

Fall 2022

Holy Facade

Introduction

When asked for the definition of ecofeminism, no strict words come to my mind. I see fragments of thoughts that lay together to make a mosaic of concepts instead of sentences. I see people, of all shapes, sizes, and configurations, I see land, forests, and deep-sea creatures. But the one thing all of these have in common, is I see the haze of oppression clouding over them, and the sense of imminent destruction. My thoughts fill with a pressure, not a physical one, but a threat that I feel in both mind and soul.

What is that supposed to mean?

To me it means the injustices of this world are so interconnected, there would be no way to fill a map of their destinations.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition states ecofeminism as *a movement or theory that applies feminist principles and ideas to ecological issues*.

But how can just one sentence hope accomplish that message through to thoughts, feelings, physicality, life, action, sustenance, accessibility, equality, spirituality, faith, identity, (should I go on?)

Ecofeminism is something that impacts every living being on our earth, whether or not they know it, or their beliefs have taught them so.

Like Valerie Kaalund dubbed 'environmental racism' within *Witness to Truth*, I feel like many in the Western world and beyond are also victims of environmental prejudice, entitlement, bias, and so on.

As a queer person myself, I've learned to ignore the influences of homophobia, transphobia, sexism, etc., throughout my life, and although an individual can be easy to defend against, there tends to be an ever-present and overwhelming force from within organized religion or corporation. Those of this sort which feel near impossible to combat when the aggressor has no desire to listen. I have been forced to endure the concepts of the mob mentalities and systematic patriarchies teaching those around me that I'm not who I claim to be, that my identity is sinful, and that I am desecrating the body god gave me.

I am one in an infinite sea.

When does the "god given right" have the ability to override the surrounding world? Who lets a king decide a forest is less valuable than his courtyard?

The catholic church is amongst one of the number one influences on the Western world, and I believe that the psychosocial role of religion within our day-to-day life

is one of the foremost antagonists against theologies like ecofeminism. One might ask, “what does belief in god have to do with ecofeminism”, but when put into the perspective of someone’s religious or spiritual values, that guide their daily action and thought, it becomes self-evident. Evident that those values will rule over all factors of ecology and feminism that one interacts with in the world—their guide to life, if you will.

To the hyper-vigilant believers, there is not one facet of life that was not influenced in some way or another by the structure they follow, and this book seeks to go into an abstract investigation of how said structures impact a person’s life, merely by existing around them.

My perspectives can be widened, but my reality is still my own. Thus, I composed my thoughts of the subject matter within these pages, using my journey of discovering gender queerness amongst catholic oppression, as a parallel of my own interpretations upon the world. My body is our earthen body, and my personal oppressions are the worldly oppressions of capitalist, patriarchal, and religious varieties.

This book was originally bound to be titled “Holy Father” by Greg Tobin, an account of the historical Papacy and a biography of Pope Benedict the XVI. Using its original landscape, I endeavoured to remodel it into an artistic analysis of the effects of Catholicism on Ecofeminist subjects, as a *euphemistic placeholder* for overarching oppressors in our modern world.

Let me disclaim by saying this collection has no intentions to mock religion, but rather, with a critical eye, understand the *façade* that has been built *around* religion to excuse the actions of some believers. In the same ways that corporate patriarchy is able to fly under radar using political loopholes and conservative rulings; in this book, belief in God acts as the moral perpetrator for all these seemingly external forces.

My number one inspiration for the medium of this novel was the blackout poetry I had yet to write.

I sought to take this environment: paper written on by the white, hetero-cisgender man, and cultivate within it, new, intersectional meanings, and art, founded upon the voices of my peers.

Within each page blacked out, that had been written for the Pope, hid the words of another and their lived experiences, that I would hopefully be able to bring forth to become the book being read now.

6 of my peers were generous enough to sit with me while I asked them their experiences with Catholicism and patriarchy within their lives, in which they each have a dedicated “chapter” of the book.

The other sections of the novel are short introspections on the content of our ecofeminism course, in the context of this book concept and of myself.

Part 1: Connections

Chapter 1: My Heart (Education)

Since I was young, although I was not raised religiously, I had a concept of what god was, and what it meant to some people.

Sometimes I would feel powerless, out of control, for problems big or small, and I wished there was something bigger than human, something omniscient, to guide me. Sometimes I would borrow that concept of God to do what I thought praying might have looked like. Those times were disappointing.

What I realize now is those feelings of disappointment grew from a lack of real action. Although I could think as much as I wanted about some bigger being bringing change and fixing problems, those solutions never truly came and only left a shadow of temporary solace.

As I grew older, I began to learn how different it would feel rather than to ask for a change, to make that change myself.

However, the topic of my heart for social and ecological change remained in turmoil. By the time I hit puberty, the gender dysphoria hit back. I knew there was something wrong with the way I felt versus the way people told me it was *supposed to feel*, and that consumed me for years. I didn't have the language or the external support that I needed to make sense of what was wrong. That changed when I grew into high school and was exposed to a whole new meaning of being queer.

In the pallet of man and woman, I finally saw non-binary colours.

I had suddenly found a space to learn new vocabulary, concepts, and ways of expression. I finally learned what I had been struggling with for so many years. It was like the floodgates had opened and all those things that felt like unclimbable mountains became hills that only needed patient traversing. Because I had the spaces I needed and the comfort of understanding, I felt like a real person, who was *capable*, rather than a pawn of the system.

Chapter 2: My Mind (Policy)

Young me had always asked questions, tons of them; why, why, why, but why? But there were days I hated asking, the days when my mom wouldn't be able to give me an answer much better than "that's just the way some things are". That wasn't right, mom always had a reason for how things worked. And it was so frustrating to *not understand*.

A six-year-old doesn't have much capacity to learn the nuances of politics, so I don't blame my mother for her answers then. Especially now, as I'm grown and fluent in the realities of our western society and can see *her* daily frustrations.

I remember her taking her tired body out to the backyard after a long day at work to do the composting before our city got the green bins. I remember her sorting through her closet over and over to find clothes that she could wear to her

corporate job, that didn't make her feel like a boxed barbie doll. I remember the first time she told us of her Metis background that she had no way to reconnect with.

Although she didn't always have the answers, I still learned them from her.

She taught me that I have a responsibility in this world to *not* believe the answer "That's just the way some things are". So, I fought back to change what the status quo looked like. Being the 'weird' kid didn't scare me from living within my own policy. Because even if I felt powerless against the adult-made structures above me, no one could stop me from challenging the 'normal'.

Regardless of one's personal religious, cultural, or political beliefs, there is also a personal and civil responsibility to question their actions for themselves; to not follow the herd blindly.

Chapter 3: My body (Direct action)

When I was a tiny baby, I was bald and chubby: characteristics in which vast society deems unfeminine, even for an infant. "He is such a cute baby!" they would exclaim, and my mother would strap another pink bow to my hairless head.

At the time she couldn't have known that her child would grow up non-binary, but from the very beginning, even if in a binary manner, she was helping me battle gender stereotypes.

My parents seemed to play good-cop/bad-cop by nature when raising my sister and I. For all that my mother was understanding, guiding, accepting, there was always a counterpart from my father. They were both raised catholic, though each chose to stop following in their adulthood. Even still, my dad had a difficult time understanding *me*, and tried to combat it with values he didn't even uphold.

My body was god's gift to me, he once told me, therefore I cannot change or modify it. I wanted to colour my hair and get piercings for self-expression, but because God put me on this planet with a certain number of holes, I should leave it with the same amount, so he claimed. I knew this was something he didn't believe, but was using it as his reason, nonetheless.

But if our bodies are God's gifts to us, then the planet is too, **yet we modify it, create holes, colour it grey instead of green?**

My physical environment was wrong, unhealthy, and hindering my natural potential: so, I went to therapy, I started hormones, I got top surgery. I pursued direct action against the problem. Even before I could physically change things myself at a fundamental level, I pursued passive action as well:

I use the washroom that's most convenient, not always the one I'm designated. I put my pronouns on all my most visible objects.

I wear the clothes that make *me* happy, not others.

The way we treat our own bodies should be the same as the body we live upon. With respect and the actions it deserves.

Chapter 4: My Identity (Community)

People are always changing, and with or without humans, the world does too. Naturally, that finds us with different friends, changing workspaces, moving homes, and most of all, finding new communities.

A Ven diagram of all those communities put together, makes up the individual at the centre. For me that includes queer, neurodivergent, disabled, pagan, feminist, and many more that fill in the cracks to make up a person.

Communities certainly shape entities, tie others to a source and teach them lessons about the world and guide them to build something that nurtures all within. But people can also come together to form community, to take like minds, find their similarities, and share a passion that makes them want to speak together.

Very few exist in this world without some sense of community, and be it any biological creature, they would always have something to call a neighbour. What many humans amongst us actively forget is one of those communities is the ecological one: that we are living things amongst others that must work together to survive.

A sense of identity thrives within the perception and interaction of one's being, for if locked in a void with no connections, how would one believe anything at all? Connections are what tie us to this planet and make us a part of the greater picture.

My spirituality stems from this concept of existence due to connections, and it has grown to be a facet of my life that brings me deeper relations to others and the earth. My patron deity exists *because* of the thoughts and emotions we as humans give them to do so, for if there are no believers, there is no being to worship.

We cannot thrive without connections, nor can we suffer without them.

Connection, identity, and community are all tightly intertwined to make up the experience of living. And when I found this perspective of existence, every moment I could acknowledge one of those pieces became foundational to how I value it. Every one of my communities is worth fighting for

Part 2: Intersections

Chapter 5: Molly

"The story begins to seep out

Minds absent
For sanctuary most solemn”

“Celebration for the world
Translated blood-red”

“Ideological creed
Which is rooted to judge love”

For a planet as forgiving as the Earth, there are limitations to what it can recover.

We’re living in a world where some think it is safe to burn bridges with others, while still expecting the most of them. How can one find safety from the judgement of those who only seek to hear only their own voices? Such as a religiously conservative grandmother who was never met, but who’s opinions are still feared, or endlessly taking from an unsustainable resource without a backup plan or regard for the consequences.

In this, the ecofeminist mindset can come with a sense of loneliness, where discovering something that should feel natural, also feels isolated, for no one around you hears the revelation, nor can they feel your same connections. It is impossible to share identical lived experiences, so without the words to express it in ways others understand, it leaves one immobile with no direction.

But dealt with the same hand is finding more community than one knows what to do with. You are alone in your connections to the earth but at the same time are connecting to trillions of beings, far more than feels reasonably manageable. How can a single person find the energy to have compassion for every blade of grass?

But then you think again, *Are these feelings still worshipping the human perspective?*

Gift the world to humanity!”

“The centuries sang
For time previous.
For history to remain visible”

“Some wept
But mourning is oblique”

To mourn the destruction of our planet is both valid and misguided, for a variety of reasons. Foremost being the sense of forfeiting our own cause; we must remember where we came from, and what we have lost, but the habit of use and abuse must die. Another is that continued human perspective that rules our thinking. We are not the only creatures on this planet, and likely none of us will be the creatures on this planet millions of years from now. The world is “ours” as we know it now, but we are not its salvation, for it shall live on long after we pass.

Mourning our destructive past is more just in the context of our histories, and who paid the price of us taking so long to understand. But the guilt we feel, the negativity, should be transformed into something for tangible change. We should take heed of the sprouts that thrive after a forest fire.

Ultimately, there is no 'one' among trillions—that lonely soul is still a part of the ecosystem like all others. We need to treat ourselves, each other, and the earth with that presiding concept, that we are only a small part of a whole.

But inherently, as the human existence implies, we have emotional and spiritual consequences that must also be addressed. The complex relationships we have with all that's around us puts barriers between us and the simplistic ecological community. *How do we balance our own survival with the survival of our surroundings?*

"The futility of victory"

This amount of introspection leads to the understanding that there is no sense of 'victory' waiting for us at the 'end' of activism. Where we currently are points us in the direction of self-destruction, as there is no good future for us harming each other and the surrounding world. But even still, a perfect world just isn't a possibility, and there would be no way to define it in a way every person and creature agrees. So, within our current existence, we have to strive for what better could possibly look like to us while we can experience it.

And that doesn't mean striving for success, it means striving to see change. The first suffragettes would never vote, but their actions had an impact.

We can make an impact.

**"Dear brothers and sisters
Me, a simple and humble labourer
Entrust us the joy of unflinching help"**

For ourselves and for the place we call Earth, we must work together to put aside personal grievances, put aside bias, and move forward together to create a world worth living in. We must stop harming our own communities for personal retribution.

"We may read clues about the genesis of self-awareness in our cultural myths, which are fraught with ambivalence and religious fear—for example, the "fall" from grace, with its accompanying separation from a divine source of sustenance and from nature." — Stephanie Lahar

Taking the time, energy, and emotional vulnerability, to connect with all aspects of the world around us, reasonably also brings fear.

What kind of meditation is fearful?
The kind that has something to lose.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that each of our generations seems to become more and more anxious. This anxiety we feel, about what looks like nothing at all, may truly be too much awareness.

But maybe we aren't more anxious at all, rather the changes brought by our elders helped remove the restrictions that kept us from being vulnerable.

In modern societies, where historical relativity would claim humankind is doing better than ever, our circumstances never cease to feel dire.

Whichever of the innumerable causes, fear accumulates differently in all things, the next step is to gauge the level of risk in proceeding.

Perhaps that missed connection would have been gloriously fruitful, had it been given the opportunity.

Perhaps the possible rejection would have hurt too much to recover.

A painting of a young woman in nature reaching out to the old woman surrounded my religious infrastructure, with a barrier dividing the two people

Chapter 6: Lizzie

"I was born Holy
The water of life clear"

"But life is not easy
Through rivers clustered
Beautiful dreams
Meeting no faith"

"mother, sister,
Surrounded by woods
The clear waters of the past gave unrest
Parents rejoiced
But they did not see
The violence all young people live in
Another meadow drowned"

"Nature and religion
Ever in war
Forest and land became the gymnasium of his government
Students study intelligent torture"

"Religious existence writes deep impressions of boyhood
Ambitions transformed a home into lands for apocalyptic believers"

"The home was wounded
By the grim reality he found"

Ecofeminism rises in the basis that feminist subjects and ecological subjects are siblings under the same abusive guardian. When the ambivalence of patriarchy leaves scorch marks, the burns scar both faces. It's not the idea that we treat one like the other, as the definitions would suggest, but they are delt the same damage as they walk together hand in hand.

But this battle is still one-on-one, of all survivors combined, and all authoritarians combined. Opposing ideologies segregate the teams for us naturally.

"he
Himself
Denied this life.
That the violence had been his
His pride endured"

Decades are spent in speculation about whether they are truly doing harm. The systems we live within refuse to take action for the destruction, and they feign skepticism against the more knowledgeable advice, so that pride and success can remain intact.

The systems don't change, and they teach each following generation the same key to their 'success', which profits from imaginary blockades put in place by their own hands.

"These oppressive days thrived
But the teenagers know
That they must not prescribe"

"an end
a beginning"

Where there is injustice walk the few who amplify their voices for the sake of others.

"his sister marched for the rains
Amid the chaos"

a painting of troops led through flames, rain clouds distinguishing the fire where they've walked

"they had been soldiers
Working for a cause in which they believed."

"It was not for lack of trying.
The critics decimated gardens of
Thoughts and prayers"

"These women, and others, acting with moral agency, were the instrumental in launching the national movement for environmental

justice, advocating for fit communities in which to live, work, play, pray, and learn. This moral agency is passed in part on an ethical consciousness that is an articulation of principles and values that affirms the activists' humanity and the humanity of those in their communities. Their advocacy also derives from an authority and confidence based on the moral validity of their cause and the spiritual support for their actions."

– Valerie Kaalund

Chapter 7: Shani

"Alien is the man
That spoke down-to-earth"

"Accepted was the teaching
of men overwhelming women"

"Brothers learning with territory
There lived fortunate accounts
but it followed him
like the dark shadow of war"

"Tradition holds to turn others obedient"

"Because we know all this from our experience, and know from a study of history that the domination of women and the domination of nature have long been politically, philosophically, and economically linked, our perspective differs from that of the men." – Linda Vance

Some traditions are sacred, and some 'tradition' is upheld to suppress certain voices.

No 'tradition' is worth respecting if it is not built with respect for its contributors. And a tradition worth keeping is not so easily broken by the abolition of privilege.

"Now to choose formidable salvation
and be the foundation
for unrelenting enthusiasm"

"unruly spring and summer
employed siblings
concerned for their future"

a painting of a tsunami forming over religious men who are threatening a cowering child

"Their forthrightness was dangerous
but unlike the brightest young progressives
he, he, he, (he, he, he, he)
would live guilt ridden"

Chapter 8: Alex

“A moment of faith
may not be central”

“among friends we place council
shocked by the world's Catholic takeover”

“morals considered universal
by nature
by western ways.
But they were not always the foundation”

“the council lived
to have a chance
and allow confidence
in change of conservative power”

“change must not be individualistic
with the true longing for a tomorrow
find shape with arms open to countries and cultures throughout the
world”

“We make a grave error if we try to separate individual well-being
from the health of the whole.”

“As a nation, we are beginning to follow the guidance of our elders
the pecans by standing together for the benefit of all. We are
remembering what they said, that all flourishing is mutual.”

- Robin Kimmerer

“Earth continues teaching reality
to help the obvious conclusions
live on different planes”

The individualistic thought is not only true for a person but for a nation, too. A coming together to aid a greater issue should bring with it a multitude of perspectives. Rather than change the ‘outlier’, embrace them, and destroy the concept of what “should” be.

The western way isn't the only way.

“International spirit
this modern ally of positive innovations
is the real crisis
will He assume responsibility of the population
with humility and willingness?”

painting of the tower of Babel

Chapter 9: Sarah

Painting of a child cowering in the shadow of their praying parent

**“Feminist debate
and homosexuality
test the conservative communities”**

**“critics in their closed mindedness
who disturb serenity
expressed displeasure
uncomfortable change spread great pains to Catholicism
thus it was sinful”**

**“prosecutions of perspective ensuring skepticism
in the word and will of God”**

**“faith with integrity will value human life
and promise mankind feminism
as her love, equality, and reciprocity
called for an end to gender discrimination”**

“As environmental justice activists engaged in a protracted struggle for justice, we draw upon these many spiritual sources and guidance for the support needed to help create meaningful improvements for our communities adversely impacted by environmental justice”
– Valerie Kaalund

Spirituality and religion may play a vital role in the way an activist finds the will to proceed. There is no need to separate faith from the ecofeminist agenda, as long as there remains a precedence for individual autonomy to remain, no matter the differing beliefs. Power over one's identity and body is for oneself and their own belief system, not for foreign religious scripture.

**“Abortion is not cooperation with evil
abortion is not evil
the church has no business with abortion”**

**“homosexuality and the moral evaluation of homosexual acts
are not a matter of public debate
the homosexual person is not a sin”**

The concept of working with and by the environment, rather than erasing and building your own, was something I looked forward to in the creation of this book.

One of the overarching adversities I have faced throughout this process has also been the concept itself. I created a formidable challenge for myself to rewrite a religious composition into an analysis of activism, as the environment, such as these most recent pages, were not the most welcoming.

The words on these pages happen to be virtually unusable to compose something optimistic, or even humane in the mind of a feminist. But given the challenge, I am going to take this opportunity to provide introspection on what this situation resembles to me.

Land unhospitable, with little to no agricultural promise, provided by the words of a patriarchal figure, and containing resources that would make one sick if consumed, can only allow me to make a comparison to the reservations of indigenous peoples.

I want this page to act as the land acknowledgement within my assignment, despite its imperfect placement. Although an acknowledgement deserves to be the first words presented, I believe this is a significant place to represent the thoughts and energy I give towards indigenous lands. It sits upon a page that is bereft of respect, and I put it here with respect, as I want its placement to provide this space an opportunity to cultivate meaningful connections that it otherwise would be incapable of.

“Women and all AFAB people are more than their uteri”

“Questions above any religion”

“Questions are a risky business.”

As Andrea Batista states (2009), and especially for such that provide moral ambiguity or spiritual struggle. For both subject matters, it is wise to hold onto the philosophy of asking, not for an answer, but for thought.

Thought for oneself, and beyond oneself, it is important to ask the right questions for surpassing societal restrictions.

**“Freedom is not liberation from theology
it is authority in autonomy”**

**“questions representative of reality takes precedence
read in to why”**

a painting of a person being pulled away from a door while they reach out to it

**“Silencing the person
as engaging enjoy
is described as unabashed hedonism”**

**“the world must have wondered:
could this be evil and selfishness?
the world whole and unsweetened has native responsibility”**

Chapter 10: Sophie

**“The shock of tragedy
will confront a myriad of issues
and teach spirituality as equal”**

**“the defeatist would believe
in devastating changes”**

art of girl at a bus stop in front of a wall, with a flaming town behind it

**“Doom and disaster
would present diverse cultures
and move toward Transition”**

**“nature will expect
exceptionally well-implemented movements
to diminish centuries of problems”**

**“I, a young voice
who placed footsteps with others
and promoted diversity
will continue on the path toward autonomy”**

**“the safer shore still appeals to some
but the issue is definitively human
within its core”**

“what will happen?”

The problem is human.
The preservation of human depends on a human solution.

Nature will always have a way to overcome and evolve. Whether species known or new, life will find a way on this planet we call earth.
But our imminent threat was caused by, and directed at, us.

Many like to call it a conspiracy, to avoid means taking no onus for the problems and the ability to claim victim.

We have a human responsibility to reign in our systems and overcome our own hierarchies and prejudice. For the benefit of our selves, but moreover for the respect of the planet we share with so many others.

Just because nature is resilient doesn't mean it should be subject to our abuse.

We know it would be entirely possible given a collective effort. But the collective cannot be a minority amongst people, nor can it be in lack of diversity.

We can strive for rehabilitation, but only together, land and human.

**“In all phases of life
in the entire world
at the heart is diversity”**

“what will happen?”

art of the bus stop with the charred town behind it

“Is there a way to know whether there were ever times and places when human beings lived in easy cooperation with each other and the nonhuman environment, without the sexist, oppressive, and exploitative complex of power relations we call patriarchy?” – Stephanie Lahar

“What will happen?”
**“both opportunity and high risk around the world
in a world**

—with dangerous chasms
—billions of people
unity and reconciliation is crucial.”

“common ground
in both communities and throughout the world
has a stake in this conflict of the current future”

“war is no friend
of international and global peace”
“*what will happen?*”

art of the bus stop, trees growing behind it

“This unique body
continues to grow
its long suppressed crisis
is, at its best
in the forefront of investigations”

“Our challenges cannot be “siloeed” or looked at in isolation if we want to rise above them.” - Sheila Watt-Cloutier

“*What will happen?*”

art of broken bus stop, nature growing into it

“The lives of modern martyrs
work to save lives
from harassment by an oppressive regime”

“*what will happen?*”

Despite the need for collective action, our current reality is the relative few of us who don't have the corporate power that our capitalist central societies desire from us.

It means that our actions must be mighty for their size and be able to compete against those who wish to silence and suppress.

Our diversity is within all creatures and entities.
We will grow.

“The role of women
on issues of women
raised the feminist”
“*what will happen?*”

art of nature overcoming the bus stop

“Spiritual power is founded by faith in the world
national, regional, ethnic, and theological differences unify”

“we who seized the native land
need to be the type the world no doubt trusts”

no bus stop, art of only nature

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