

Standing Powerfully In Her Own Words:
The Poetic Solo Performances of Indo-Canadian Rupī Kaur

by
Simi Singh

B.A., California State University Sacramento, 2017

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

December 2019

© Simi Singh, 2019

The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Standing Powerfully In Her Own Words: The Poetic Solo Performances of Indo-Canadian Rupī Kaur

submitted by Simi Singh in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Theatre

Examining Committee:

Dr. Kirsty Johnston

Supervisor

Dr. Hallie Marshall

Additional Examiner

Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the online performance work of Rupi Kaur from feminist, postcolonial and performance studies lenses. Where other studies have focused on the literary qualities of Kaur's poetry, especially in terms of its aesthetics and the debates these spark amongst critics, I focus here on the transformative power of her poetry performances. Rupi Kaur is a bold, unapologetic agent for progressive social change. In this thesis I explore how the powerful imagery and themes of her written work combine with her online public performances. In particular, I analyze her choices about costume, facial expressions and bodily gestures, vocal intonations, Kaur's use of rhythm and pacing along with other performative elements. As analyzing her entire oeuvre is beyond the scope of this project, I focus on two of her most publicly performed and well-known poems: "timeless" (2017) and "home" (2017). I base my arguments about her performance choices on contemporary reviews from those who witnessed these performances live and on close analyses of her public performances of these aforementioned works during her 2016 TEDxTalk and interviews at CBC *Q* in Canada and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* in the U.S.

Lay Summary

Rupi Kaur was born in India in 1992 and she immigrated to Canada where she was raised in Brampton, Ontario. Although she arrived in Canada not speaking English, she now holds a degree from the University of Waterloo in Professional Writing and Rhetoric Studies. Then she self-published her collection of poetry entitled *milk and honey* (2014) which was later picked up by Andrews McMeel Publishing. In 2017 Kaur published her second collection, *the sun and her flowers*. In addition, she also travels widely for the purpose of sharing and performing. Through her written poetry, live performances and media interviews she has gained an international audience. Kaur has created an original artistry, mixing poetry with live and digital performance to advance her progressive social agenda. This thesis seeks to understand key features of Kaur's performances of her poetry to help make sense of their role in her artistry and public reach.

Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author Simi Singh.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Lay Summary.....	iv
Preface.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	viii
Dedication.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Origins of this Particular Thesis.....	1
1.2 Survey of Kaur's Biographical Details and Oeuvre.....	5
1.3 Kaur's Artistic Successes and International Impact.....	8
1.4 Introduction to Research Question and Thesis Argument.....	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	13
2.1 Introduction and Acknowledgment of Previous Scholarly Study of Rupī Kaur.....	13
2.1.1 Maartje Stift (2017) “Translating Poetry: Spoken-word versus Written Word”.....	13
2.1.2. David McQuillan (2018) “Aesthetic Scandal and Accessibility: The Subversive Simplicity of Rupī Kaur’s <i>milk and honey</i> ”.....	14
2.1.3. Philip Monks (2017) “The Importance Of The Poetry Book In The Digital Age: How Far Digital Technology Has Influenced Contemporary Poetry And The Status Of The Poetry Book”.....	15
2.1.4 Janelle Reinelt (1989) “Feminist Theory and the Problem of Performance”.....	16

2.1.5 Jeanie Forte (1989) “Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright- A Problem of Reception.....	17
2.1.6. “Drama and the Literary Tradition” by Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd.....	18
2.2 Applying a Postcolonial Lens.....	19
2.3 Applying a Feminist Lens.....	20
2.4 Accessibility and Understanding to Rupi Kaur Amidst Literary Criticism.....	20
Chapter 3: Performance “Home”.....	23
Chapter 4: Performance “Timeless”.....	37
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	50
Works Cited.....	52

Acknowledgements

Let me start by first and foremost thanking my supervisor, Dr. Kirsty Johnston, for her endless patience, limitless compassion, and all the imparted wisdom. Without you and your guidance this thesis would not exist. Thank you also to Dr. Hallie Marshall for providing assistance and invaluable feedback as my second reader.

Next I would like to acknowledge the contributions of other inspirational professors in the Department of Theatre and Film: Dr. Siyuan Liu and Professor Stephen Heatley.

I would also like to extend a deep bow of gratitude to artist Rupri Kaur. Thank you for capturing that which is good in this world and reflecting light in places of darkness.

And finally, to my family who deserve the biggest hug of gratitude. All of you know just how much your unconditional love and support have lifted me up so I could reach new heights.

Dedicated to Women of Color Everywhere,

You are SEEN

You are HEARD

You always MATTER

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Origins of this Particular Thesis

I have had the immense pleasure of being involved in theatre from a very young age. With over two decades of experience ranging from performing in and directing various productions, incorporating technical innovations to such productions, playwriting and studying theatre in academic settings, I bring to my theatre studies a practiced understanding of the labour and effects of performance. Having this opportunity to research in detail the powerful poetic performances of Rupi Kaur is truly a gift as she is both a personal and professional inspiration. Like Kaur, I am a young Sikh woman living in a modern world where injustices and inequalities abound though we attempt to uplift the world with our art. Like her, I also understand artistry as a critical engine for progressive change, having experienced firsthand the transformative power of performance. Kaur is political, vulnerable, and committed to her egalitarian vision, as am I. These shared impulses have led me to her work and I have been eager to bring the analytical tools of my MA study to help make sense of Kaur's performance choices and their evidently far-reaching resonance and impact. Many people, like myself, encounter her poetry and performances online, and through her published collections. In addition, there are those who have witnessed her work live and shared vivid details about her performance choices and their effects. In my analysis, I build from these resources, as well as Kaur's poems and public interviews. My theatre and performance studies training has helped me to understand how different performance elements combine for effect and I have found feminist and post-colonial performance theories particularly valuable in this effort.

As I will describe in more detail below, Kaur is a product of two worlds. She was born in India in 1992 and then immigrated to Canada alongside her family at the age of four. This sense of dual origins is a common phenomenon in contemporary experience and its resonance with so many may account for some of the global acclaim and recognition that she has received. Her written and spoken words are testaments to her own particular balance between the distinct cultures that shaped her upbringing and life so far. She brings a spirited and hopeful attitude to this perennially difficult balancing act, seeming to navigate always with grace and poise.

As I will demonstrate, the theme of balancing is everywhere evident in her published collections, poetry performances, television and Internet appearances, and interviews. For example, in an untitled poem from *the sun and her flowers*, she writes mindfully about this balancing act: “perhaps we are all immigrants trading one home for another first we leave the womb for air then the suburbs for the filthy city in search of a better life some of us just happen to leave entire countries” (Kaur 131).

The theme is also evident in her 2017 interview with Lewis Howes, where she argued that, “How I was being treated as a woman, in my world and, how women around me were being treated [...] that sort of tension between them having to fight for their space was really what pushed me into writing poetry” (Howes). It has been meaningful for many of her readers, audiences and followers that Kaur tackles directly the many searing difficulties faced by women in modern society including heartbreak, domestic abuse, sexual assault, and even death.

Importantly, however, she is equally attentive in her explorations of joy, love, passion, healing, recovery and discovery. Writing from both personal experience and more observational points of view, she shares the vast range of her experiences and insights with the explicit intention of foregrounding deep and often taboo topics so that readers, audiences and followers might be able to see aspects of their own experiences in her work and gain from this connection.

Kaur's public performances continue the balancing theme, most materially in terms of her choices about costume. For example, in December 2018 she wore a couture gown created by Canadian designer Mani Jassal for a performance at the Sony Centre in Toronto, Ontario. The blush-colored gown was adorned with metallic embellishments and paired with skinny-strap stiletto heels. The gown itself reflected Western fashion and styling standards while also paying tribute to Toronto-based designer Mani Jassal, another Punjabi woman who immigrated to Canada at a very young age. The gown, styling and designer choice created was a material and visual tribute to Kaur's Indian and Canadian heritage.

In this instance and her many other live and televised public performances, Kaur evinces a careful consideration of costume and its role in shaping a sense of cultural tension or balance. Each ensemble is a visual tool that she uses to inform the audience of her cultural background and how that has shaped her contemporary identity.

For further example, Kaur has also shared the personal meaning behind several of the costume pieces that she wears regularly in public. There are a few select items that she is rarely, if ever, without. First, her rose and sandalwood oils which, Kaur says, “Reminds me of the time I spent with my grandparents in Punjab, India” (Fitzpatrick). Equally important in connection to her family heritage is a pair of ruby earrings which belonged to Kaur’s grandmother and mother and which she can frequently be seen wearing in her Instagram posts. Next is a mustard-colored pashmina shawl which, Kaur explained to Anna Fitzpatrick of *Toronto Life*, was “...gifted to me by a dear friend. It’s the shawl I always travel with on tour” (Fitzpatrick). Costume items are clearly imbued with meaning for her and she demonstrates a careful attention to their role in her travels and work.

As the details above suggest, Kaur’s public work is not limited to the words she has shared on pages. I believe her personal performances of both self and poetry have been significant contributors to the remarkably swift, large and international following she has garnered. In trying to make sense of these performances, I have explored the already significant scholarship emerging in relation to Kaur’s work. I approach this as well as Kaur’s work with care, caution, and respect. I am humbled by the already grand scale of Kaur’s poetic contributions and impact on scholarly discourse. To suit the scope and parameters of this MA thesis, however, I have decided to focus on Kaur’s performances of two key poems: “home” (*the sun and her flowers* 2017) and “timeless” (*the sun and her flowers* 2017). The poem “home” is about Kaur’s personal experience with sexual assault, a crime that is often silenced and denied within the Punjabi

community for fear of shame and social ostracism. I applaud Kaur's transparency and audacious sharing in her evident commitment to bring about change. Her public performances of "home" are particularly powerful in the sense that she brings her very body into public space to tell her truth in flagrant challenge to those authorities and traditions which would seek to deny, closet, shame and silence her on this taboo topic. Her present, speaking body in the delivery of the second poem I discuss, "timeless" is equally powerful for it also centres around her very body, again challenging those who, through patriarchal ageism, would seek to silence it in the future. Indeed, her decision to share "timeless" at the CBC *Q* radio taping, and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* helped to build a performance archive that can be added to by her future self. In each of these cases, her performances allow her to embody and amplify the ideas of her audacious, powerful and evidently resonant poetry.

1.2 Survey of Kaur's Biographical Details and Oeuvre

In early October of 1992, Rupri Kaur was born in a small village located within Punjab, the northernmost region of India. She spent her earliest years there before eventually immigrating alongside her mother to Toronto, Canada, to join her father who had settled there previously. The family, like many other Sikhs, fled India following the violent persecution of Sikhs, namely Sikh men, following Operation BlueStar in June of 1984. Kaur recalls her own father leaving hastily in order to avoid any harm as thousands of Sikhs were targeted, arrested, and even murdered at the hands of the Indian government. Many of these individuals that were taken were never seen or heard from again.

Reeling from the immense injustices taking place in their homeland, Rupri Kaur and her family turned to Canada to start their lives as a family together again. Thus, a four-year-old Kaur arrived in a completely foreign country, one in which she neither spoke the language nor looked like most of those around her. “I went from a very warm place in India that was full of love [...] to a place that was cold, rigid, and where you couldn’t understand anything” (Fishwick). Given the language barrier, she has shared in numerous interviews and social media posts that she was handed a paintbrush by her mother and began painting and drawing, a hobby that would set the foundation for her artistic career decades later. By the age of ten, she had learned English, and was reading incessantly, another habit that ultimately inspired Kaur to write herself.

Kaur was only seventeen years old when she offered her first poetry performance. This took place in the basement of Toronto’s Punjabi Community Health Services Centre where the sponsors of the event were bringing awareness to the Sikh Genocide of 1984. This initial step into the world of spoken word was a night of immense success and positive feedback for Kaur. As one spectator of Kaur’s work has argued: “Her poetry is raw it’s real [...] She addresses so many topics that other people may be too afraid or too timid to speak about. It’s very unafraid, unashamed poetry” (Huynh). Following her poetry recitation, attendees asked her where they could purchase her book, illustrating how strongly her words had resonated. She would continue to write and perform her poetry for the next few years until she made the unconventional choice to self-publish her first collection of poems, *milk and honey* (2014).

Kaur has argued that she learned to write through her suffering, teaching herself to process her emotions in this generative and ultimately self-empowering way. Facing others who had not only heard her words but had comparable experiences of their own, she felt it was her calling to produce a tangible source of inspiration and healing. “I had to take on the responsibility of putting it all together” (Howes). People approached Kaur relentlessly following her spoken word performances asking where they could purchase her poetry, which motivated Kaur to learn how to design, create, and self-publish. Then a student at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, she studied Rhetoric and Professional Writing which armed her with valuable knowledge and credentials to write her poetry. As a top student, armed with dozens of poems that were sparking interest, Kaur gained the confidence to self-publish in the face of some nay-sayers. Kaur remained unswayed by those around her, even when mentors and professors suggested she not go forward with her plan to self-publish the poetry collection. In a 2018 Our Shared Shelf interview conducted by actress Emma Watson, Kaur explained her logic behind making this bold decision against the prevailing wisdom: “‘No one’s going to take you seriously’ and I thought that’s fine cause no one’s taking me seriously anyway [...] who cares?” (Watson).

Kaur did undertake the painstakingly laborious process that is completing a self-published collection: “I self-published the day I realized all the poems were really one, long continuous poem from the front to the back” (Watson). It was not long, however, before her initial poetry collection *milk and honey* was picked up by Canadian publishing company, Andrews McMeel, which published the volume in 2014. The collection went on to sell over 2.5 million copies and

has been translated into over 25 languages since its debut. Kaur's collection quickly soared to the top of *The New York Times* Bestseller List where it remained for over a year. In addition to publishing her poetry collection, she became known to the general public after posting her poetry on social media platforms such as Instagram and Tumblr. For these carefully curated social media posts, she enhanced the poetry with small, original illustrations. This mingling of image and words has become a distinguishing feature of her work, both online and in print.

1.3 Kaur's Artistic Successes and International Impact

Kaur's writing, with its raw, emotionally-charged imagery, reaches readers and audiences alike. Kaur has explained her strong impulse to perform the work: "You get on a stage [...] People are listening and I'm able to speak my mind and I never want to stop" (Kabango). I believe her willingness to share her words live, to embody them in performance, is a strong contributing factor to her overall success. That she has been brave and willing not only to publish about taboo and emotionally charged events but to embody her ideas and feelings in live reading performances has been profoundly empowering both for her and audiences. As the abundance of online comments and responses to her work attest, it has been inspirational for many to see this strong, young, Sikh woman unabashedly speak her mind. Importantly, her work is both autobiographical and more broadly inspired by her observations of the world and people around her. She explores her immigrant experience and the broader experience of being Sikh in Canada, as well as her experiences of being a woman, an artist and a sexual assault survivor. For Kaur,

poetry is about the words but, she insists, it is also so much more than that. As she argues, “Anything done with honesty works, we need to listen to each other more” (Howes). In the face of some critics who have belittled Kaur’s work for lacking depth, she has highlighted her innovations and originality: “I think the issue is because we have a form of art that is highly, highly traditional - meaning poetry - then you have this other thing which is new and quite nontraditional [...] the gatekeepers are kind of confused” (Edes). Kaur’s ability to revitalize poetry among youth today is undeniable and she hopes that by publishing her own poetry she will empower other women to create their own work. Having faced scrutiny by scholars and critics, she hopes that voices like her will, “Continue to be shared and become part of the larger literary conversation” (Rao). Part of Kaur’s appeal is her determination, her tenacity, and her artful way of capturing in writing deep, widely resonant feelings and emotions. In her Our Shared Shelf Group interview, Emma Watson said of Kaur’s poetry: “I loved it as shorthand for ideas that I found really difficult to express myself, I could refer someone to this poem [...] I felt so lucky to have that as a tool in my arsenal that I could draw on [...] you’re giving people more words” (Watson). For Kaur, poetry is about honesty and sharing. Thus, while not solely autobiographical, her poems and performances centre around who she is, her life and experiences, and the personal moments and stories of people she cares about.

The bravery and tenacity of her sharing is evinced by the significant hostility, rancour and criticism that has been directed at her as a result of her work. Some critics have found the work to be too heavy and raw, particularly her explorations of assault, trauma, death, and rape.

The discomfort of some was so severe that Kaur has admitted to having been rejected from performing her work at certain venues within Canada, given the less than desirable reactions by some. She wanted to discuss her experiences as a Sikh immigrant while living in Canada, due to the fact that despite having a national, highly visible presence she felt the group was not represented in existing literature and mainstream culture. Kaur writes straightforwardly and speaks unabashedly from her platform. Defying conventions, Kaur has refused to adjust her writing and style: “People thought it was too much and raw. It’s not easy to digest. But... I don’t really care” (Fishwick). Her work is purposeful and what she does care about is her community of readers. When touring she wants to foster spaces that allow for the free expression of ideas, voices, and experiences, explaining that, “Art should be accessible to the masses, and when we start to tailor it in a way that keeps people out, then there’s an issue with that. Like, who are we really creating art for?” (Edes). In her public performance work, she seeks to build environments in which no voice is to be silenced, nor is any trauma or experience ignored or amplified over another. In a review, Moriah Forbes argues that, “Kaur’s poetry speaks directly to trauma without artifice or too many clouded metaphors. Her work is intensely emotional, dealing with many themes” (Forbes).

1.4 Introduction to Research Question and Thesis Argument

Kaur has argued that the contemporary world has promoted far too many examples of negativity, suffering, and division over unity, compassion. As a result, she believes that “The world needs healing” (Fishwick). This fundamental healing impulse is evident in her poetry and performances. Her supporters have explained the impact of her work on them in profound terms:

“People say exactly that, they found the book at the perfect time, when everything is falling apart” (Fishwick). Although she distinguishes the impulses of her two collections, both are rooted in the healing power of reflection. She has explained that while *milk and honey* was about holding up a proverbial mirror to herself, *the sun and her flowers* became about holding up a mirror to the entire world. In the latter she chose to widen her perspective and speak directly to issues of immigration, race, and unapologetic feminism. She recalls her reaction after witnessing the U.S. Presidential Election in late 2016: “I’ve never been more aware of my color” (Fishwick). Kaur was in San Diego, California at the time and has explained that she did not leave her apartment for fear of what might happen. This experience fueled the broader educational and empowering impulses of *the sun and her flowers*, as compared to the more self-reflective healing aims that drove *milk and honey*.

In both collections, Kaur’s poetry often concentrates on the simple yet meaningful examples of beauty within our world, urging readers to find their own examples. For example, Kaur has explained that getting dressed is a pleasure for her, especially given her childhood reliance on older cousins for hand-me-downs. She cites a time when she was given a new pair of red corduroy jeans and the exuberance it brought about, arguing that “It was the first time I felt like a girl” (Fitzpatrick). Given Kaur’s own longstanding self-awareness of the power of costume and the urgings of theatre and performance studies scholars to attend to such choices, in this thesis I analyse her sartorial choices alongside other performance elements that combine to shape public

engagement with her and her poetry. In the following chapters, I explore how her choices about costume, gesture, intonation and other performance elements, help her to embody and amplify her original, politically and personally provocative works.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and Acknowledgment of Previous Scholarly Study of Rupi Kaur

Although it is less than a decade since the publication of her first poetry collection, Rupi Kaur's work has already generated a significant body of critical response, including work generated as part of graduate thesis research. In what follows, I survey two contemporary Master of Arts theses and a doctoral thesis, as well as the work of a few key further Kaur analysts.

2.1.1 Maartje Stift (2017) "Translating Poetry: Spoken-word versus Written Word"

The first MA thesis is by Maartje Stift, from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, entitled "Translating Poetry: Spoken-word versus Written Word" (2017). Her primary research question—"What are the differences in translational problems and approaches between translating written-word poetry and spoken-word poetry?" (Stift 3)—provides a critical analysis of key translation differences that distinguish the forms. Additionally, Stift provides translation strategies for the purpose of showcasing how poetic elements translate when shifting from one language to another, as shown by her own work in translating Kaur's poetry from dutch.

Like Stift, I am invested in the relationship between written-word poetry and spoken-word poetry, though my research hones in on the ways in which Kaur strategically combines poetry and performance for the advancement of her feminist agenda. The harmonization of her two art forms requires an understanding of both mediums, poetry and performance respectively, and from there we begin to understand the thematic content on a much deeper level. Stift's study of Kaur's poetry has helped me to better understand its key thematic and formal features.

For example, with regard to “home” by Kaur I am able to apply Stift’s knowledge of spoken word and slam poetry, especially concerning how Kaur uses this form to cut down the distance between herself and her audience. Kaur echoes the history of spoken word, as defined by Stift, choosing to write and perform in accessible language rather than relying on more rarefied or elitist language that might only be received by a small minority faction. I am grateful to Stift for such insights and the ways in which she has helped me to understand the power and reach of Kaur’s poetry beyond the confines of the English language.

2.1.2. David McQuillan (2018) “Aesthetic Scandal and Accessibility: The Subversive Simplicity of Rupi Kaur’s *milk and honey*”

The 2018 MA thesis written by David McQuillan, at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is entitled “Aesthetic Scandal and Accessibility: The Subversive Simplicity of Rupi Kaur’s *milk and honey*” (2018). His primary research question concerns where Kaur’s place is in the modern Canadian literary canon, especially in view of how her poetry has been labeled, as he points out, “simple” by some literary scholars and critics. McQuillan challenges those who would belittle her work through such a term by suggesting that Kaur’s accessible language and original style actually advance the national and aesthetic boundaries of the Canadian literary canon. He highlights the shift from the historic and arbitrary boundaries carved by earlier writers, poets and literary critics, to a contemporary perspective that is eager to examine the semiotics of Kaur and her published collection(s). I, too, see the value in Kaur’s accessible language, both in her written-word and spoken-word, as she has the gift of articulating very

clearly the deep, raw emotions many of her readers themselves experience though often cannot express fully. Beyond Kaur and over time and space, formal innovations and perceived “simplicity” have often been met with critique in a range of art forms. Consider, for example, the profound impact and reach of Bertolt Brecht’s dramaturgical and directorial innovations (paring down of stage effects, direct address of audiences, and accessible language in dramaturgy and directing) that were first rejected by some established practitioners and critics. Like McQuillan, I wonder at the need for some to discount her clearly powerful work as “simple.” Again by analogy, Brecht valued a divided audience response, one that suggested the strength, complexity and import of the debates and problems raised. As McQuillan’s work also suggests, the significant engagement that Kaur’s work has already generated publicly, both from large numbers of fans and critics, might be better read as a marker of her work’s politically generative complexity.

2.1.3. Philip Monks (2017) “The Importance Of The Poetry Book In The Digital Age”

In 2017, Philip Monks’ completed his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. Entitled “The Importance Of The Poetry Book In The Digital Age: How Far Digital Technology Has Influenced Contemporary Poetry And The Status Of The Poetry Book,” Monks’ dissertation includes, alongside his academic analysis, his own original poetry, a collection entitled “The Birth of Romance.” He examines the creation and curation of a printed poetry collection, from both a practiced-based perspective and wider field research, particularly with regard to the influence of digital technology on contemporary poetry practice. While Monks provides critical insight and personal analysis of the impact digital technology has on the

contemporary poet, he also asserts the complex significance of contributions made by what he calls “Insta-poets”. In reading this dissertation it becomes clear that Monks prefers printed poetry, though he does acknowledge the impact made by the use of digital technology, given the robust boost it has given contemporary poetry consumption as a whole. While I am not aligned with Monks’ critiques of “Insta-poets” and the digitalization of poetry publication, I have nonetheless found valuable his analysis of the lively, healthy discussion and debate about the pros and cons of digitized poetry publication. As my own research includes analysis of Kaur’s performances as they are made most broadly available through social media and digitalization, it has been important for me to recognize the kinds of reservations, concerns and terms such as “Insta-poets” that Kaur and her work have encountered.

2.1.4 Janelle Reinelt (1989) “Feminist Theory and the Problem of Performance”

As with the graduate theses, I have gained from these studies but have also recognized the opportunity to study further Kaur’s poetry and performance from a theatre and performance studies perspective. In particular, I have found useful feminist performance scholar Janelle Reinelt’s “Feminist Theory and the Problem of Performance”, Jeanie Forte’s “Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright- A Problem of Reception” and, finally, Simon Shepherd and Mike Wallis’s explorations of drama and the literary tradition in their disciplinary survey book *Drama/Theatre/Performance*. Together, these scholars have helped me to understand the cultural need for feminist stage performances, the importance of scholarly engagement with the same and the need to explore beyond the literary value of words when analysing performance.

In “Feminist Theory”, Reinelt provides a wide-ranging analysis of connections between onstage and offstage gender roles. She also highlights the strategies and means by which feminist performances have unsettled patriarchal performance traditions, again, both onstage and off. Like Kaur, Reinelt sees the stage as a space for opportunity; a place that can be made safe for women to speak in a direct, uncensored manner; this specialized location can allow women the freedom to create their own narratives, less inhibited by the presence or false pretenses of patriarchal offstage norms. Reinelt urges women to use performance spaces to deconstruct belittling and dehumanizing patriarchal understanding of women’s roles and experiences. Reinelt’s arguments help me to understand the political impact of Kaur’s public poetry performances and her calls for more such voices alongside her own. Moreover, both Reinelt and Kaur emphasize the importance of women claiming their own bodies and speaking openly about their own experiences. Both also state the importance of women allowing themselves to feel and articulate their vulnerability in order to find their shared strength through such feeling and expression.

2.1.5 Jeanie Forte (1989) “Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright”

Jeanie Forte’s scholarship analyses the structures and ideologies which uphold patriarchal dominance. Importantly for my analysis here, Forte underlines the critical roles played by popular culture, literature, and modern drama in the generation and continuance of patriarchy. Forte encourages the subversion of this ideology, as does Kaur, by means of crafting new plays and other literary projects with the aim of promoting equality. In reading Forte’s study, I found myself noting how her perspective resonated with my experience of Kaur’s work. I believe Kaur’s work builds from many of the same egalitarian principles articulated by Forte. Both seek

a society that is rooted in equitable practices and understandings as I will demonstrate in my analysis of “home” and “timeless”. In her poetry Kaur often chooses words and phrases that convey this message in language that is clear and direct. In performance she often selects specific poems that foreground demands for equitable treatment. Forte’s work has helped me to read Kaur’s poetry and performance choices for their unsettling of patriarchal expectations and ideologies. Both Forte and Kaur push for thoughtful analysis of the ways in which societies have been crafted to privilege some voices over others and how they might be deconstructed and recrafted to promote equity among all voices.

2.1.6. “Drama and the Literary Tradition” by Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd

Although it is less obviously connected to my feminist performance readings of Kaur’s work, Shepherd and Wallis’s *Drama/Theatre/Performance* has helped me to engage with another kind of bias influencing Kaur’s critics: the longstanding tradition of privileging the written over the performance text. Wallis and Shepherd trace the primacy of the text for many Western dramatic theorists and critics over time. They also highlight the role played by feminist performance critics in dismantling this tradition and contributing to the field of performance studies. Their work has helped me to identify how those who seek to understand Kaur’s poetry as separate from her public performances reify the pitfalls of these past critical traditions and miss an opportunity to query why the female body in performance is itself powerfully unsettling to critical tradition.

2.2. Applying a Postcolonial Lens

In terms of contemporary relatability, public recognition and accessibility, Kaur is arguably one of the most popular poets in Canada. Her work has also garnered critics, not least because of her progressive social agenda, formal innovation, provocative imagery and engagement with formerly taboo topics like rape, racism, misogyny, and menstruation. A student of Rhetoric and Professional Writing, Kaur is trained in the aesthetic and literary traditions, mandates and cultural biases that inform much contemporary literary practice. Her decisions to ignore early advice against self-publication, share her ideas and work on social media, mingle imagery and verse, perform her work in pop culture venues like late night TV series and take up culturally provocative topics that prompt hateful online backlash against her are testament to her committed and original approach.

Reading Kaur's work from a postcolonial studies perspective helps to make sense of her cultural and political context for writing and performing. For example, in "Postcolonial Literary Studies", Robert P. Marzec compiled the work of postcolonial writers who have deviated from traditional standards of Western literature. Initially he poses a deceptively simple question, "For whom does the writer write?" Does the writer pen words for the critic or for society? His answer is that they write for themselves, for those who identify themselves in the work, but, equally importantly, for those who do not as that brings about the expansion of consciousness and perspective. Aware of the colonial literary and cultural biases that have informed critical

standards, Kaur is interested in serving a broader social readership. Like the writers Marzec analyses, Kaur also writes from a perspective of social responsibility within a post-colonial context.

Marzec has further argued that to “write as a woman in English and publish in the West is to be additionally conscious of how readership structures the politics of writing” (Marzec 303). Indeed, challenging dominant standards has been a vital component of many post-colonial and feminist texts. “Women writers have played a significant role [...] in radically revising literary forms such as the novel, short story, and drama that assume new forms [...] We find texts that are not, strictly speaking, ‘literary’ within a Eurocentric discourse” (Marzec 99-100). Both *milk and honey* and *the sun and her flowers* demonstrate this unapologetic shift away from the more traditional forms of western literature.

The most prominent examples of this are her utilization of only lowercase letters and the lack of punctuation, both of which are clearly observed in her published poetry collections. Her stated reasons for doing so in the contemporary moment, however, are clearly in the service of her own particular goals informed by her own particular biographical and cultural context. In multiple interviews she attributes her font and punctuation choices to her Sikh faith, as its sacred texts were also written in only lowercase letters. Further, she argues, they also visually reinforce equality among the letters with which she builds her work.

2.3 Applying a Feminist Lens

While I might argue that Kaur's style privileges accessibility, political bravery and social progressiveness, these concepts wear thin without evidence. As Marzec suggests, "Concepts are a little bit like workers: in order to measure their real value, one has to know what they can do" (87). One strong example of her impact can be found in a 2017 article by Jagdeep Raina, entitled "Our Backs tell stories no books have the spine to carry, women of color", serves as an example of Kaur's message of empowerment and equality being received and furthered, interestingly enough by a male feminist. In the article, Raina openly acknowledges his male privilege and rather than disavow its relevance, he utilizes it, by way of this article, to advance the feminist message as laid out by Kaur. Her work inspired Raina to construct an original drawing depicting the selfless service of three women in a Sikh Temple as they prepare a free, vegetarian meal for the congregation. "I show the incredible resilience and strength of Sikh women [...] to illustrate the selflessness and bravery [...] which has the power to transform as it teaches us to love unconditionally" (Raina). It is clear that he seeks to further Kaur's concepts and sentiments by way of his own writing.

2.4 Accessibility and Understanding to Rupri Kaur Amidst Literary Criticism

Other supporters of Kaur's work seek to resonate with her in other ways. Her sizeable social media presence has a following, at the time of writing, upwards of 2.5 million. She has explained that, "No matter where I am, folks always tell me that 'You put the words to this feeling I've always had, that I didn't know really how to define'" (Isen).

Importantly, resonance with readers and audiences is a primary goal for Kaur. She understands her poetry and her performances as communicative tools and is gratified when readers express the significant meaning her work has had for them. Encouraging readers further is an untitled poem within *the sun and her flowers* in which she writes, “representation is vital otherwise the butterfly surrounded by a group of moths unable to see itself will keep trying to be a moth” (Kaur 239). When she recites these words in performance, Kaur creates not only a physical space for new perspectives and resonances but also a mental one, pressing audiences to re-imagine themselves as butterflies and take flight.

Chapter 3:Performance “Home”

A student of Rhetoric and Professional Writing who was keenly aware of how words can shape arguments and debates, Kaur stepped into the world of performance by way of spoken word poetry. As I noted briefly above, her first performance took place in a basement in Malton, Ontario, for the purpose of a Sikh cultural program bringing awareness to the 1984 Sikh Genocide. While this performance was meant to be an isolated event, Kaur became hooked: “I enjoy the performing, it’s such a visceral experience” (Kabango). Having completed global tours between 2017 and 2019, it is clear that performing has become a staple part of her artistic expression and audience outreach.

Throughout the course of her poem “home”, Kaur speaks directly to her experience after the shock of having being sexually assaulted by an acquaintance. The home she writes of is her body. She also frequently addresses a “you”. Lines such as, “someone broke the windows-you/ kicked the front door in-you”, and, “there is no space for you,” direct her address and anger at this anonymous violator, someone she initially trusted because “...our dads worked at the same company and you’d been to my place for dinner many times”. In this way she shares that the perpetrator was known to her before the incident, as a friend of the family. Kaur addresses her attacker in the poem directly by the use of the second person singular pronoun. Standing outside the biographical details of the “you” referenced by the poem, the reader is drawn in as a silent witness to the intimate, direct confrontation.

Reading these same words in performance, Kaur similarly positions the audience as a silent witness, bringing them along as she shares her intimate and confrontational story. In observing her 2016 TEDx Talk, “I’m Taking My Body Back”, she makes direct eye contact with various audience members, and Kaur never turns her back on the audience; her physical body always faces the audience. She also shifts her weight constantly and this allows her body to move freely, facing in all sorts of different directions within the established frontal range. By doing so she ensures that each audience member has the potential to observe and connect with her as she speaks. This effectively draws the audience in, visually acknowledging while simultaneously involving her audience. She establishes an emotional connection with audience members too through the affective power of her poetry, filled as this poem in particular is with its raw, varying and vulnerable emotions. Her artistic choices are evidently validated during the performance itself, given the intense focus of her audience.

In the poem and performance, Kaur repeatedly uses the phrase “typical thursday” as a representation of just how commonly such sexual abuse and crimes against women are committed. Indeed, the poem is framed by two indicators of time. At the outset of the poem she remembers that the assault took place on a day that began as a “typical thursday”, and at the poem’s end she explains that she is remembering this all on a “typical thursday.” Clearly, however, the contents of her “typical” days in between these time periods have shifted. By the poem’s end, part of her “typical” day is spent acknowledging her survival and working to air out,

wash and enjoy her home. Importantly, these quotidian details are rhetorical aids which humanize and help to align audiences with the rhythms of Kaur's daily experience. When she performs this poem with her own voice and body, the subjective phrasing helps her to connect with audiences as an active, empowered survivor, reliving this moment together rather than isolating herself. This subjective sharing and communal impulse are especially powerful given that survivors are often shunned by society, and even all-too-often blamed for the trauma they have experienced. Kaur speaks mindfully and publicly about her experience in an effort to prevent such misguided and cruel victim-blaming or shaming.

The first-person narrative and multiple uses of the first-person singular pronoun are Kaur's way of asserting her control of the poem and performance event. The poem is about her, her experience, and her body. She is unwilling, and rightfully so, to compromise any perspectives concerning the poem's structure. This piece is about the way in which she is taking her body back, reclaiming that which was once violated. She provides several details about the "home" which make plain it is her body. She, for example, recites "this home is empty now no gas no electricity no running water the food is rotten from head to foot i am layered in dust". This metaphor continues when she refers to the healing and empowerment that she experienced after the trauma: "i'm opening all the windows airing it out putting flowers in a vase in the middle of the kitchen table". The clarity of the home and body duality she creates in the poem is also evident in her performance: "All the different parts in me turned the lights off shut the blinds locked the doors". Her hands sweep across the space in front of her physical body as a broom

pushes away dirt and dust. First her right hand, then her left follows before she brings both arms crossed in front of her chest like a giant X, creating an embodied visual image of the cage she built for herself to guard against further intrusion. Her delivery of each word is crisp and clear and she speaks in a manner which is accessible to her audience, regardless of whether the audience members have had similar experiences or not.

Kaur's performance is centered on her physical presence, accessible honesty and the senses of both vulnerability and empowerment that she evinces. Her apparent honesty builds the performance's foundation; from this base, she demonstrates the importance of being publicly vulnerable in order to share her story, emotions, as well as her own clear understanding that she is not responsible for this crime. She writes and performs from a place of power and peace. Kaur visibly relaxes while delivering the poem; audiences can visibly observe this shift through the relaxed dropping of her shoulders. They can also hear as she deeply exhales and, in the pauses between lines, Kaur's eyes open and close as though she is seeing the truth of the situation clearly, almost as if for the first time alongside the audience. Concentrating on that shared journey of understanding, she is empowered to speak about the traumatic event, refusing to remain silent. Kaur shares her feelings openly, expresses the control she has regained concerning her body, and explains how she has healed from such a traumatic experience. This performance illustrates her survival, granting hope and bravery, fueled by Kaur's positive energy, to audiences who can follow her lead. Trauma and negative experiences are not what define a person but rather are examples of how one can learn inner strength, self-love, and having faith in yourself.

By performing Rupi Kaur is helping to expand the repertoire of ways in which audiences can perceive South Asian female artists, as well as women in general. She is changing the narrative and defying stereotypes which are pinned to such groups, by their surrounding environment and the world at large. There are ad campaigns splattered across popular culture which contradict Kaur's messages by perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes. Examples include, though are not limited to, plastic surgery advertisements, published photographs of models, weight loss supplements and detox products, magazine articles, social media posts, television commercials, political cartoons, all of which can ignite misogynistic and racist feelings against South Asian women. Moreover, the volume of these damaging materials seems only to be growing as they are posted, circulated, and amplified on social media. Kaur's audiences are highly likely to have been shaped by the ubiquity of the negative imagery and narratives Kaur seeks to dismantle with her loud, dissenting voice. This is where the magic of Rupi Kaur's material surfaces, in how she urges her audiences to shake such notions off, to be who they are and conduct themselves as they see fit, urging the restoration of individuality and gender equality. Building on this, she also emphasizes the importance of self-love, compassion, and not giving one's own power away in order to fit some arbitrary mold carved out by society. In the last few lines of "home" she speaks directly to the moment she realized this: "the truth comes like sunlight pouring through an open window it takes a long time to get here but it all comes full circle (Kaur 71).

Kaur's spoken word poetry performances have clearly captured many audiences, not least because she bravely shares progressive ideas about girls, women, sexuality, violence and the

possibilities for cultural change and healing. In performance, she invokes the two worlds she hails from, India and Canada. She does this in significant part by way of costume and appearance, vocality, and the details of her poetic content. The stage is her platform, a scaled-down slice of our contemporary world, where she articulates her ideas and shares her perspectives.

For this study, I have examined in detail Kaur's 2016 TEDx Talk, "I'm Taking My Body Back", in which she includes a performance of "home". At time of writing, the video has received 989,193 views on Youtube and 909 comments. This performance is haunting, honest, and humbling to watch. It shows an immigrant girl who has grown into a poised, vulnerable, and captivating speaker who shares her optimism, art, and compassion with a global audience. It is the strong sense of purpose that compels me most while observing Rupi Kaur in performance. Her insights regarding the extreme depth of human feeling and processing emotions is made all the more compelling by her performance choices.

Kaur has developed a distinct vocal performance style which differs markedly from her regular speaking voice. Onstage reading her poetry, her voice is soulful, emotionally-packed, and she articulates each word of every line from her poem with distinction and strength. This style is unlike her natural speaking voice which is packed with tonal variances, discourse markers, namely the constant use of "Like" and "Right". While performing poetry, however, the sound of her voice is amplified to fill large venues. She speaks clearly so as to convey each poem to her

audience, and holds steady even when discussing personal, raw, violent experiences she has faced. We hear the words and clearly enunciated syllables pour from her mouth as she recollects the moments leading up to her attack, the pain and anguish that followed, and the ultimate period of clarity and healing which has led to her to this empowered place of sharing and performing. Between words, we can hear the pauses which Kaur takes in order to contemplate the lines; each phrase is vital to the construction of the performance's momentum. It is in this mindful delivery that she comes most alive as a performer. Her words fill the performance space with energy, emotion, and impactful silence which commands the audience and directs their attention at all times.

Costumes are valuable tools for performers to convey, among many things, character, mood and action. For example, a long dress being caught on an exposed branch could signify how a character is not used to such a rough exterior and is caught in an unfamiliar environment, especially when compared to the same costume being used for a ball scene in which the extra material would be useful for a swirling visual aid denoting luxury and an elite lifestyle. Kaur is clearly aware of the nuances and significance that costumes bring to a performance. She dons a white, fitted, unadorned dress in her TEDx Talk performance of "home". For many of the Anglo-western audiences, white is symbolically defined as the color of purity, new beginnings, a blank slate, and cleanliness. She is visually conveying to her audience that all these definitions and meanings associated with the color white apply here and re-emphasizes this sentiment during the course of her poetry recitation. That she wears a fitted and unadorned dress rather than shorts

or jeans or a bedazzled or slogan-ridden outfit, helps her to focus audiences' attention on her words and body. Further, her dress is arguably conservative in ways that adhere to gender norms and expectations for a young South Asian woman.

Another element of costume is an actor's hair. Colour, style, and cut, and even a properly utilized wig can inform the audience much like a costume does. In this performance, Kaur's hair is pulled back in a long braid. Her hair is swept away from her face, and cannot be used as a veil to cower behind, signifying she cannot hide from the audience nor does she aim to. The braid is also a preferred choice of style for South Asian women. With this familiar and open hairstyle, she connects herself with this community of women; boldly and unapologetically taking them and others in the audience along as she recollects her experience and discusses the optimism she discovered when healing. Further, like the loose unadorned dress, her long, tidy and unadorned hair also arguably conforms to gender expectations. So too, her nude-coloured shoes are unobtrusive and grounding. Her performance choices in this regard help her to reach audiences who might otherwise dismiss her out of hand in response to an alienating or non-conformist appearance. She is traditionally feminine but dressed in a manner that could be classified as "Business-casual." The rhetoric of her costume choices demands community respect and adherence to her words. Thus, her performance blends the soft, feminine, familiar costume with her professional and poised poetic recitation. Her recitations, in these ways, amplify her poetry's call for an expanded public repertoire of South Asian women's representation. Her public recitations also contribute to and connect her with the influential public spheres of Spoken Word.

Spoken-word poetry can be defined as word-based art in performance and, for the purpose of this thesis, spoken word is poetry that is written to be recited and performed out loud as Kaur does. The form Kaur developed in *milk and honey* and *the sun and her flowers* is different than other poetry and mindfully so. Such difference is especially apparent given the distinct aesthetics of both published collections; the overall lack of traditional form and Kaur's unique point of view as a young South Asian feminist immigrant. So too are her staged performances shaped by these three aforementioned factors. Where another performer might amplify the scenes of violence or use vocal extremes like shouting and shrieking in oscillation with silence, Kaur's approach is more even, like the even sized letters she puts on her published pages. While a contemporary world leader uses divisive language to turn ethnic groups against one another, Kaur's message remains unifying: "we are all immigrants trading one home for another [...] in search of a better life" (Kaur 131). Moreover, given that in the Digital Age people often rely on visual imagery to inform themselves on contemporary issues, the original illustrations that Kaur has drawn to accompany her poems in the written collections are also used onstage as projections when she recites. Apart from the artistic details and emotional impact of the evocative images themselves, they also signal of her artistic control of the performance event, her authorship, and professionalism.

Marc Smith covers the history of spoken word in the pages of his book, *Take the Mic* (2009). He explores the recent history of spoken word poetry and artistic innovations. Most importantly

for me, he situates the form within the broader field of performance. He argues that performance allows more people to be reached by poetry and he hopes that this will inspire many more to take the stage themselves. Kaur is also interested in empowering others to find and share their voices. In this way she seems well-aligned with the philosophy and performance objectives Smith identifies as central to contemporary spoken word practice. Moreover, her commitment to comprehensible, accessible language and delivery style resonates strongly with spoken word audiences, allowing her to convey her thematic messages clearly and with impact.

It is important to note the primacy of performance among spoken word critics and practitioners. Indeed, William Chase Greene has argued that, “Spoken word is alive; the written word is only its image” (Greene). When she performs “home” for the TEDx Talk, the stage is purposely bare. This is due in large part to the genre’s format which creates a uniformity of style across Ted Talks, but the bare performance space also aligns with Kaur’s solo spoken-word performance style. I have, nonetheless, decided to focus on the TEDx Talk version because it clearly conveys her intonation, gestural, costume and other performance choices.

By articulating her past experience, she is able to define what occurred clearly, and note how it affected her without harming herself. Her performance choices suggest that she speaks from a place of intelligence, honesty, and courage. Kaur’s vocal intonation is a powerful indicator in her performance style as to how she feels in response to the trauma she has experienced. Although, as I noted above, she avoids vocal extremes, her steadier approach provides audiences with an

anchor to the narrative and her control. Speaking about raw experiences, such as sexual assault, risks leaving performer and audience feeling heavy, emotionally drained, confused, and incoherently angry. Kaur takes every measure to share the experience in ways that are assured, coherent and empowering. She vocalizes her varying emotions in a manner that is clear and conducive to her overall message. She has found her voice, and remains unafraid to use it.

Kaur's delivery makes for many powerful performances, and she has clearly inspired others to do the same in their own lives. For example, citing Kaur's example, Ankita Shah, Priya Malik, and Aranya Johar have each also used their poetry and performances to spread like-minded messages of gender equality, body positivity, and self-love within their own communities. Shah participated in the Patriarchy PackUp Challenge this past International Women's Day, an initiative that brought together poets from all across India for the purpose of education reform and gender equality by way of spoken word performances. Malik also joined in the initiative speaking up for women's right to education, citing the sacrifices made by her own mother. Johar, a student, is a living example of the benefits women receive by becoming educated. She shares how grateful she is to be allowed an education, providing a platform for future generations of women to join her. Poetry, for Kaur and these women, is a powerful tool that opens the minds and perspectives of those listening. Thus, while Kaur has shown leadership as the first young, contemporary, South Asian female poet to reach a global audience, she has also connected with and sought to empower other female artists.

Kaur is a performer who understands the effects and impact of movement onstage. She harnesses the powers of stillness and silence, sometimes halting her physical body to create a captivating stillness providing a resounding silence. For example, after she directly addresses the attacker in the poem, she takes a moment after each “you” to allow the audience a moment to recognize the gravity of this attack. This intensity makes it clear how unwelcome, unforgettable, and irreversible such a moment is. Through her open, honest, grounded and empowered approach, Kaur encourages individuals in her audience who have their own experiences with such intruders like “you” to articulate their own feelings, speak out about the importance of consent and safety, build courage and share their own story. Perhaps most striking is when she delivers the lines, “when you broke into my home it never felt like mine again”, noting how difficult it became for Kaur to trust others following the attack, to open herself up to anyone romantically became such a challenge setting off moments of intense fear, anxiety, and panic attacks. While articulating those lines of the poem that deal with the explosive bodily attack, she is remarkably still in contrast. Later it can be observed amidst her deep thoughtfulness how her hands spiral in and around the surrounding space, allowing them to float up and around her face and body as she is gesturing to the audience the magnitude of her words. Her eyes open and close like shutters on a bay window, allowing all the varying emotions to shine through while she moves from line to line. Her voice softens as she recollects how difficult it is to allow a new love into her life. The uneasy breath mixes with her voice, mimicking her internal struggle when she shares how she forgets “to breathe”, citing how this experience changes her as she “becomes more bone than skin”, withering away as the leaves of summer do when the cool autumn arrives.

The majority of her energy goes to the vocalization of the poem recollecting line after line, sharing the memory of what occurred. Through quotidian gestures like clasped hands with interwoven fingers, in front of her chest, she refers to doctors in a psych ward and her outstretched palm twitches as a tree shakes from a gust of wind. She gives off a sense of that which is universal and her familiar gestures make for easy recognition and connection to the material. As a performer, her intense, focused energy makes her seem illuminated from within while on stage both vocally and physically. During the course of her performance, Kaur makes significant use of her body and voice to humanize her story, to embody that trauma and healing while speaking to an auditorium of complete strangers is no easy feat. Hence the purposeful portrayal of a storyteller and a survivor, separated though unified in her embodiment. Moreover, despite the large number of people to whom she performs, her steady, composed vocal tone comes across as one who is speaking to a much-appreciated colleague, friend or loved one. Furthermore, her ease in performing is marked also in her hand gestures; eyes that are downcast and at times closed; and her shoulders are both relaxed and tense, giving off a naturalistic stylized performance that is comforting and comfortable to observe, despite the heaviness of her material.

While the content of her poems is emotionally-wrought and can be personally disturbing for the audience, Kaur's grounded presence throughout the performances provides an aura of safety. Thus, while she bravely recollects the assault, the pain and trauma, she also shares and embodies the personal healing she has experienced. That is no easy performance feat, or to be taken lightly.

She has approached this process with purpose and mindfulness, and done so with care for safety. The physical environment created by Rupri Kaur's performances is done so as to foster intelligent, emotionally-vulnerable conversation about topics that are not easily discussed.

Such a place needs to be nurtured and carefully maintained, so as to allow for the exchange of ideas and feelings. Her literal platform for speaking up on the specified issues at hand is the stage, a place where she is in control. Kaur uses the stage as a site for deep listening, a space audiences and performer to feel together and with a purpose. Even online, where the TEDx Talk camera angles and editing intervene to shape the performance, it is easy to sense the direct connection she builds with spectators. Through her direct eye engagement with audience members and careful positioning of them as witness to but definitely distinct from the assailant of her poem, Kaur skillfully builds a strong, responsible and vital bond with the audience. From this bond she is able to share her both harrowing and healing narrative in a way that is ultimately empowering and, in the simple fact of its embodied telling, socially transformative.

Chapter 4: Performance “Timeless”

As I demonstrated in the last chapter, witnessing Kaur embody and interpret her own often body-centric, self-reflective and challenging words differs greatly from reading them alone and in private. In such moments, her mode of expression relies heavily on performative techniques. In her public performances, audiences are subjected to the sound of her voice, the rhythm of her line delivery, her vocal tone variation, her costume choices and their symbolism, as well as her bodily gestures, movements and forms. All of these elements shape her interpretation and performance. While I have been unable to see her perform live, I have studied how in 2018 she performed the poem “timeless” from her second collection on live television while making an appearance on “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.” A video clip of this performance is available on YouTube and, while only 6 minutes and 43 seconds long, it provides a rich example of the way her performance shapes the poem’s delivery and meaning for audiences. The camerawork follows the typical late-night talk show form of establishing, medium and close-up shots of both the host and guest(s). No shots of audience members are visible in this clip, but their constant clapping and laughter provide background for the interview. They clap enthusiastically, for example, when Kaur recounts the extensive process of her self-publishing, ultimately ending her story by declaring it “ [...] the best decision I ever made”, to which she is met with resounding cheers. Kaur’s performance plays well to these camera angles and editing format as they feature the emotional build of her expressive reading while also revealing her fashionable, polished, poise.

Jimmy Fallon's late-night talk show program regularly features celebrity artists from film, television, comedy and music. Guests in these veins typically perform their hits, engage in comic banter or play performance games like lip-sync battles or dance-offs in the small performance space between the show's band space and Fallon's desk and interview area with its New York model skylines behind him. As a poet, Kaur is a rarity in this performance venue and her appearance there stands as a testament to the remarkable commercial uptake of her work and her own growing pop-culture celebrity. Indeed, the segment opens with her telling Fallon that she had thought she would have to be a pop-star or actress before she could sit with him in this way. Ultimately, her poetry performance is sandwiched between their comic banter, much of which is taken up by Fallon discussing his encounters with pop-star Sam Smith and showing a close-up image of Smith's arm to reveal how he has had one of Kaur's drawings tattooed there. All of the references to Smith provide evidence of her relevance to pop culture and, by extension, Fallon's more typical line-up and audiences. It is remarkable that instead of being featured in the small performance space near the band as Smith might have done with his latest hit, Kaur is seated with Fallon throughout. The latter has both of her poetry collections on his desk and, nearly five minutes into their segment, Fallon hands Kaur *the sun and her flowers* and asks her if she would be willing to read from it, having found a page and explaining that "he likes that one". She acquiesces but insists that she be allowed to explain where the poem came from. All of this was likely determined and choreographed in advance, but it is interesting that the poem she reads appears to have been selected by Fallon, seemingly providing yet another pop culture endorsement for her work and its relevance for his audience. As she has done in other media

venues, including her 2017 performance while appearing on CBC's *Q*, Kaur then performs "timeless". It was an interesting choice for this particular performance in a decidedly mainstream, commercially-oriented venue, challenging as it does mainstream culture's ageism and patriarchy. An avowedly feminist poem, it speaks of self-love, body positivity, gender equality, contemporary politics and societal norms. In its twenty-one lines, all of which she performs, it incorporates a wide spectrum of contemporary social issues and topics in a deceptively simple piece about female empowerment through experience and ageing.

When she begins to read the poem, Kaur immediately heightens her vocal expression. Rather than continuing in the jokey register with which she has been bantering with Fallon, Kaur's shift in tone takes care to lift the words and she appears to speak from her own heart, imbuing her speech with a kind of personal urgency. Indeed, in her preamble to the reading she explains that the poem "timeless" derives in part from her personal experience with her publishing team who had suggested that she quickly write the second collection of poems so as not to lose the momentum or public following that she had generated through the first collection. Careful not to castigate her publishers directly, in the interview she speaks of a broader group that urged her to complete *the sun and her flowers* before another poet could potentially replace her in the public eye and harm her potential book sales. Much of "timeless" is inspired by this and similar contemporary social practices wherein women are pushed beyond their own limits for the gains of others. So much of her 2018 performance pushes back at such vampires and leeches, whose naysaying and doubts evidently no longer intimidate Kaur. Smiling widely, she claps back by

forcefully sharing lines such as: “my twenties are the warm-up [...] wait til you see me in my thirties” (Kaur 234). Her vocalization strays from the deep, soulful style that she normally uses while performing. For this poem she amplifies her vocalization to take on a lively, bold, somewhat cheeky tone that suggest her defiant feelings. This tone is especially evident in the way she stretches out words such as “age”, “irrelevance”, and “lies” when performing. She emphasizes and breathes life into each of these selected words. Her eyes sometimes flit from the pages held in front of her to the corners of the stage but otherwise they remain closed, as though Kaur were alone and reciting to herself. Her closed eyes underline her familiarity with the text and its ideas. She seems purposeful and prepared. Moreover, in not making eye contact with Fallon while performing, she separates her performance from him, drawing the camera more closely to her with numerous close-ups of her facial expressions as she recites. The camerawork here is especially intimate, given the close proximity viewers have to her face. In watching this performance, which is less than a minute long, it is clear that Kaur is able quickly to access and expel a thundering amount of emotion in a controlled, poetic way. For example, Kaur recites: “how can i leave before the party’s started [...] let’s begin the show” (Kaur 234), where she takes great delight in savouring her words, again making the point that women are powerful, significant, and capable at all stages of life. Even seated, her physical body is filled with an impassioned energy which is manifested by the swaying of her shoulders and the way she punctuates words with her chin, both serving to emphasize her lines physically. The societal standard that women lose their worth as they age is clearly misleading, potentially harmful, and one that Kaur actively seeks to disarm and dismantle. The heightened quality of her reading

stands in stark contrast to the earlier portions where she exchanged fun, upbeat banter with Fallon. Her demonstrated ability to transition between these modes of discourse heightens the sense of her artistry and professionalism. She evidently moves between the modes with control. Moreover, through her powerful and self-possessed performance, she amplifies the self-empowering theme of the poem.

As we saw in Chapter 3, in her poetry performances and other public appearances, Kaur typically combines both Western and traditional Indian clothing. For example, her ensembles range from colorful maxi dresses, bedazzled evening gowns, linen pants paired with beaded jewelry, and traditional Punjabi apparel including *salwaar- kameez* or a long cotton shift worn over fitted pants, and *dupattas* or scarves wrapped around her shoulders. These kinds of fashion choices serve as visual aids for informing her audience about the richness of her northern Indian heritage, as well as her Canadian cultural context. She often relies on hues that complement her golden-brown skin tone, as well as fabrics which are soft and flattering to her body shape, materials such as raw silk, earthy linen, and soft cotton. Further, the lines created by such fabrics are natural, supportive, unrestrictive and they allow Kaur graceful, purposeful movement while onstage. No one culture seems to dominate over another across her choices. Rather she seems interested in claiming and mingling a range of costume approaches in a bold and unapologetic manner. The emphasis on complementarity, cultural hybridity and self-acceptance in her costume choices reifies themes from her recited poetry and in turn, allows and empowers audience members to do the same in their own lives.

As we saw in the last chapter, costume serves as an important visual tool for informing an audience about a performer's identity in relation to terms such as class, gender, culture, age, ability, and politics. Kaur's choices while appearing on Fallon's show were both in keeping with the patterns of her sartorial choices over time as well as tailored for this mainstream, male-dominated environment. For the televised performance she wore a fitted black blazer over black pants. Like the themes of the poem she would read, the suit seemed untethered to a particular fashion moment and timeless in its classic appeal. The suit's monochrome power colour emphasized her face and hands and its tailoring accented her feminine figure without being sexually revealing. Kaur also wore four pieces of jewelry to complete this ensemble: a pair of small stud earrings, two rings, one worn on each hand, and a metallic choker around her throat. In contrast to other public appearances wherein her jewelry emphasized her cultural connections, here her jewelry accented her physical body without distracting from her interview or performance. Her minimalist yet appropriate accessory choices mirror those of the fashionable Amal Clooney, about whom Kaur gushes during the course of the interview, citing Clooney as a source of personal and professional inspiration. The entire costume is minimalist: an all-black outfit paired with small metallic accessories. Each element underlines her femininity and no costume details distract from her face or body throughout the course of this performance.

Television viewers receive a clear, unobstructed view of Kaur's facial expressions and body as she performs the poem which in turn provide a concrete foundation for performance analysis.

In this performance Kaur wears her hair parted to the left side, allowing for the multiple television cameras to have complete access to her face, most prominently her right-side profile. Her hair is shiny and sleek, framing her face as a proscenium does for the stage. Her hairstyle embodies the last lines of the poem: “and now for the main event curtains up at fifty let’s begin the show” (Kaur 234) reflecting light and her optimism. This effectively serves as a visual tool which aids Kaur’s overall goal of rewriting the narrative surrounding women to suggest that they gain rather than lose value as they age.

While Kaur is styled in a way that is largely feminine in keeping with her thematic material, there are also arguably some masculine elements in her costume which allow her to align with the male-dominated late-night television environment. Kaur sits opposite host Jimmy Fallon who wears a charcoal-colored suit paired with a white dress shirt and beige tie. He wears neutral, light colors which contrast greatly with Kaur’s dark monochrome. She wears a dark blazer that is fitted with a wide lapel but in place of traditional buttons the blazer ties in the back to provide Kaur with a defined, feminine silhouette. Her overall shape remains feminine, angular shoulders with a fitted waist. The tailored suit features her broader silhouette instead of her chest and her legs are covered, effectively thwarting the typical sexualizing male gaze that some actresses experience in this performance venue. The focus, as it is for Fallon, is on her as a performer and poet. Her costume echoes the confident sentiments laid out in the poem’s lines: “a proper introduction to the nasty. wild. woman in me [...] i ripen with age i do not come with an expiration date” (Kaur 234). Although it offers nothing overtly wild or nasty, her costume choice

provides a visual example of Kaur combining femininity, power and professionalism in a timeless way, much like the other professional women she cites as her role models in the interview: Amal Clooney and J.K. Rowling.

Kaur's costume adorns her body while also allowing for movement throughout the live television performance. Her shape is carefully constructed though fluid enough to allow for the physicalization of her creative expression by way of spoken word. At the beginning of her reading, she holds a copy of *the sun and her flowers* in her hands, placed in front of her body as a devotee would hold an offering. Reading the poem aloud, the words are comforting and familiar to Kaur, so much so that she can clearly recite them with meaningful intonation. After a pause to demarcate the poem's reading, she begins, eyebrows arched, and immediately her head tilts from side to side as she reads the first line: "they convinced me i only had a few good years left" (Kaur 234). Defiantly, she goes on in a carefree, slightly cocky manner that suggests her rebellion against such opinions. Her clear, strident volume is an important part of her performance here, as each word uttered reifies her strong rebuke to the opening line. She even tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ear as she reads, a casual, disarming gesture that in this context suggests her comfort in this venue. This subtle gesture helps Kaur ensure that thematic messages are clearly transmitted, even by those who may not share her ideas and values. Closing her eyes, she continues: "they can keep their lies for i have just gotten started." As she recites the words, they seem strongly felt and wholly embodied by her, the concluding phrase in particular is infused with daring optimism that elicits cheers from both Fallon and the live studio audience.

Both are primed to be celebratory her brief poem selection and recitation style has melded with the show's format to produce a rousing segment. Her energized, confident reading once again demonstrates her practiced performance and professionalism. She evidently does not need the physical book to prompt her performance. Her powerful gaze turns to the studio audience seated off-camera, she directs her lines as though having a conversation with them, taking her attention away from male host Jimmy Fallon. A solo performer like Kaur must be comfortable addressing their audience, regardless of its makeup, or else run the risk losing the effectiveness of her words. In these moments, Kaur extends her attention and effort beyond the talk show host, beyond the television cameras, and towards the live studio audience, urging them to wait as she spouts the line "for what i'm really about to do" (Kaur 234) where her gaze then goes upward as physical proof of the limitless heights she aims to reach. Evidently mindful of where her eyeline and bodily attention are directed at each given moment of the poem's performance, as soon as she begins her recitation, Kaur shifts to a more outward focus, her direct connection with the studio audience, as well as pointing with her chin, eyes, and fingers. By opening herself up to the broader studio audience in this moment, Kaur evinces a confident force of determination and energy, actively seeking to empower both herself and the audience in her optimism for a better future.

Kaur's performance is energized by her physical performance choices. First, her feet are planted on the ground and serve as a stable foundation upon which to build her performance. This choice empowers her to move her upper body freely. Kaur's mindfulness in sitting while

reciting ensures there will be no distractions of accidental stumbling or imbalance, all of which could potentially take away from the impact of the brief performance. The second key choice concerns her hands. These she uses like branches of a tree reaching outward and above. During the reading, familiarly holding a copy of *the sun and her flowers*, her hands oscillate between devotional holding in both hands to a more casual one-handed hold that allows her fingers to point and her wrists to spiral upwards in an energized way that complements the kind of future growth and dynamism she describes in the poem. Further, Kaur chooses to sit tall with strong posture, gracefully holding her book in a camera-savvy way that makes sure not to block her face or body. At the height of her reading, her shoulders sway, like a sapling in the wind. From the left to the right, she moves as though the energy of the poem takes over her person. In this way, her performance here is akin to those performances recorded in such other venues, such as on *Q* on CBC (2017) and TEDx Talks (2016). Swaying to the rhythms of her lines is a common feature of her performances that physically suggests her full and confident embodiment of the poetic rhythms and themes she shares with the audience.

Kaur has the artistic savvy to reach her audience, whether they sit alongside her or remain a silent participant who listens ardently. This professional knack is key to her strong connection to fans via social media sites such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter. It mirrors the way Kaur was influenced, positively, by such provocative and bold artists as Lauryn Hill and Amrita Sher-Gil. Like Hill's music and Sher-Gil's artwork, Kaur's work is complex and unconventional. She defies cultural expectations, considers herself a feminist, shirks opposing

conservative mandates and criticism, and finds ways to engage tradition without compromising herself. Her performances capture the imagination, articulate deeply-felt emotions, and audiences react very strongly, both via the Internet and when physically present. Keeping this in mind, Kaur's 2017 appearance on *Q* is notable as it broadcast an additional performance of "timeless". Whereas *The Tonight Show* with Fallon provides viewers with a stylized, highly scripted and, strictly formatted visual media, *Q*, a radio program, provides the audience with a unique visual and aural experience which largely contrasts with the preparation and delivery displayed by Kaur while appearing on *The Tonight Show* alongside Fallon.

By performing her poem on *Q*, Kaur expanded the already extensive community she had built via publishing two collections, touring the world, and through the aforementioned social media sites. Her appearance on *Q* is melodic, soulful, and resonant with the rhythms, cadences and harmonies heard when they play in this segment, at her request, Maya Angelou's famous recitation of her iconic poem "Still I Rise". Angelou is a sacred figure in Kaur's life, and she explains in the *Q* interview the power she herself felt upon reading Angelou's poetry, arguing that Angelou was one of the few poets that Kaur says made her "feel as though she could change the world." Kaur acknowledges that she finds herself in a position to inspire others. In its 21 lines there is a great sense of urgency to share the message that women are not defined by their age but rather what they do. In her mid-twenties she has clearly gained a variety of life experiences which have informed her artistry, her voice, and her self-love but she points to and builds excitement for even greater futures with age.

In her *Q* appearance, a format that is filmed and streamed online but is largely aimed at radio listeners, Kaur seems less focused on her body, apart from her eyes and hands, than the precision and impact of her voice. Instead, she chooses to express the confidence, strength, vulnerability, and femininity which are all rooted at the core of “timeless”. She again holds a copy of *the sun and her flowers* but in this instance, rather than recite from memory as she did with Fallon, here she genuinely holds the book and seems to read key lines precisely and with greater emphasis, including, “they convinced me”, “but women grow”, and “now that will be a proper introduction.” It is clear that Kaur’s seeks to emphasize the auditory impact of her lines. Another significant element to this performance is her use of cadence, rather than relying on physical gesture as previously observed in the televised performance. While she recites the lines, she speaks with a softness, her cadence is audible as she drops her volume when pronouncing words at the end of the poem’s 21 lines. Such words include, “years left”, “party’s started”, “expiration date”, and “now”, all of which are related to the poem’s central concept: time. By lowering her spoken volume when pronouncing these selected words, she arguably softens and corrals the markers and power of time in service of her more optimistic narrative for ageing women.

While her vocal ability is pronounced, methodically approached, and mindfully crafted, the costume choice here for her *Q* appearance is rather muted. For this on-line streamed radio interview, she is only visible above her waist. She wears a purple, long-sleeved top, with some matte gold embellishments. Her color choices here differ from those of her *The Tonight Show*

interview, as Kaur blends into the blue-purple colors of the *Q* interview studio and is not in a monochromatic power colour. She also wears more evident make-up in this context; a bright pink lipstick, drawing attention to her mouth as she recites and answers questions. Otherwise, her makeup and hairstyle are simple with the latter parted down the middle and focusing attention on her open face. Her performance choices here help her to blend in with the more casual dress of interviewer Tom Power and the interview setting which lays bare the technologies used for the radio broadcast.

In a 2017 interview for *The Evening Standard*, Kaur explained, “I grew up thinking I was going to change the world” (Fishwick). By organizing her performance of “timeless” to suit both her poetic themes and the differing formats of *Q* and *The Tonight Show*, Kaur demonstrates her media savvy in reaching broad audiences. Others have noted her skills in this regard. For example, Huynh has argued in an article penned for *Madison State News Service* that Kaur’s is, “very unafraid, unashamed poetry [...] Kaur also seemed to serve as inspiration to the audience [...] as if having a conversation with her” (Huynh). Her poised, professional, rhythmic and pointed readings engage audiences in the trajectory of her optimism. As her poem insists, Kaur has “just gotten started”. Her television talk-show performance evinces the energy of her mid-twenties and she makes physical and vocal choices to point out for audiences the direction of the confident, optimistic trajectory she describes for her future.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Rupi Kaur is a relatively new addition to a long history of female Canadian poets who have spoken directly to the female experience. While her sources of influence, cultural background, and comprehensive writing style differ from many of her antecedents and contemporaries, she does find common ground by way of overall message. It is one of hope and equality, to create a more egalitarian world in which everyone is heard, supported, and matters. Kaur's evident tenacity, mindfulness and refusal to compromise in pursuit of her artistic vision is everywhere evident in her poems, publishing practices and professional performances. In conducting research on her performances and original material I found her blending of the written and spoken word to be bold and timely. With mindful purpose, Kaur's words are direct and capable of emotionally triggering her audience, just as she has been influenced by the works of Angelou, Hill and Sher-Gil.

Both collections, *milk and honey* (2014) and *the sun and her flowers* (2017) along with Kaur's global performance tours are direct examples of prose, poetry, and performance combined together to create a new mode of artistic expression, one that aims to foster an open, safe environment, discuss a wide range of social issues and events facing contemporary society, allow for the sharing and healing from past traumas, and educate those present about such topics without judgement or condemnation. As the lack of capitalization in her printed works and her evocative physical gestures in performance suggest, she makes unconventional choices in service of her artistic goals. All of Kaur's written words are in lowercase letters in homage to Sikh

scripture which is also comprised of all lowercase letters. In performance Kaur often speaks with passion and moves her hands to almost visually punctuate the lines of her poetry where there is none. The rolling of her wrists, the crossing of her arms, the spiraling, long fingers which gracefully play in front of her physical body all serve to ground Kaur and her audiences in the shared time, space and authenticity of her performance.

By reading, performing, and sharing her original poetic material, Kaur brings audiences alongside her to bear witness to often difficult narratives and truths. She seeks to engage them in the goal of creating a more progressive, egalitarian world. As we have observed there are a number of individuals who are already speaking out and producing their own art as a result of Kaur's influence. While Kaur herself is thought to be connected to a number of celebrities, politicians, and influencers, she chooses to remain humble in her professional performances, and allow her art to speak for itself. Kaur's narrative is deliberate, honest, and packed with emotion which is utilized to unite rather than separate. The over twenty-five translations of her work and her considerable social media following certainly supports this idea.

Kaur's personal observations and experiences inform her writing. In performance, she both grounds herself and demonstrates a keen awareness of the surrounding environment, the current state of politics, social issues, her audience and social media followers, performance venues, and costume. Kaur, as a performer, looks to the future generations with the hope that her words will inspire and empower them to find their own voice and continue to champion this progressive

campaign. Although she herself hails from a Punjabi/Sikh background, Kaur is a secular writer who shares the beauty of her culture and language, without elusive phrasing or exclusive experience, in performance. This unconditional love and openness by Kaur has inspired a number of emerging artists and scholars to express themselves, all of which is a testament to the tenacity and optimism she so boldly champions.

Works Cited

Andrews McMeels Publishing. Andrews McMeel Universal, publishing.andrewsmcmeel.com/books/detail?sku=9781449474256. Accessed 23 November 2018. Website

Edes, Alyssa. "Poet Rupi Kaur: 'Art Should Be Accessible To The Masses'." *NPR*, www.npr.org/2017/10/09/554561078/poet-rupi-kaur-art-should-be-accessible-to-the-masses Accessed 9 September 2018.

"Emma Watson Interviews Rupi Kaur for Our Shared Shelf." YouTube, uploaded by Our Shared Shelf Group, 5 September 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL2u93brqiA.

Fishwick, Samuel. "I've Never Been More Aware of My Colour" *Evening Standard* [London, England], 4 May 2017, Pp. 38-39.

Fitzpatrick, Anna. "THE SENTIMENTALIST Rupi Kaur, the bestselling poet, dresses for her own pleasure." *Toronto Life*, 9 April 2018, torontolife.com/style/fashion/torontos-stylish-rupi-kaur/. Accessed 16 January 2019.

Forbes, Moriah. "Instapoet Rupi Kaur Shines at the Majestic." Instagram's favorite poet shared her story IRL at an emotional Dallas reading. *D Magazine*, 23 October 2018.

Forte, Jeanie. "Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright- A Problem of Reception". *Modern Drama*, volume 32 number 1, 1989. Pp. 115-127.

Greene, William Chase. "The Spoken and the Written Word." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, volume 60, 1951, Pp. 23-59

Huynh, Kayla. "RUPI KAUR SHARES HER LOVE FOR MADISON, DELIVERS POWERFUL PERFORMANCE." State News Service [Madison, Wisconsin] 2 October 2018.

"I'm Taking My Body Back | Rupi Kaur | TEDxKC." YouTube, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 2 September 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIToQQfSILA.

"I Was Losing My Mind." YouTube, uploaded by Q on CBC, 28 November 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a49Po4Lccw&t=8s.

Isen, Tajja. "Poet Rupi Kaur comes full circle with a homecoming performance in Brampton." *The Globe and Mail*, 28 April 2018, Pp. A.16

Kabango, Shadrach. "Rupi Kaur brings *milk and honey* to studio q," *YouTube*, uploaded by q on CBC, 20 April 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThJGwrN_oEY.

Kaur, Rupi. *milk and honey*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2014.

Kaur, Rupi. *rupi kaur*| 2017, rupikaur.com Accessed 10 October 2017. Website, <https://rupikaur.com/>.

Kaur, Rupi. *the sun and her flowers*. Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2017.

Marzec, Robert P. *Postcolonial Literary Studies: The First 30 Years*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.

McQuillan, David. *Aesthetic Scandal and Accessibility: The Subversive Simplicity of Rupi Kaur's milk and honey*. Dalhousie University, Master's Thesis, 2018.

Monks, Philip. *The Importance Of The Poetry Book In The Digital Age: How Far Digital Technology Has Influenced Contemporary Poetry And The Status Of The Poetry Book & The Birth of Romance A Poetry Collection*. University of Birmingham, PhD Dissertation, 2017.

Rao, Sonia. "Few Read Poetry, But Millions Read Rupi Kaur" *The Boston Globe*, 11 October 2017, Pp. 22-24.

Raina, Jagdeep. "Our Backs tell stories no books have the spine to carry, women of color." *Sikh Formations*, volume 13 number 4, 2017. Pp. 335-336. Online Journal.

Reinelt, Janelle. "Feminist Theory and the Problem of Performance." *Modern Drama*, volume 32, number 1, 1989.

"Rupi Kaur on Love and Pain, Suffering and Joy with Lewis Howes." *YouTube*, uploaded by Lewis Howes, 3 October 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cHCaUA5ahA.

“Rupi Kaur Reads ‘Timeless’ from Her Poetry Collection *the sun and her flowers*.” YouTube, uploaded by *The Tonight Show* Starring Jimmy Fallon, 26 June 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHkFFA5iGlc.

Shash, Nabil. 10 October 2017. Interview Magazine. “How Rupi Kaur Used Instagram To Transform Poetry”. Photograph. 28 January 2018.

Shepherd, Simon and Mick Wallis. *Drama/Theatre/Performance*. Routledge, London; New York, 2004.

Smith, Marc. *Take the Mic*. Sourcebooks Inc, 2009.

Stift, Maartje. *Translating Poetry: Spoken-word versus Written Word*. Utrecht University, Master’s Thesis, 2017.