

# The Messenger

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Volume 2014  
Issue 1 *The Messenger*, 2014

Article 23

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2014

## Ring Dance

Jasper Gunn

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### Recommended Citation

Gunn, Jasper (2014) "Ring Dance," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2014: Iss. 1, Article 23.  
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2014/iss1/23>

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# Ring Dance // Jasper Gunn

Maybe we could benefit  
if I add my voice to the conversation  
about these changes, about tradition,

But how can I share my words  
when that voice falls dead  
before it passes my lips?

I've heard too many times, whether intended or not,  
that transgender people are too few  
'we can't just go about changing things  
just for such a small minority.'

I feel, why bother speaking,  
when I feel so small?

This is a tradition for women,  
it's not for me, not for some genderqueer in-between;  
they don't make traditions for me here.  
I have to make my own way every time.

How do I summon the courage  
to face the vulnerability  
that comes with saying  
"Hey, I may feel like the only one  
but my pain hurts too. It does matter."

I left the country my junior spring  
partly because  
I didn't even want people to ask me  
if I was going to ring dance.  
I didn't even want to be around  
for people to keep reminding me  
that being put in Westhampton College  
is supposed to mean I'm a woman, a daisy, a lady.

Instead, last spring,  
I pretended the dance wasn't happening,  
Instead, I had Indian shopkeepers, children, strangers  
asking me everyday  
"Are you a boy or a girl?"  
I didn't mind so much  
this chance to be visible, to speak my truth,  
as I hardly ever get to in the States

I'll be honest.  
I stopped reading most emails from WC,  
I didn't go to proclamation night.  
I have no reason to put myself  
in those situations  
where someone speaking to a crowd of women, and me,  
calls us "ladies" calls us "women."  
and I feel tiny  
I feel invisible, forgotten, ignored.

it's not because i'm against being a woman  
you see it's just  
i'm not one.

I wanna tell you more  
like what it feels like,  
rushing to find a gender-neutral bathroom  
without being late to class  
like the way my mood sinks  
when another friend calls me "she"  
a stranger says "ma'am"  
how the words choke up in my throat  
to correct them, again  
please use "they" instead  
please correct each other and yourself

I'm so tired of always  
trying to be less invisible

for some people it's exhausting  
to just live as yourself  
day after day  
in a world that feels  
like someone else's

I wanna tell you more  
of how it feels  
but there's this voice in my head  
that says "Hush."  
"Hush child, they don't care."  
says "Hush now, your pain is your own.  
You're just one in a thousand.  
Why should they care?"

I know this is a voice that hides  
in the back of the minds  
of many of the other people  
that face oppression  
that face discrimination that's hard  
to pin down, to point to, to tell others about

I know that I don't know  
exactly what it's like for these people  
that also hear this voice  
but that we have some things  
in common  
and can embody  
the power to resist  
and can stand  
with one another

But knowing these things  
for some reason  
still doesn't quiet that voice  
that finds me  
at my most downtrodden  
and whispers "Hush."

I still don't know  
what benefit  
my own voice, my stories  
might have  
but here it is anyway.