

Week 4 Writing Experiment (Experiment #3): “Gender & Body, OR: ‘Queering Language’” – READ THRU THIS WHOLE DOCUMENT BEFORE YOU BEGIN WRITING!

Here are the directions I gave out in class on Saturday; those in class on Saturday have already done “STEP 1”, the “focused free-writes” and thus have already generated the “raw materials” that the draft poem is based on. For those who were NOT in class, instead of simply reviewing STEP 1 (instead of simply reviewing your free-writes to the questions reproduced below), DO those free-writes at home (times spent for writing to each are indicated in parentheses after the question), and ONLY AFTER THAT proceed on to STEP 2, which are directions to/constraints for the building of your poem. For the rest of us, I reproduce the questions I asked you to write to in class so that folks can review/recall the steps we’ve taken so far to ultimately produce this poem.

*This poem is due WEDNESDAY OF WEEK 4 (not Saturday, as this week’s reading-to-writing order is flipped, and this poem has another step to it that we’ll work on in class on Wednesday).

*Please follow the steps for these poems—the order is important, for example, first free-write first, then the second, etc., since one builds on the next, and so forth. The constraints for building your poem are below, under “STEP 2.” Use the constraints; otherwise write in ways that inspire you, that ultimately allow for discovery. Enjoy! //d

QUOTES FROM CLASS (and our readings):

“If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary.”

--Judith Butler, Intro p. 7 (from the 1st page of the linked pdf).

“For more and more queer and trans people, regardless of marital status, there is no inheritance, no health benefits from employers, no legal immigration status, and no state protection of our relationship to our children. Four decades after queer and trans people took to the streets throwing heels, bottles, bricks, and anything else we had to ward off police, the official word is that, except for being able to get married and fight in the military, we are pretty much free, safe, and equal. And those of us who are not must wait our turn until the “priority” battles are won by the largely white, male, upper-class lawyers and lobbyists...”

--Dean Spade, from “...Giving It Everything We’ve Got” (from one of our recommended readings from this week, link is on blog for reference)

STEP 1: GETTING STARTED: Again, reproduced below are in-class questions most of you have written on already—please read thru them to refresh your memory and cross-check your free-write notes. If you have not yet written on these questions, free-write to them for the times—the amount of minutes—given. Do this writing before moving on to the “CONSTRAINTS,” which are the rules, so to speak, for turning your free-writes into a sonnet.

QUESTIONS FROM CLASS, FREE-WRITES (which you will end up using to make your poem):

- 1) Free-write on the following question: what are your first impressions of kari edwards’ “Subject: Statement”? What do you notice, hear, etc? (5 min of free-writing)
- 2) Free-write on the following question AFTER READING ALOUD the Butler quote above: What is Butler getting at here? What, in particular, does Butler mean when she writes that gender is a “practice” that is always an “improvisation within a scene of constraint”? (5 min)
- 3) Free-write to the following: recall one instance in which you can remember learning how to do something or know something—that is, recall a skill or piece of knowledge and write about how you learned it (such as riding a bicycle). Write what you can recall of learning it, the things you had to do in order to acquire this skill or piece of knowledge. (5 min)
- 4) Free-write to the following: list some skills or behaviors that are vital for you to live but that you don’t recall ever learning how to do or know. Choose one and write about how you imagine you might have acquired this skill or behavior. (5 min.)
- 5) Describe your body. Be as descriptive as you can (this writing will remain private), interpreting “your body” here as it occurs to you to do so. (7 min. of free-writing)

STEP 2: CONSTRAINTS FOR THIS WEEK’S POEM, MAKING a SONNET (Rough Draft is DUE WEDS, WEEK 3, next class): Make sure you have done the readings. I’ve given us more time with the readings this week, so RE-READ at least ONE text that you feel you could spend more time getting to know, such as the Butler or the Stryker. THEN, using the free-write material you’ve already generated above, WRITE YOUR POEM, FOLLOWING THESE CONSTRAINTS:

--OVERVIEW, BUILDING YOUR “SONNET”: you are to turn your body description plus other language from your free-writes (see below for details) into a 14-15 line poem that MAKES SOME SORT OF ARGUMENT RELATED TO THE THEMES AND/OR QUESTIONS THAT HAVE COME UP THIS WEEK FOR YOU.

--Specifically, you will build a 14-15 line poem that UNFOLDS AN ARGUMENT BY what is often referred to as “MAKING A TURN,” making a swerve at some point from VIVID OPENING SCENE into ARGUING SOME POSITION. The “turn” in a sonnet is precisely this sort of shift, from opening shot that unfolds, sometimes abruptly and quite unusually, into TAKING SOME POSITION. Your poetic “argument” should aim for NOT STATING THE OBVIOUS. AIM INSTEAD FOR ELUSIVENESS, VIVIDNESS, UNUSUAL LANGUAGE—AIM FOR ELISION (avoiding making obvious statements, such as declarative statements,

as one would see in a research essay--YOU ARE NOT MAKING AN ARGUMENT IN AN ESSAY OR PAPER, BUT A POETIC ARGUMENT, SO MAKE VIVID, UNUSUAL GESTURES WITH YOUR LANGUAGE). It is important for the reader to FEEL YOUR POEM, to ACTIVATE THE SENSES via avoiding any overbearing directness or expressions that make obvious the what argument is—MAKE THE READER HAVE TO WORK TO GET IT (don't worry if it "doesn't make sense"). Again, to restate just for emphasis, you are about to make a poem that seeks to argue in a way that is poetic and not essayistic, that is likely NOT sentential (not always made of full sentences), which means thinking about what a "poetic argument" is to you, and making strange the language we speak such that you are writing poetry and not a speech or a normative essay.

THE RECIPE: THE LANGUAGE THAT YOU MUST FIND A WAY TO USE IN YOUR POEM SOMEWHERE (as a line or part of a line, among all the new language that you make, somewhere along the way, include in your poem language from each of the following):

- 1) USE ANY LANGUAGE (but AT LEAST ONE LINE or LINE PART) FROM YOUR BODY DESCRIPTION—pick some language compelling to you, then proceed to make it "poetic" by revising, rephrasing or remaking the language you've chosen; revise/rephrase as necessary.

ALSO YOU MUST INCLUDE IN YOUR POEM:

- 2) ONE QUOTE FROM EDWARDS (EITHER "SUBJECT : STATEMENT" OR "NARRATIVE OF RESISTANCE");

- 3) And make use of ONE QUOTE FROM ANY ONE of THE FOLLOWING OTHER TEXTS that you read this week: one quote from the Butler, the Stryker, OR from the Lundy Martin, and...

- 4) Finally, make sure to use (again by re-writing or rephrasing to make the language more vivid, more "poetic") AT LEAST TWO pieces of language from any of the in-class writing you did last class (meaning the language you generated from the free-write questions above, in addition to your body description).

TIP: Feel free to substantially alter the language that is yours—quotes remain quotes, but language from your body description and other free-writes can be freely re-shaped, changed, etc.

TIP: it is helpful to pick out ahead of time the language, including quotes, that you think you might like to use. Or to pick out this language at least before your poem draft is complete. That way, once you've picked out the language, you can proceed to write your 14-15 line poem with some sense of where you are headed.

STEP 3: REVISE ONCE. After one short revision, you now have a full rough draft of a 14-15 line poem, a sort of "sonnet" that makes an argument and that emerges out of a combination of your body description and your thoughts from the last couple classes.

REMINDER: BRING THIS ROUGH DRAFT TO NEXT CLASS, ON WEDS, THEN SEND AS ATTACHED FILE TO D BY WEDS NIGHT, w/clear subject line of what you are sending!... this is a ROUGH draft, remember! So don't worry if you feel it could be better.