I have fallen in love with in the past few years. The pairing of my English major and Women's Studies minor, as well as being a woman who is not afraid to vocalize the female experience, brought forth an interest in modern feminist poetry. The information I learned about Rupi Kaur and Kim Addonizio's life and work was fascinating. However, diving into their techniques and themes within my own writing is where I truly began to appreciate their work.

The poetry of Addonizio is full of storytelling, something that I found comfort in. Describing events and drawing truth out of them is something I already demonstrated in my writing. However, there were still techniques that were foreign to me. Reflecting on a past memory while sharing a more present experience was very enjoyable to create. It brought forth much more reflection on everyday moments in my life. Dipping into structured poetry, as Addonizio does, felt restricting at first, but there was something special and challenging about it. Conveying emotion or a certain event with guidelines brings forth ideas that would not have come to mind otherwise. I appreciated Addonizio's portrayal of the truth. There was no sugar-coating it or any sign of a mask.

Kaur's poetry at first glance seems to be a walk in the park, something the average person could jot down after meditating or contemplating life at two in the morning. Just by writing five poems using her techniques, I quickly realized how wrong that assumption is. Of course, after looking at my work inspired by Kaur, it seemed that it wasn't enough, as I am someone who needs to go onto every single detail and over-express myself. It was actually a challenge to fit all of my thoughts into a few lines and after reading through my work again, there was something satisfying about the way it was extremely clear. My favorite parts of her technique were ending

with the title and using lowercase letters. I felt more vulnerable with the piece and read more meditatively. It's clear that Kaur's success is well-deserved.

The literary movement of modern feminist poetry is one that requires courage and rawness to be a part of. Addonizio, Kaur, and many other feminist poets use their love of writing to share life-altering and sometimes uncomfortable experiences, which in turn normalizes conversation on these topics. Poetry has become more mainstream in the past decade, allowing women of all backgrounds to find a safe space to be validated in their female experience and discover their own voice. By completing this project, I am proud to say that I am now a part of the catalyst of change that is modern feminist poetry.

Works Cited

- “A Brief Guide to Confessional Poetry.” *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets,
<https://poets.org/text/brief-guide-confessional-poetry>.
- Ahsan, Sadaf. “On Rupi Kaur and the Question of Authenticity in the Age of Social Media Artists.” *National Post*, 12 Oct. 2017, <http://nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/on-rupi-kaur-andthe-question-of-authenticity-in-the-age-of-social-media-artists>.
- Browne, Susan. “An interview with Kim Addonizio.” *Five Points: A Journal of Literature and Art*, vol. 14, no. 1, fall 2011, pp. 74+. *Gale Academic OneFile*,
link.gale.com/apps/doc/A259157552/AONE?u=mlic_assumpt&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=6a411c05.
- “Confessional Poetry.” *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation,
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/151109/an-introduction-to-confessional-poetry#:~:text=Confessional%20poets%20wrote%20in%20direct,sequences%2C%20emphasizing%20connections%20between%20poems>.
- Gay, Roxane. “Theses on the Feminist Novel.” *Dissent Magazine*, 4 May 2018,
<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/theses-on-the-feminist-novel#:~:text=A%20feminist%20novel%2C%20then%2C%20is,the%20best%20interests%20of%20women>.
- Hoffman, Nancy Jo, et al. “Reading Women’s Poetry: The Meaning and Our Lives.” *College English*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1972, pp. 48–62. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/375218>.

Juhasz, Suzanne. "Transformations in Feminist Poetry." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1979, pp. 23–30. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346663>.

Kaur, Rupi. *Home Body*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2020.

Kaur, Rupi. *Milk and Honey*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015.

Kaur, Rupi. *The Sun and Her Flowers*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2017.

Kaur, Rupi. "I'm Taking My Body Back." *TEDxKC*, Sept. 2016, <https://www.tedxkc.org/rupi-kaur>.

Kim Addonizio, <https://www.kimaddonizio.com/>.

"Kim Addonizio." *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/kim-addonizio>.

"National Poetry Month: Rupi Kaur - English: Colorado State University." *English*, 13 Apr. 2017, <https://english.colostate.edu/news/npm-rupi-kaur/>.

Noel-Tod, Jeremy. Review of *The Sun and Her Flowers*, written by Rupi Kaur. *The Times*, 15 Oct. 2017, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sun-her-flowers-rupi-kaur-review-wxrlzcksf>.

Paquet, Lili. "Self-Help: The Multimodal Appeal of Instagram Poetry." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2019, pp. 296-314. Research Gate, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lili-Paquet/publication/332428398_Selfie-Help_The_Multimodal_Appeal_of_Instagram_Poetry/links/619e9978f1d62445716821db/Selfie-Help-The-Multimodal-Appeal-of-Instagram-Poetry.pdf

Rupi Kaur, <https://rupikaur.com/>.