



**this zine is
about rape**

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This zine is about the experience of rape and sexual assault in fiction. It is also about why it is important that those of us working to end rape culture be able to tell those stories in all their surreal, horrifying, confusing realness.

I will be using the words "rape" and "sexual violence" throughout this zine because that is what is what I am talking about. I will not be using SA or any equivalent terminology.

Please keep yourself safe while reading. The zine will be here if you need to take a break.

Introduction

I am a survivor. I do not want to tell my story in detail as part of this zine. That is my privilege and my boundary.

Instead, we're going to be talking about rape and other sexual violence in fiction and why it is not only acceptable, but critical, that we tell more stories *from the perspective of the survivor*.

When we tell stories of rape, so often the survivor is the object whose reality is prescribed by the subject, the rapist. Too rarely do we explore the experience of the survivor from inside; it's so much easier to reduce the violence to an "objective" view, violence is done to a body.

But what happens inside that body, both during and after?

In many ways, experiencing rape and sexual violence is quite literally a nightmarish experience: it's surreal, it can feel like a betrayal of known reality, and in almost all instances it lives in the event horizon of annihilation panic. Sexual violence splits a life into a "before" and an "after", and repeated sexual violence can cause further fracture. Trying to depict rape "realistically", as in the mechanics of subject-verbing-object, is not and can never be capable of capturing the full experience. We lose the words of the uncanny, the almost magical thinking that comes with experiencing and surviving sexual violence, the feelings of unreality or hyperreality, the fantastical ways the bodymind shapes the experience in order to survive. We lose the ability to talk about the imaginaries the survivor creates, which is to say we lose the ability to talk about a major part of the reality of sexual violence.

There are plenty of books on the "real world" experiences of survivors of sexual and other intimate violence. I strongly recommend checking out *Trauma And Recovery* by Judith Herman, *Beyond Survival* edited by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Ejeris Dixon, and *The Real Lolita* by Sarah Weinman if you're interested in nonfiction. However, this zine is not that. This zine is about the power of fiction to explain and externalize what is so often an internal reality.

Sexual violence in fiction isn't just for misogynistic creeps. It's for us too. It's how we shape, define, and share our survivorship with others. It's how we start and maintain our conversations. And it is so, so hard, but it is worth doing.

I wasn't born with this view. It took a long time for me to come around to the idea that I enjoy reading fiction that includes sexual violence as a core theme: I kept getting tripped up by either a) sensationalized, mechanical rape written for titillation, specifically in the Starz/HBO tradition or b) puritanical overreaction that dismisses any writing about sexual violence as sexual violence in itself regardless of how it's handled. I want this zine to be a space to struggle with the discomfort of that realization, the extremes, and the potential for survivor fiction (and existing fiction!) in-between. I want to talk about catharsis, healing, and the reality of the bodymind when what we were promised were the rules of reality are ripped away. I want to do this all through examining fiction, because it is in fiction where we find important emotional truths difficult to locate elsewhere.

This introduction is difficult to write. I can feel myself beginning to panic as I write it — it would be so, so easy to cancel me for this zine. I'm no longer constantly on Twitter, and I'm writing under one of my pen names, so it's unlikely I will catch too much direct flak. However, I — like many survivors — know that even talking about rape and sexual violence can set the nervous system aflame. I include my disclaimer because I hope people will be kind enough to themselves, and to me, to put the zine down if they cannot currently (or ever!) engage with it. I will probably engage with a comfort novel after finishing this.

However, I am writing this because I feel it is important to write. I hope you get at least as much out of reading it as I did of writing it.

Tldr: we need more stories about rape that don't just end with the body being violated and the survivor only acknowledging themselves as an object in a subject/object action. Rape is not the destruction of property. Rape always includes at least two people, and the survivor is walking away with a "before" and an "after", with the after containing worlds, imaginaries, behaviors, modes of healing, and understandings shaped by a massive betrayal of what we think of as basic human decency — and the realization that it could happen again, for any reason. "Realism" focused only on the physical violation by the rapist inflicted on a victim does a disservice to survivors — so much of our experience can only be communicated through the fantastic, the absurd, the surreal, and the sublime. This zine is about reclaiming that space in art and fiction.

I am writing this for everyone who felt their rape was a haunted house. I am writing this for everyone who felt their rape was nightmare logic, or a preview of a dystopia, a conspiracy's grand experiment or an abduction to another plane of existence. I am writing this for everyone who feels that nonfiction will never quite capture the "during" and "after", because we don't

have grounded, solid, tangible words that capture where our minds and hearts go when our bodies are violated.

Yours in love and solidarity,

Catharzine Aubusson

July 2025

PS: A Helpful Table of Contents

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Trigger Warning: Rape

I have tried to make the intent and scope of this zine very clear: it is an exploration of rape in fiction, written/acted/sung/directed/etc with the intent to stand in solidarity with survivors. This zine is called "this zine is about rape." I hope that is enough expectation-setting. I hope that those of you who are not in a space to engage with this right now can find some grace for yourselves, while those of you who can will engage in good faith with an open heart.

I am not one of those people who believes trigger warnings are inherently good or inherently evil — they are simply a tool, and they can be used and misused just as any other. I do get a little smile when I see a trigger warning used properly and kindly, but that is a personal preference. I chose to title my piece "this zine is about rape" to serve as an all-encompassing trigger warning. You know what you're getting into. You can either close that door for another day, or open it a little and peer in, or throw yourself across the threshold. What is important *to me* is that I have set expectations for myself (I am writing about rape) and for you (you will be reading about rape).

That setting of expectations, that *informed consent*, is extremely important to me. It may not be to you. You can write a zine about that in your own way.

Come in, come in, and proceed whichever way is most comfortable for you.

“Rape should never be a plot point!”: An Incomplete Reading List

- ♻ **Any Man** by Amber Tamblyn
- ♻ **A Study In Drowning** by Ava Reid
- ♻ **Bluebeard’s Bride** by Sarah Richardson, Whitney “Strix” Beltran, and Marissa Kelly
- ♻ “All My Darling Daughters” by Connie Willis
- ♻ The Dollanganger series by V.C. Andrews
- ♻ **Rosemary’s Baby** by Ira Levin
- ♻ **To Have And To Hold** by Patricia Gaffney
- ♻ **Changeling: the Lost** by Onyx Path Publishing
- ♻ **Deviant: the Renegade** by Onyx Path Publishing
- ♻ **The Last Housewife** by Ashley Winstead
- ♻ **Sharp Objects** by Gillian Flynn
- ♻ **The Spirit Bares Its Teeth** by Andrew Joseph White
- ♻ **Lord of Secrets** by Alyssa Everett
- ♻ **Tell Me I’m Worthless** by Alison Rumfitt
- ♻ **Manhunt** by Gretchen Felker-Martin
- ♻ **The Hellbound Heart** by Clive Barker
- ♻ **The Handmaid’s Tale** by Margaret Atwood
- ♻ “Four Steps To The Perfect Smokey Eye” by Clair Humphrey
- ♻ **Room** by Emma Donoghue
- ♻ **I Keep My Exoskeletons To Myself** by Marisa Crane
- ♻ **My Dark Vanessa** by Kate Elizabeth Russell
- ♻ **Parable of the Talents** by Octavia Butler
- ♻ **Iron Widow** by Xiran Jay Zhao
- ♻ **Alchemized** by SenLinYu
- ♻ **Annie Bot** by Sierra Greer
- ♻ **Bright Young Women** by Jessica Knoll
- ♻ **Speak** by Laurie Halse Anderson
- ♻ **WARHOUND** by Kallidora Rho (Archive of Our Own)
- ♻ **MYRMIDON** by proletkvt (Archive of Our Own)
- ♻ **KULT: Divinity Lost** from Helmgast AB
- ♻ **Praise The Hawkmoth King** by Sage the Anagogue

“Rape should never be a plot point!” pt. 2: An Incomplete Viewing List

- ♻ **Sweeney Todd** (1982, dir. Terry Hughes and Harold Prince)
- ♻ **Twin Peaks** (1990-1991, 2017, created by David Lynch and Mark Frost)
- ♻ **Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me** (1992, dir. David Lynch)
- ♻ **Jessica Jones** (2015-2019, created by Melissa Rosenberg)
- ♻ **Carnivàle** (2003-2005, created by Daniel Knauf)
- ♻ **Titus** (1999, dir. Julie Taymor)
- ♻ **Midsommar** (2019, dir. Ari Aster)
- ♻ **Blink Twice** (2024, dir. Zoe Kravitz)
- ♻ **Hellraiser and Hellraiser 2** (1987, dir. Clive Barker & 1988, dir. Tony Randel)
- ♻ **Promising Young Woman** (2020, dir. Emerald Fennell)
- ♻ **Woman Of The Hour** (2023, dir. Anna Kendrick)
- ♻ **The Perfection** (2019, dir. Richard Shepard)
- ♻ **Colossal** (2016, dir. Nacho Vigalondo)
- ♻ **The Geography of Fear** (2000, dir. Auli Mantila)

“Rape should never be a plot point!” pt. 3: An Incomplete Listening List

- ♫ “The Doll People” by SOFIA ISELLA
- ♫ “Me and a Gun” by Tori Amos
- ♫ “Matador” by Iuvcat
- ♫ “Gods and Monsters” by Lana Del Ray
- ♫ “Labour” by Paris Paloma
- ♫ “Cannibal” by Naethan Apollo
- ♫ “Nymphology” by Melanie Martinez
- ♫ “Unsweetened Lemonade” by Amelie Farren
- ♫ “Laura Palmer’s Theme” by Angelo Badalamenti
- ♫ “Tam Lin” by Anais Mitchell and Jefferson Hamer
- ♫ “Punish” by Ethel Cain (basically anything by Ethel Cain)

Once Upon A Rape

Once upon a time, someone decided that their own impulse, or will, or power, or expectation, or whatever overrode someone else's bodily agency. This was likely very painful and confusing for the victim, and probably lasted anywhere between five minutes and several years. If it ends with the victim living, the world gains a survivor, if not, another statistic. True crime and crime fiction alike tend to treat this as where the story ends, because the horrible violation is the act and the survivor is the object on whom the act was committed. The mechanics of the rape itself becomes the focus, because it is a subject acting on an object.

If the experience of sexual assault was anything like this, if it didn't so often shatter a life (or lives) into "before" and "after", if it didn't fill spaces with dreamworld logic and painful choices, then I wouldn't be writing this zine.

We need to tell stories about rape and sexual assault because it is so common. In our patriarchal capitalist society bodies, especially those coded as children or female, are treated like property upon which violence can be enacted. Too often, we focus on the aggressor, who they are, and why they did it, instead of on the survivor's experience, how we help them heal, what they're going through, and how to help restore their agency. While nonfiction from survivor perspectives is invaluable, fiction is uniquely positioned to tell these stories due to its ability to explore realities, emotional truths, and fantastical elements that may not be present or visible in the "real world".

Writing and reading fiction about sexual violence allow us to explore new imaginaries, ones where we have agency, and ones where we don't but that lack is explored in a way we can disengage with at any time. Angela Toscano's excellent paper on sexual violence and atonement for such (or lack thereof) in romance novels discusses this at length¹. Here we see our own traumas reflected back at us and the emotional truths played out on stage — but here, also we get *closure* and *catharsis*, no matter how unreal.

(I love a grovel in a romance novel. You can't make me stop loving a protracted grovel to the heroine.)

This leads naturally to *we want to tell stories about rape and sexual violence* because it is, no matter how much we might protest and deflect, a major part of human life as we know it at the moment. As I write this, Epstein is

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https://www.jprstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/JPRS2.2_Toscano_ParodyofLove.pdf

once again on the national stage², his alleged customer lists playing a major role in determining whether or not we're "allowed" to hate a corporatist authoritarian bully president, his survivors pushed to the side, a footnote in history. We're in the middle of a moral panic about trans people corrupting and assaulting children³, itself a child of the moral panics around human trafficking⁴ and the Satanic Panic⁵. Gisele Pelicot's story⁶ and seizure of the narrative⁷ shook the world in late 2024, but we barely even talk about that any more — she got her justice⁸ so her story⁹ is over, right? We know who the villain is. That's the end of it.

We're looking for villains around every corner, and in order to declare someone a villain, they have to have committed some form of lurid, unforgivable sexual crime against someone appropriately "innocent". Once someone is declared a villain, all focus is on them. Their survivors, if there are any, get pushed to the side. They are objects, attacked by a subject.

I once said we treat violence against children as a property crime. I stand by that here, but I would like to expand it to the idea that all sexual violence is treated like a property crime. It's so easy to take all the focus off the person who is hurting and put it on the person who hurt them, because after all, we're part of a carceral society. We want to see that person punished, humiliated, and excised because *only a monster* would do such a thing. Except, of course, when it's a friend of ours. Deep down, I think, we're all too aware of the tendency to unperson both the perpetrator and the survivor in radically different ways and wish to spare our friends the worst of it. It just happens that most tools mainstream society offers for this are absolute shit.

Telling stories about rape and sexual violence allows us to move beyond this simple carceral dichotomy of "inhuman monsters and their virginal, endlessly sympathetic victims". It creates space for survivors in all of our messy, prickly, dysregulated, sexual, healing glory. It allows us to show how those we love can also be the ones who harm us the most, not just monsters in

² <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/24/house-gop-rebellion-epstein-00473348>

³

<https://as.cornell.edu/news/cornell-expert-anti-trans-executive-order-belies-unfounded-moral-panic>

⁴

<https://lithub.com/on-white-slavery-and-the-roots-of-the-contemporary-sex-trafficking-panic/>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/31/us/satanic-panic.html>

⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/13505068241300757>

⁷ <https://time.com/7216401/gisele-pelicot-rape-case/>

⁸ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1037969X251334790>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUnmeU4rmfY>

the bushes. It allows us to navigate sticky spaces like “but what if I orgasmed and/or stayed hard” or “but what if my assailant was hot and I am still attracted to them” or “but what if I am still close to the person who hurt me” or “I wasn’t penetrated but I was confined” or “I could have stopped or controlled this if xyz” or “my rape doesn’t fit the script and no one will believe me” or even “I’m so cut up by the abuse, but can’t bring myself to be mad at them.” Laugh if you like, but I genuinely believe these are worthwhile questions to explore in a way that involves no real people being harmed.

We need to tell stories about sexual violence because it is part of our world, and we need to see ourselves reflected in our fiction.

We want to tell stories about sexual violence to find catharsis, closure, and new imaginaries that take us to places where healing is not only possible but an important part of the narrative.

We tell these stories because sometimes, it’s all we can do. Maybe our shout into the darkness will reach someone who will shout back.

Once upon a time, there was a rape survivor, and the story we tell got to be about them.

“How Do You Justify...”

(Or, On Dealing With An Understandable Disgust/Discomfort Response)

Recently, I saw a tweet (a skeet? It was on Bluesky) that said “It is so, so important that you learn the difference between A Gross Thing That Freaks Me Out, versus A Thing Which Causes Actual Harm In The World ... because as long as you don’t understand the difference, your disgust is a lever that can be used to manipulate you.”¹⁰ I want to say this is specifically about porn, but it’s really not. Horny and horror hit very similar parts of the brain and nervous system, and that’s not only ok, it’s totally normal. There’s a reason a lot of survivors have rape fantasies and write them out — horror is a transformative genre and allows us to explore things that hurt, frighten, and disgust us in a controlled and low-risk environment. Same goes for smut.

The thing that separates rape from sex is *consent*. You know this. I know this. I would hope most people we encounter know this, though you and I both know that’s a risky proposition if you don’t know someone very well.

However.

Once upon a time I went on a date with a prosecutor. I did not know he was a prosecutor at the time, just a lawyer. I was wearing EGL (elegant gothic lolita) and explained a bit about the history of the fashion to him. When I came to the apocryphal stories about men yelling “hey lolita!” at people wearing the fashion, this man looked directly at me and said:

“Well, I’m glad it’s not actually referencing the Nabokov book. That’s a pedophile’s rape manual.”

Reader, I ghosted him after one date.

Is it true that *Lolita* has been used in grooming? Yes, absolutely, I’ve read enough memoirs to know that — a figure of authority giving a book with beautiful language to a teenager they’re at least partially responsible for “because you’re so special” . Does that make *Lolita* a pedophile’s handbook? Well... no, not really. It’s a look into the head of an active predator, and it’s meant to evoke a disgust response, not admiration. The prologue and afterword both actively denounce our narrator, Humbert Humbert (whose very pseudonym is meant to make him less sympathetic to the audience) and Dolores herself knows she’s being raped and abused! The language

¹⁰ <https://bsky.app/profile/tbskyen.com/post/3lujew5475c2t>

plays games with the reader, but that's the point: it's a horror novel made into a game by the lies and cruelties of the unreliable narrator.

Does this mean *Lolita* itself is harmful?

I would argue no — *Lolita* is an example of exploration of harm, by a possible survivor of that harm¹¹¹². Further, I think *Lolita* is one of the most misunderstood books in the western canon *even though* it has a "this guy is bad!" disclaimer at the beginning, simply because it evokes a disgust response. This response targets the novel itself, its writer, and readers both actual and imaginary. Whether or not we have read and enjoyed *Lolita* becomes a moral benchmark that says something about us beyond "read and enjoyed a difficult book."

For another example: Kate Elizabeth Russell's book *My Dark Vanessa* has been subject to a great deal of scrutiny as an "exploitative fictional retelling" of very real trauma¹³. It was published around the same time as *Excavation* by Wendy C. Ortiz, and apparently there was only room for *one* book about child sexual abuse at the time, because Twitter *shredded* Russell for allegedly plagiarising and profiting off the survival story of a woman of color and writing fiction about a very real problem. In response, Russell made a statement before disappearing from social media saying that "I do not believe that we should compel victims to share the details of their personal trauma with the public¹⁴." I agree!¹⁵

I have read both books and I am a huge fan of both; they live on my desk. While they do share some similarities – a teacher preys on a student at an exclusive private school – they differ in all other particulars. I am inclined to chalk this up to another discomfort/disgust response — this idea that there can't *possibly* be two popular books about sexual abuse, especially child sexual abuse, because we don't want to think about it being a common problem. There is only room for one story, and that story has to be the most sympathetic, the most oppressed, and the one that makes us feel the most good about ourselves. After all, we don't assault people. We couldn't possibly know or trust someone who assaults people.

It frustrates me personally that we have this idea that someone who writes about sexual violence of any kind must have personally experienced sexual

¹¹ <https://heatherparry.substack.com/p/will-we-ever-stop-being-deranged>

¹² <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/1119-lolita-podcast-73899842/>

¹³ <https://lithub.com/on-my-dark-vanessa-and-the-way-stories-of-trauma-get-told/>

¹⁴ <https://kateelizabethrussell.com/note-to-readers>

¹⁵ You'll note, I started this zine with "I do not want to tell my story in detail as part of this zine. That is my privilege and my boundary."

violence but only in the ways they're writing about, and only as an unambiguous victim. While I do think there needs to be more room for us to write about the emotional and physical truths of living with the trauma of physical violence, we also do not owe the world an itemized, chronological list of what happened to us, how, and why in order to write something that speaks to other people. We do not need to justify someone else's disgust or discomfort to put something out into the world!

This is especially true of queer and trans authors who write smut, pornography, whatever you want to call it. This year (2025 as I'm writing) I've found new ways to soothe and address my traumatized sexuality through dark, fucked-up erotica primarily written by trans women. Micro-genres like Empty Spaces and Mechsplotation have more than enough space for a cis girl me because, at the end of the day, I am respectful, thoughtful, and curious. I know which stories I like to engage with and which I can't handle, either right now or indefinitely.

Yet even here, in this near-paradise of hornyfic built on traumatized kinky queer sexuality, critiques of empire and conquest, and an understanding that we are telling stories both to titillate and horrify, unexamined disgust responses masquerading as moral or ontological concerns crop up fairly regularly. Observe this exchange between an anonymous commenter and Kallie, the author of WARHOUND (recommended above), a piece of dark erotic sci-fi that quite literally weaponizes the idea of revolutionary heroes against the revolution itself:

anonymous · 14 hours ago

What is your position on the ethics of creating media that uses rape as a method of titillation? I am familiar with works that use it for wider artistic themes or to explore elements of horror or society (and WARHOUND does that as well), but WARHOUND is my first time seeing that mixed with an explicit pornographic purpose. While I get CNC as a kink done between consenting adults, my feelings are different with fictional media, as fictional characters have no agency, and there is no real person who is "just playing" as Sartha. At the same time, many folks tangent to my circles have expressed defence of works such as this and "No Mercy," so I am interested in your position on these sorts of stories. From my POV, while I loved the writing, while reading it, parts of it felt like when an anime you are digging gets really creepy about teen girls. I mean this post as no insult I am in good faith asking to see what the moral argument in favor of fictional rape pornography is. Thank you for your time.

firstly, please understand that I am part of a community of readers, writers and general perverts in which the kind of thing I write about is not particularly unusual or taboo. that might seem strange to you, but I can assure you that WARHOUND is far from the only piece of noncon smut on Ao3 or the internet at large. it's a drop in the ocean. as such, I am not in the business of needing to provide 'moral arguments' for the things that I write. I think the presumption that I would have one or need to have one is strange and rude, but since you do seem to be asking in good faith I'll try to give you a full answer

that said... while you clearly feel that my writing (and other noncon pornography) requires a 'defense', to me, based on your question, it seems that there is no case to answer. indeed, to me it's quite baffling that you're OK with CNC between consenting adults (as you should be) but not with noncon porn, in which nobody can possibly hurt, not even consensually (or for that matter conceivably) because the characters are not real. you mention that it feels creepy to you. you're perfectly entitled to that feeling, but I am not accountable to it in any way

there are a bunch of 'defenses' I could trot out, about how it's fiction or free creative expression, about how it means something or is in service to a greater catharsis, but the truth is that those defenses generally assume a certain ethical standard that writers are presumed to be subject to. instead I simply don't understand why I would need to defend anything I write - why the onus is on me - and I don't think anything in your question really speaks to one. I would ask you to interrogate your own assumptions and biases about that

I know that might not be exactly the kind of answer you were hoping or looking for, but I hope you can see where I'm coming from here. in any case, I'm glad you liked the writing lol

anonymous · 18 hours ago

Hey, this is the person who asked the question about the ethical dimensions of noncon erotic fiction. Thank you for replying, especially since, as you pointed out, my question put you on the spot in a way you were not obligated to engage in, and you said on Bsky that you were tired when you answered it. You said I "assumed an ethical standard that writers are presumed to be subject to." I agree with you on that, I do tend to operate that media (and pretty much anything people do) has a certain level of ethical spaghetti to tangle through.

Some hold a more artistic expression absolutist pov, and while I respect that, I admit I can't jell with it. In a world that gave us Birth of the Nation, Loli and Shota hentai, the works of Shadbase and racist porn where white people say stuff like "give me that big nigger dick*", I do think that porn, even when there aren't real people involved can propogate some fucked up shit and that it is fair for writers to investigate and be investigated on how they engage with that. If someone draws highschoolers getting drugged and raped so that people can masturbate to it questioning the ethics of it doesn't seem to out of line to me. Tangent's aside, we share multiple communities and identities, so I would hope these messages come across as someone "on the same side" as you struggling to reconciled a moral contradiction, rather than a right wing normie outsider passing judgement of the kinky queers. Would it be accurate to say the TLDR on your position is that "Art needs no justification, and since the charcaters are fictional, anything that happens in the story is morally harmless by default?" If so, while I may hold a different position, I respect yours. Thank you for your answers. Especially since if this winds up being answered, you would have replied TWICE to someone openly questioning the nature of your (well-written) work.

*I'm Black.

I appreciate your perspective, and it's actually a lot more similar to mine than you might think. I'm not an artistic expression absolutist, although I do think that free creative expression is important and the presumption should always be on the side of the artist. I don't think that right should be infringed on unless there's a good reason for it to be - not vague feelings of discomfort or creepiness, but an actual, specific harm that needs to be prevented. Basically: anything goes, unless there's a good reason for it not to go. That's the TLDR of my position

Where I agree with you is that I think, yeah, there are a ton of creative works that are racist, sexist, homophobic etc., and that that's not OK. I agree with you that Birth of a Nation is a racist film that was unacceptable and immoral to produce. In the context it was made, it reflected, reproduced and proliferated racist stereotypes about black people and pandered to racist white fears. Even today, people still believe in a lot of those stereotypes. It's harmful and that's why it's wrong

Where I disagree with you is that I don't believe that noncon pornography is necessarily harmful in the same way. It depicts harm, yes, but my work (and other work like it) does not reflect or endorse the viewpoint that rape is OK. In fact, a lot of my work is erotic horror and relies on the understanding that it is very much not OK. Noncon porn doesn't encourage anybody to go out assaulting people - I don't believe it does in general, and I definitely don't believe it does when it's a transgender women writing niche lesbian mind control porn for a small online audience of (mostly) transgender women. I completely understand why you personal might find it uncomfortable, but I also believe that that feeling isn't enough and that the people reading my stories are perfectly capable of distinguishing artistic depiction from real life and from moral endorsement. I would compare it to horror films, or to very violent films. These things don't necessarily encourage or promote what they depict. That's not why they exist, they exist because people find these things, on some level, artistically and psychologically compelling to depict and to experience through fiction - and that is fine

Hopefully that fully explains my viewpoint. I don't see you as right-wing or anything - if I did, I wouldn't have answered your questions - but I do think that there's a long history of censorship of (especially queer) works of erotic art, and I hope that you can likewise see that I'm not being a free speech edgelord about this. I'm a kinky transgender lesbian who sincerely believes in the value, meaning and general harmlessness of expressing kinks, fantasies and horror stories artistically in the way that I do

WARHOUND is deliberately not a depiction of real-world healthy kink, nor should it be read as such. Many of the mechanisms of the kinks it depicts can only exist in fantasy. Nor is Kallie arguing that kink as a whole is a weapon of a fascist imperial state, ontologically evil, or part of a Social Darwinist natural order. By her own admission, Kallie is telling a transfeminine horror story¹⁶: the eroticisation of subsuming your gender and sexuality to the power of the state military apparatus. This isn't new —

¹⁶ <https://bsky.app/profile/kallidorarho.bsky.social/post/3limrxrqnos2j>

Isabel Fall wrote about something similar in *I Sexually Identify As An Attack Helicopter*¹⁷, though the eroticism was somewhat more subtle.

All of the stories recommended in the three lists at the beginning of this zine do include elements of transformation, eroticism, disgust, and/or power. That's intentional. I selected them because they made me uncomfortable and allowed me to engage with the vulnerability of my feelings around my own assaults in a controlled environment. I think that's so fucking important that these stories are out there, even the ones that I won't engage with, because someone will find them and have the same healing, cathartic reactions that I did.

But Catharzine, you read queer mecha rape porn. What won't you engage with?

I'm so glad you asked, strawman I've just made up in my head for the sake of this argument.

Famously, in my social circles anyway, I have an entire skeleton to pick with dark romance authors the likes of HD Carlton and Penelope Douglas. The Cat And Mouse series by Carlton is my special hyperfix-hate-tion and Natalie Meagan of Weirdo Book Club does an excellent rant review series of videos on why¹⁸. Further, Penelope Douglas's (themselves a queer enby) writing feels, to me, like a lazier and less thoughtful version of VC Andrews. I could also include EL James in here, but what she did for (to) the kinky dark romance oeuvre is well beyond the scope of this zine.

Do I hate these books? Yes.

Do I think they deserve to exist beyond censorship? Also yes.

Look, I can vent about how HD Carlton takes every single weirdly specific fantasy I have and twists it into something both banal and creepy at the same time. I can complain about Penelope Douglas's paper thin characterization and unlikeable male main characters whose only difference from the men we're supposed to hate is how hot they are. I even deleted a fairly-well-thought-out rant chapter to this zine about how human trafficking is a core theme of this particular strain of dark romance, not because we

¹⁷

https://isabelfall.neocities.org/Isabel_Fall_-_I_Sexually_Identify_as_an_Attack_Helicopter.pdf

¹⁸

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWy3ak7raTs&list=PLQ701wfbGeZB1fHU5gYM8FQMB4rzvIwuf>

want to explore the experience of survivors, but because it makes perfect villains for our already-villainous main characters to stand against without any whiff of hypocrisy. Fortunately for me, SWOP said this better than I could — as mentioned, this zine is being written during a resurgence of Epstein conspiracies so it's on the forefront of everyone's mind¹⁹.

But I don't think they should be censored. In fact, I think there should be more shitty heterosexual dark romance in the world, just as I think there should be more fucked up queer smut²⁰. The audience is not the same, but the reasons are painfully similar. These books provide a *safe, fictional, and controlled* way to explore abuse, control, catharsis, kink, fear, and fantasy²¹, among other things. They do not involve any real people being harmed and they are not instruction manuals, nor are they expected to be. In general, I believe that folks reading dark romance understand that their book boyfriends are just that — book boyfriends.

But Miss Aubusson! What about Wade Wilson, the "Deadpool Killer" and his dark romance-reading fandom on TikTok²²?

If we are to judge whether or not a work deserves to be censored by its worst and most vocal fans, the popular TTRPG actual play show Critical Role deserves to be delisted, shadowbanned, and not available in most countries unless you use a shady VPN — and in that instance, the performers have some miniscule say over what their fandom does with their work. The most the author can do is communicate their intent clearly and kindly — with or without content warnings, the argument over their use as a tool is beyond the scope of this zine — and hope their readers Get It.

As someone who Gets It as an audience member, I am less willing to believe that the vast majority of audiences doesn't Get It too. I am not so jaded as to think that I am the only one who Gets It and maybe the other sheep will

¹⁹ <https://swopbehindbars.org/so/46PWZUqld>

²⁰ While I am well aware of the disparity in the publishing world between marginalized and mainstream authors and stories, discussing that in detail is beyond the scope of this zine. I have, however, attempted to feature mostly queer, trans, and nonwhite creators in my recommendations.

²¹ Especially fantasies that cannot feasibly be engaged in IRL, at least without a certain amount of heavy roleplay, i.e. "a wealthy grey-hat hacker man is stalking me and killing other men who touch me simply because his love for me overwhelms him" or "a beautiful woman in the military drugs me with a heavy hallucinogen and rewrites my personality so I do not feel guilt or shame over disappointing those who look up to me". These fantasies are actually normal and healthy, we're imaginative creatures, but enacting them in full would go against the laws of physics and/or get several three-letter agencies involved.

²²

<https://www.newsweek.com/wade-wilson-killer-prosecutors-sentencing-florida-death-penalty-1945207>

wake up someday. As a writer and designer who specifically aims for people who Get It, I am gratified by the curiosity and bravery of my own audience.

Your disgust response is not a moral guide. It is an autonomic reaction, like fight/flight/freeze. While it does protect us from disease as a sort of “behavioral immune system”²³, it is about as reliable for distinguishing whether or not something is ethical as a Zade Meadows from *Haunting Adeline* is for finding a “mean-ass burger” instead of a hot author.

Sorry, bad joke. My point is that disgust is not a metric for ontological worth. It is totally ok to not engage with things that disgust you, but to suggest a blanket ban is not only shitty, but deeply dangerous. You risk censoring the voices of survivors, as well as making it far more difficult to tell stories about sexual violence both unusual and standard — which then lessens the ability to talk about such thing as part of normal discourse, and so on.

It is my hope that this zine will encourage you to feel the same, and maybe to seek out some art that allows you to engage in this tender, painful, and vulnerable space in a way that makes you feel both held and brave *and* allows you to move past your initial disgust response.

²³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3013466/>

Contributing Essay: So you've decided your heroine's been raped²⁴.

She's raped. We're not describing the experience here, the action on her body. That's irrelevant right now. What matters is that she was raped, she survived, and now there's an After™.

What comes after?

Some fiction will have me believe there are two options for her to take:

A. She's damaged; a frail damsel who fears men now, whose trauma haunts her to this day – the woman who trigger warnings are meant for, who has therapy twice weekly. For her, there is no 'after' – the 'during' of the rape lingers on, even long after the act has stopped. Eventually, there will be some romantic, tender man who comes along who will teach her how to forgive men and move on from her trauma – with him.

B. She's scarred but strong; she's a badass heroine for whom rape was not a merely a mentally and emotionally harrowing experience, but a *plot point* – an event from her to emerge from strong and hardened, as if forged in a crucible. She'll probably end up dead at some point (she's damaged now; she's not a romantic option for the hero now, so she's disposable), but the author will get Feminism Points for having a Strong Woman Heroine™ included in the book – right?

I've yet to see either 'after' scenario ever actually happen in real life.

So, authors: I've decided to provide you with 10 new raped heroine archetypes – ones I've actually seen, been, known, met. Maybe these archetypes will better resonate with your readers:

1. She's twisted, she's been warped by sexual violence; her sense of humor and what's 'normal' is wildly out of touch with what society deems as 'normal'. She functions fine in society (mostly), but her trauma crops up at unexpected times – when her friends are talking about their first times, about their parents teaching them about their periods.

But it isn't even trauma that flares up the most; it's *jealousy* – she's never going to be able to share her stories of those key memories and relate to her friends in the same way. No one wants their tales of first fumbblings in high

²⁴ The pronouns in Liz's essay are explicitly gendered due to the prevalence of a specific gendered element to rape and sexual violence — however, it should not be taken to mean that CA or Liz believe only women can be raped or only men can be rapists, or indeed that it's limited to those two genders.

school interrupted by the seven year old whose stepdad visited in the night and left her to fall asleep in her own blood. No one wants to hear how she was put on birth control at age nine – ostensibly for ‘dancing’, but her mother knew exactly what had been happening for years by that point – and didn’t get a period until long after was normal for most girls.

Is jealousy an acceptable reaction to rape? To sustained sexual violence? Is ‘being jealous of not being raped’ an emotion that is going to fuck up her friendships? Is she only ever going to manage to be friends with other girls who were fucked up and raped in the same cult she eventually escaped?

Is frustration an acceptable response? If *she* endured it for so long and survived without having panic attacks, why is her friend constantly still breaking down and having panic attacks after her *one* attack, now almost a year later? Sure, give her room to heal, it takes time, blah blah blah—she tries to give her grace, but some dark part of her mind won’t shut up, whispering *she only even got raped once, and she wasn’t even bleeding afterward*

2. She’s resigned; sexual violence is just part of being a woman in society, and to some degree, she’s *accepted* this role. She’s a feminist who staunchly believes in breaking down rape culture and destroying it, but she’s cynical enough to realize that she *does* still live in a rape culture, and she knows how to navigate that in society. She’s been raped before and survived, but she had to fight back from it, get over her PTSD.

When she’s led into the basement at an event at 2am, her handicapped body too weak to resist or fight back, she knows exactly what’s happening here; she’s already said no, but he’s decided he hasn’t heard. She tunes out his foul descriptors of what he’s going to do to her, of if the rice bags are comfortable enough to rut into her against, and she takes back power in the only real way she can – she leans into it, plays along like she isn’t being forced to do this, like it really is the raunchy fantasy he wants it to be. She trails her nails down his chest and undoes his fly, and she gives him the best head of his life, like she’s desperately competing for Fellatio Queen, knowing getting him off with her mouth will save her other orifices.

When he finally cums, gasping for breath and starry-eyed, she’s able to take advantage of his moment of weakness – to pull away and stand, tuck her breasts back into her top from where he’s ripped them out, say something about not wanting to be caught by security or being on her period -- some inconsequential excuse and lie one way or another – and flee.

Later, she wonders if it even *was* rape. She was an active participant. How

could she ever convince someone that she didn't want to do it, if she actively encouraged him to cum down her throat? How can she possibly explain that it was a choice between outcomes, both of them bad, but one of them worse?

She's a feminist. She knows it *was* rape – it just doesn't really feel like it this time.

3. She pretends it never happened; she minimizes. It happens to lots of women, it's not really a big deal. She hides her trauma by pretending it's not traumatic, that she doesn't disassociate and see her body from outside herself each time it happens. If it's just part of being a woman, then there's no need for her to be upset or shaken by it – it's just another unpleasant part of femininity to get used to, not entirely unlike having a period.

When another woman in her friend confesses what happened to her and breaks down in tears, she's momentarily confused as their friends rush to comfort her, to hold her as she weeps. She's forgotten for so long that she's forgotten that really, what's happened to her – *been* happening to her, even – isn't really okay at all.

She struggles to be a good friend afterwards. She wants to be, but it's *hard* – facing her raped friend means facing what's been happening her, and she really doesn't want to have to face the truth like that.

4. She's paranoid and suspicious; she doubts men's motives, doesn't drink in public anymore, doesn't have sex with men. She leans into her bisexuality to keep her safe, and keeps away from men who might harm her.

Sure, it's 'not all men'. She knows this. But it's *mostly* men. And it's mostly men who objectify her in the streets, who raise their voices and grow violent when they're angry or insulted, who are taller and bigger and can physically overpower her.

So sure, it's not *all* men. But it's *enough* men to justify her actions, and she cuts men out of her life entirely like cutting off a tumor, focusing on living the best life she can fully immersed in female friendship, relationships, and sisterhood.

5. She's scared and afraid; she hides her pain in ice cream and potato chips, in Taco Bell at 1am regularly. When she sees the revulsion on men's faces when they see her ballooning figure, she feels no shame for being fat and undesirable in their eyes – all she feels is *relief*.

If her body is undesirable, she can hide in plain sight. Men do not see fat women; they are not objectified or wanted. She will not become a target again, now - she will be *safe*.

6. She's shaken and unhinged; she only remembers bits and pieces, flashes of memory and sensation that filtered past the drug she'd been slipped. She obsesses over HIV tests for months, though she's trying desperately to keep herself together for her day job – she can't afford to lose her health insurance now, not when she might need a Truvada prescription depending on her latest results.

None of her friends know that anything happened until she gets her final test results on her phone in the middle of a party, and finally breaks down, crying in relief – that she's clean, that she's healthy, and that it's finally *over*, something she can leave in the past.

Only, she's just broken down at a party in front of her friends crying. So maybe not *quite* yet, but she'll be able to leave it in the past and forget about it soon, right?

7. She's not scared, she's *mad* – she *trusted* him, and he violated her in that way. She'd known the statistics – that most rapes are done by someone who knows the victim – but she'd never thought it would happen to *her*. She thought she was a better judge of character than that, that she wouldn't have a friend who was a *rapist*. She's mad at him for raping her, she's mad at society for encouraging rape culture, and she's mad herself – *so* mad at herself – for ever being his friend in the first place.

Serial killer and true crime podcasts fill up her playlists almost without her noticing; she falls asleep planning the perfect crime that she'll never commit, the one that would make him pay. She keeps her anger behind closed doors, behind flinty eyes, so no one knows. But every once in a while, something will nearly slip out, and she'll have to catch herself – saying that kind of specific, violent detail is the type of thing that could stick in someone's mind for them to remember when the cops come around.

Not that she'll ever *actually* do it, of course. Thinking about it's harmless; practically a therapeutic tool.

But she silences herself anyway.

Just in case.

8. She's numb. If rape comes up in conversation, she'll bring up her own if it's relevant – either as anecdotal evidence or to relate and show empathy

for another person. But the details are facts, recited off a sheet in her memory like statistics at a press conference. Nothing is processed, nothing is handled – but she continues on, leaving the experience trapped in a box in the back of her mind, where she doesn't have to deal with it.

Years later, she will see a sex therapist for EMDR therapy, and she will cry a lot. A *lot* a lot, as her box(es) slowly get emptied and repacked. She cries a lot during it, so much that she wonders if it's even worth going through; but no one ever said processing trauma was easy, and she knows now, as an adult, that sometimes it is good to do things that are hard.

9. She's vocal. She talks about it – she was raped, this is what happened, and rape is bad. Women aren't supposed to talk about rape, after all – it's a horror that's meant to remain hidden, not something addressed directly and dragged into the light. But it's by talking about it that she regains her autonomy and power; if she talks about her rape and what it was actually like, there might be less rape.

10. She's better, but she's still not totally over it. She remembers it, the memory cropping up at random times. She rarely mentions it, and she doesn't like to talk about it.

But writing in zines about rape behind a penname helps.

Thanks

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