



The Queer Foundation Scholar

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With this issue, we inaugurate *The QF Scholar* as an electronic quarterly dedicated to essays, poetry, short fiction, and similar writings by college and university students who previously participated in the Queer Foundation's English Essay Contest for High School Seniors. Four students will share \$1,500.00 in scholarship funds this year: **Ericka Sokolower-Shain**, a senior at Wesleyan University, and **Javon Smith**, a sophomore at DePaul University, have received \$500.00 scholarships; **Lisa Hurwitz**, The Evergreen State College, and **Brandon Lambert**, a sophomore at Point Park University, have each received \$250.00 scholarships. The works by Sokolower-Shain and Hurwitz appear below. Submissions by Smith and Lambert will appear in the January, April, or July 2012 issues. I wish to thank those donors who have made these additional scholarships possible and thereby given these young queer students an additional vehicle for their talents. I would also like to thank the five individuals who helped evaluate the submissions.

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Excerpt from a memoir written for *Intimate Histories*, a seminar at Wesleyan University.

By **Ericka Sokolower-Shain**
Wesleyan University

Charlie and I are hiding underneath the play structure at our preschool. Harold, the school's bully is looking for us. He keeps calling our names and I try hard not to make any noise that will give away our hiding place. Charlie's pants are around his ankles and we have just compared his body to mine. I am overwhelmingly jealous of his penis and the way he is able to hold this strange piece of anatomy in his hands. Charlie is my first boyfriend, which means he lets me play with his Hot Wheels and we meet sometimes under the play structure like this or under a towel after we go swimming and we sit next to each other in the school van when we go on field trips. It was with him that I first realized that my body was different from other kids. Harold is still looking for us, I think he knows what Charlie and I do when we disappear and he wants to join in. "Charlie and Ericka, sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g." His footsteps get closer and I hold my breath. 1

I feel a rush the first time I used the boys' bathroom. I'm in kindergarten, playing with my friend Antonio in the aftercare program at my bilingual elementary school in the Mission. We are using the roller blades provided by the program and we are finally going to put into action what we have been planning for days. The only person standing in my way is Siria, the woman hired by the school to watch the playground after school lets out for the day. She is known for being strict and I know that if she catches me going into the wrong bathroom, I will be sentenced to ten minutes sitting on the bench next to her while Antonio gets to keep playing. We make sure she is watching other kids playing on the monkey bars and take off flying towards the bathroom on our in-lines. Zipping across the threshold, my heart starts racing and I quickly bypass the urinals for my very own stall. I use the toilet, something I haven't tried to do at my elementary school since the first time I tried to use the girl's bathroom one of the older kids told me I was in the wrong place and to get out before she got a teacher. Most days I just hold it until I get home, at which point my bladder feels like it's going to explode.

Jody and I are in the bathroom at home. I would rather be anywhere else but she insists we practice. "What do you say when someone tells you that you are in the wrong place?" she asks again. "Yes I am, I'm a girl," I respond with little enthusiasm. I know what she is trying to do and I know that it will never work. Even though we will practice in this bathroom all weekend, I know that come Monday, I still won't be able to go at school.

I am in second grade and I ask my mom if there is any way I can have a penis when I grow up. My mom pauses and looks me square in the eye. "This is a very serious question," she tells me. "I have a lot of friends who transitioned from female to male a long time ago and some of them are really happy they did it and some of them wish they could go back. Do you think you are ready to make such an important decision about your body? You know we only get one of them. If you'd like, I can try to find someone to talk to about this."

Years later I am writing a paper for my high school about gender identity and she shows me the books she went out and bought after the conversation we had, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* by Kate Bornstein, and *Transgender Warriors* by Leslie Feinberg. I am amazed at how calm she was when I asked her about getting surgery.²

I look up at the glow in the dark stars above my bed. My alarm goes off but I'm already awake. Glancing out the window, I can see the morning dew on the windshield of my grandmother's red '89 Subaru that we've inherited. I roll over and slither out of my newly built Ikea platform bed. My room still smells like new paint: blue with purple trim. We have been living in this new house for almost a month now after watching it get built from the ground up for almost a year. Jody's cousin Eve and her husband Gale have given us half of their lot to build a house for ourselves and now, for the first time in their lives, my moms are homeowners. For me, it has meant a move across the Bay and a new school. Today will be my first day at Longfellow Arts and Technology Magnet Middle School in Berkeley, California.

I pull on my new pants, the first pair I've bought from the Juniors' section of the department store instead of the boy's. They are khaki and flair at the bottom. On top, I wear my New York Jeans Company t-shirt. The weekend before, I had gone to the mall with Jody and she had helped me pick out girl's clothes. I have decided that at my new school, I am going to dress and act like a girl. During the day, my pants feel too tight around my thighs and the next day, it's back to my old jeans. One day a kid in my class remarks at how nicely my jeans are sagging and I smile triumphantly, my pants

are cool.³

A colleague at Karen's work has invited me to come to the first meeting of a new organization called PISSR (People in Search of Safe Restrooms). We are sitting on folding chairs in one of the bigger meeting rooms at the LGBT Community Center on Market St. in San Francisco, which at the time required you to check out a key from the front desk if you wanted to use the gender neutral bathroom rather than the unlocked men's or women's rooms on the first floor. I have made my mom come with me, but now that I am in a room, surrounded by transpeople, I finally feel like I belong and I wish I had enough courage to come alone. To break the ice, we go around the room and describe our favorite toilet paper. "You know how razors used to be one blade, then two, and now these new three bladed ones are coming out? Well that's how I feel about toilet paper, first there was one ply and now there's two but I'm going to hold out until they start marketing the three and four ply rolls." Susan Stryker in her *Introduction to Transgender Studies* states, "that 'gender,' as it is lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered, is more complex and varied than can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity."⁴

PISSR introduces me to a new vocabulary and I realize that there are people out there who are as confused about gender as I am. I start writing poetry about the word genderqueer and I keep going to the meetings and I keep bringing my mom with me.⁵

I am at the point where I feel like I can use any bathroom at Wesleyan, gendered or not, although I have made a point to find all of the single stall bathrooms I can on campus. My favorite is the one on the second floor of Fisk. It has a giant window that overlooks High Street. I also use the bathrooms in Allbritton, which are almost all gender neutral, or the secret second bathroom on the first floor of the Center for Film Studies. I love the bathroom under the stairs in the Center for the Americas because I feel a little like Harry Potter every time I use it.

I'm at a Diplomats concert at Toad's Place in New Haven, Connecticut. There is heavy security and all of the men are asked to lift their arms to get pat down for weapons. Women, on the other hand, are asked to open their purses and I assume that since there are no female security guards, this is a legal matter. I realize I have about two minutes to decide how to play this interaction. In the end, relying on my bulky winter coat to protect me, I step up to the man blocking the door and passively lift up my arms. He runs his hands down

the sides of my chest and I wonder if he can feel the sports bra through all of my layers.⁶

Notes

1. “Phallogentrism is exactly that: not primarily the denial of power to women (although it has obviously also led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above all the denial of the *value* of powerlessness in both men and women.” (Bersani, 217) While I don’t necessarily associate my own feelings with this definition of phallogentrism, I am intrigued by Bersani’s conceptualization of power and the intersection of pleasure and fear I felt as a young girl hiding from a boy who was also, I have come to believe in the ever dangerously subjective view of hindsight, attracted to me, while aroused by the different bodies I was discovering beneath the play structure with Charlie. (Bersani, Leo. “Is the Rectum a Grave?” October vol. 43 (Winter 1987), 197-222.)

2. I was still extremely confused. Later, reading Julia Serano’s book, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, I can relate to her confusion about the gender binary. “Being that, like most elementary school children, my understanding of ‘girl’ and ‘boy’ was largely based on gender preferences in toys, activities, and interests, it wasn’t clear to me how to reconcile my vague, subconscious feelings with my passion for dinosaurs and my desire to be a major league baseball player when I grew up.” (79) While Serano was at the time, “obviously a boy,” she didn’t understand why others were confused that her narrative didn’t follow that of others on the male to female spectrum that were more characteristically feminine as children. I too felt trapped by expectations, why did my love of dinosaurs and dreams of being a major league baseball picture mean I had to be a man when I grew up? (Serano, Julia. *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press. 2007)

3. Gayle Rubin, in defining *butch* in her article “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries,” writes “[Butch] may include women...who consider women’s usual wear too confining or uncomfortable or who feel it leaves them vulnerable or exposed.” (Rubin, Gayle. “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries.” *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Stryker, Susan and Whittle, Stephen, eds. New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006.)

4. Stryker, Susan. “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies.” *The Transgender Reader*. Stryker, Susan and Whittle, Stephen, eds. New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006.

5. David Valentine once wrote, “language shapes how we make sense of our worlds. In this view, ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ are not self-evident experiences of domains outside language. Rather, they are linguistic tools which extract certain information, experiences, and feelings about ourselves and others from the stream of daily life for the purposes of

making meaning about, and representing, ourselves and others.” (*Imagining Transgender*, 31) For the first time in my life, I felt this sort of resonance with the language of genderqueer. No longer did my body feel tethered to the static categories of male and female, nor did I feel the pressure to choose one category or the other. (Valentine, David. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham: Duke, 2007.)

6. Ellen Samuel in her GLQ article “My Body, My Closet,” writes, “like racial, gender and queer passing, the option of passing as non-disabled provides both a certain level of privilege and a profound sense of mis-recognition and internal dissonance.” (239) This question constantly plagues me when I get “sir-ed” at the grocery store. Like the connection to drag as a performance that needs an audience, I wonder what it means when I am able to pass though the world as a man. (“My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming-Out Discourse,” GLQ, v. 9 nos. 1-2 (2003).)

About the author: **Ericka Sokolower-Shain**, a 2008-09 Queer Foundation Scholar and a graduate of Berkeley (CA) High School, is currently a senior at Wesleyan University, double majoring in Film and American Studies. Ericka reports finding “a great community at Wesleyan, particularly through my participation on the rugby team.”

Since 2006 the Queer Foundation’s Effective Writing and Scholarships Program has awarded scholarships to talented high school students. Now, new Publication Awards are available to current college/university students who formerly participated in the QF’s high school essay contest whose writing is selected to appear in this or in future editions of this newsletter. Aside from assisting these talented authors with their expenses, the new program ensures a wider audience for their writing and helps The QF reach one of its most important goals: to bring young queer writers’ unique contributions to the larger community.

Donors now have the option of designating their contributions to either the general QF Scholarship Endowment Fund or to the Publications Award. Donations with no particular designation will continue to go directly into the Scholarship Endowment Fund.

Thank you to all of the donors and volunteers who make these awards possible.

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DADA - DANCING: An Introduction to "Single Ladies"

By **Lisa Hurwitz**
The Evergreen State College

"Shall we dare really to compare an imaginative writer with one who dreams in broad daylight, and his creations with day-dreams?"

Sigmund Freud

The spectacle appears as follows. In a school gallery: a living tableau of motionless dancers in black leotards stand on pedestals, their eyes concealed by black sleep coverings. Visitors circulate as an anonymous voice fills the room, reading from Freud's "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming." The preface ends and my film "Single Ladies" is projected onto the walls. While the video itself is very professionally done, featuring sophisticated camera movements and cuts, the dancers in it are varied in their expertise. Some are quite polished while others have all the attitude of typical dancers in contemporary videos with little of their skill. The production and performance are a success. In this intentional communal sharing of dream experience, I reject the notion of the vulgarity of our dreams, the impossibility to share them, and embrace them for their truth and beauty.

When our dreams overflow into real life it is as though we begin a second life. Our daydreams, the most lucid and tangible access to unconscious fantasy, stand as the most accurate vision of the inseparability of truth and fiction. These distinct realms of possibility nevertheless blend, and the distinction between these juxtaposed worlds becomes blurred and broken. Our present life may reconfigure in no way, yet an alternate path is laid. The struggle is how the path can lead us if we lack opportunities to realize these dreams.

Freud finds it vulgar to share the inartistic dreams of the everyday and calls for the inartistic person to live vicariously through the poet, the socially sanctioned provider of dream experience to the general population of mere daydreamers. These dreams are inartistic because the material is spontaneous as opposed to the poet's, whose material is ready-made. Without the ability to wield her dream readily, the dreamer therefore lacks the intellectual and hence artistic merit of the poet. Her creations are unqualified.

Prompted by this troublesome notion, I set out to celebrate the opposite – life as art. This said, there is an abundance of magic in Freud's attempt to trace the source of some of our most concrete unconscious

desires. Akin to the Dadaists who sought beauty in the strangest ways, I find inspiration in the destruction that makes way for essential new beginnings. Today I embrace pop music for its communicative power as shared cultural vocabulary and open invitation for theatricality and reinterpretation. Through reinvention I make my world livable.

Made fun of for my weight and being bossy, as an adolescent I looked to pop, dominated by women of looks and attitude, for the confidence to shape my own world. My first pop concert naturally was one of the most exciting nights of my life. I went to see Christina Aguilera, but her opening act (a band I had never heard of called Destiny's Child) stole the show, particularly their lead singer Beyonce Knowles. It was a night hard to forget, leaving me with the impression that one day Beyonce, the clear star, would be a virtuoso in her own right. I chose to recreate Beyonce's "Single Ladies" video for its inherent exemplification of the potential to transform the everyday experience into a collectively interpreted form of interest, beauty, and art.

Ms. Hurwitz' video, as well as a behind the scenes video, can be found at this Youtube site:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQHPXnKRvtg>

About the author: **Lisa Hurwitz** is a student at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, where she is pursuing a B.A. degree in Liberal Arts, with a focus on American Studies, Media Studies, and Sustainability.

From the Editor's Desk

Until the Republican presidential candidate debates, I had never paid much attention to the power we queers have to anger the gods. It's not just Fred Phelps and his Westboro Baptist Church gang anymore. The hyperbole now comes from almost all of the Republican candidates for president. We've long been blamed for natural disasters (most of which occur in the "Bible Belt"); now we're blamed for the economic recession, for unemployment, for poverty, and for the destruction of "traditional" marriage. Oh that we had such power.

The pundits mostly get it wrong: the presidential candidates are not catering to their base; they are trying to expand the base. Since a majority of Americans are not buying into their homophobic claptrap, they can't but resort to increasing hyperbole in an effort to convert a few more people. Fearmongers always have a degree of success in difficult economic times, but to do so they have to increase the volume of their fearmongering.

However, a funny thing happened on the way to the forum. Why would god punish Texas? The worst drought in over 60 years and before it's finished, perhaps the worst ever. The worst ever season of wildfires, and earlier this week, the most bizarre sandstorm. Few governors are as intolerant of "others" as Rick Perry, having shared the podium at his Prayer Meeting with many of the nation's most reactionary ministers. They all prayed to be delivered from the evils that are, in their minds, Judaism, Islam, Mormonism, atheism, queers, abortionists, feminists; they also prayed for rain. The drought continues. Maybe Perry and his supporters are praying to the wrong god; maybe even their god doesn't approve of their promotion of hatred.

RV

How many Homophobes does it take to change a lightbulb? None. They fear change, even if it can make the world a brighter place.

HIT SHARE to pass it on - Thanks (WHOF).



Queer teens worldwide maintain blogs on tumblr. Thanks to many of them, "posters" like this get wide circulation.