

A Response To:

Deep, Dark, Desperate / Eat Your Saints

Deborah Prior & Jess Taylor

Stuck inside the performance, I am slipping in and out of myself—in and out of my body—in and out of the ways that I can fail. Failing always announces itself as a verb; as a doing word. Nothing frightens me more than failing. The only solution is to centre my body within the work. Elated and ruined—I end, and then begin again.

Their bodies were seen as books to be burnt. Knowledge can be so powerful when carried conversationally. I held the words in my hands, wondering if I could claim them. They held the secrets in their veins. I wanted to be welcomed into every conversation. The smell of burning hair remained. Were their tears made from the same kind of salt as mine? Carved *from a particularly bleak place of bleak*,¹ there was understanding by way of chronic pain. Doctors will often dismiss the severity of women's discomfort—we are known for both coping and hysteria.

Did Agatha of Sicily feel the tear of flesh as her breasts were cut off?
Her tears will never stop running as my eyes have become a conduit.

Tending to my body as a type of ritual. I kept striking myself against the card, waiting for the flame to take. The sound of the head of the match as it caught alight was nothing in comparison to the violence of being in a female body. To what extent am I outside of myself? Do the flames burn less if you are the one that lights the pyre? Suffering by way of dedication to a cause. The word 'martyr' means witness—one *who brings a testimony, written or verbal*.² Their pain is bound within the marrow of my bones.

*I am victim, perpetrator and witness.*³

Looking down at the length of my arm I noticed that Acconci had left a line of bite-marks, running wrist to elbow. My side seams were strong, bound by Bourgeois' stitches. Antoni licked the details off my face and washed me in the bath. To stop the light from burning my eyes, Malevich painted me deep inside his black square and Popova sewed me into the folds of her uniforms. They were at-once exfoliate and moisture and the works were now hidden behind my eyelids. I no longer know where my outlines begin and end. The sides of my torso met constructivist corners and my hair was dyed by modernism. I followed their return to the body and it became easier to take in oxygen. When I struggled, Clark breathed air deep into my lungs. I regained my energy and was caste in the Serpentine Dance. I moved in fast circles. Tired, dizzy and seeking respite, I slipped into Beuys' vat of wax. I melted momentarily and then kept moving. Exhaustion was there, but I didn't know how to make time for resting. Using your own body: *it is in part about tipping the scales in your direction*.⁴ You come up simultaneously elated and ruined. You are still in control (to an extent). *I do things to myself I would not do to another human*.⁵ I come back to the body and hope for renewal. I know that a work can never really be finished. The heat of the flames leave marks on my skin.

Self as relic, storage-unit, repository. Even if my edges were softer, I would still scratch surfaces. To be present in the art world you must be within acts of endless consumption. It is easy to forget to take breaths between bites: *so I will be eating up this destructive aspiration too—masticating and digesting and shitting it out absolutely*.⁶ The repetition of making and how the thread lessons the tension of my heart strings. The works are never finished and the words are never written—the second act is forever delayed. The word 'woman' enables pluralities and complexities. *When being burned alive, take big, deep breaths and you will pass out sooner from inhaling the smoke, making your death less excruciating*.⁷ Likewise, walk home in company, with your keys between your fingers. Still, the flames are licking at our thighs.

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¹ Deborah Prior, *Email correspondence* (May 22, 2018).

² Wikipedia contributors, "Martyr," Wikipedia, accessed July 2, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martyr>.

³ Jess Taylor, *Email correspondence* (May 23, 2018).

⁴ Deborah Prior, *Email correspondence* (May 22, 2018).

⁵ Deborah Prior, *Email correspondence* (May 22, 2018).

⁶ Deborah Prior, *Email correspondence* (May 22, 2018).

⁷ Laurel Zwissler, "Witches' Tears: Spiritual Feminism, Epistemology, and Witch Hunt Horror Stories" (Central Michigan University, 2016) 196.