

AN EFFORT AT CEREMONY

The story of my girlhood is inseparably linked to poetry. Before discovering my girlhood, I was confused and upset. There was no blueprint for a trans girl in Tulsa, Oklahoma. There was no role model for me to find myself in, let alone in the words to describe myself in the first place. I remember this time like being a hungry slide, formless and comfortable in the "male" role I was raised to play.

Through poetry I found language that did not only fit my self-image, but transformed me. Tulsa native **Joy Harjo** wrote in her book *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* that "**every poem is an effort at ceremony**", so I'll let the intentions of this collection of ceremonies be explicit: I hope to call forth the lost girls. I intend to show **the joys and sorrows of being trans in Oklahoma** in equal measure. I intend to **put the T in T-Town.**

THE TSA TOOK MY PENIS AWAY

The TSA took my penis away. They took her away.
My little bomb of
skin

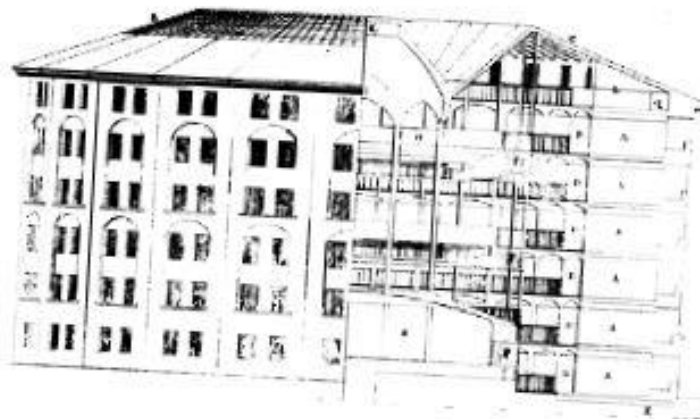
Who knows what would happen if we let a whole
girl in the sky! She might not
come
down 'till the stars know her bitter taste & even then
she might pull up on the
event

horizon of a black hole where she is the event & on
the horizon is a show so
energetic
light won't leave.

Here is where time slows down for the outside
observer.

Here is where we never come back.

Here is the landing strip, the tease, the reveal, the
baggage claim, the barf bag, the lover at the
terminal.



CULTURE OF SUSPICION

"*The TSA Took My Penis Away*" is the result of a workshop with Tulsa Artist Fellow Steve Bellin-Oka. In the workshop, he asked us to write a poem in a drag persona, focusing on the theatrical performance of gender, including a reveal and other motifs of drag. For me, this manifested as a sarcastic take on a common issue in flying while transgender.

The TSA has used problematic binary screening processes, leading to the singling out of gender nonconforming people. The computer detects a woman's penis as an anomaly, often leading to public humiliation at best, and harassment at worst. This is only a small example of how our country seeks to control our bodies and enforce an unnatural standard.

Rather than lamenting yet another vector of oppression, the poem makes a joke of it. The title harkens to the *Ramones*, and the absurd image of the TSA simply confiscating the speaker's genitalia like a bottle of liquid over the 3.4-ounce limit. When I was younger, I only saw people with bodies like mine depicted as punchlines by cis comedians, to swap that dynamic is empowering. I am a woman and I have a penis. These realities do not only coexist, they are one, and they are beautiful.

TO THE T GIRL I WAS TOO SCARED TO TALK TO AT THE CONCERT

God is real between you and me in this mosh pit.
thrash and teeter totter on one leg i will

catch you and trampoline from your back to
my friend with my glasses in his hands, hand

him my breast forms and tell me some
day this dance won't feel like a miracle

we won't see each other like
sailors on their seventh month alone.

that day when our kind of dangerous
survival is not our dance on

the edge of a blade. that day
our bodies are more than

ghosts that have
not lived yet

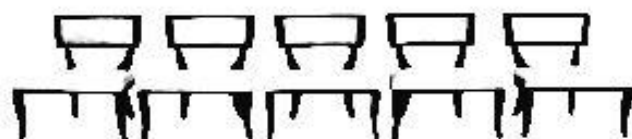


ON ~~TRANS~~ OUR GRIEF

In January 2021, I set up a memorial for the trans youth we've lost in a bathroom with a small canvas trans pride flag I painted and a candle I lit with a stick and a stove. I watched the flame and promised the ghosts that I would live, despite how harsh the world is to us, if not for myself, then for them. When I have little hope, I have my promise.

My therapist says grief for a person you've never known is also grief for yourself. It is true I grieve the girl I could've been had previous generations been there for me. I grieve the people I could know if my government hadn't ignored AIDs. I grieve the knowledge lost when the Nazis burnt the Institute for Sexual Research for daring to study the queer and trans. I grieve people like Tulsa's Daniel Aston, lost in the Club Q Shooting on November 20th, 2022.

The grief is heavier when it's carried alone, and unfortunately only other trans people carry this grief. So yes, while this poem is about the weight of responsibility I feel, it is truly about survival, which is necessarily together. What we learn to do and how the families we choose are vital, including the ancestors **When we lose so much, we have to value everything we have, even the empty chairs.**



WITH MY BOYFRIEND AT THE GAS STATION WHERE MY THERAPIST'S OFFICE WAS

How he held the umbrella over our head
while the wind punched our faces
& he imagined other states than here.

How I gasped for air when he said
that we could die in other places
& I imagined another state than fear.



How we filled up the biggest slushy cup
together
& giggled through the aisles without shame.

How our defenses surrendered to the weather
& he said he forgot my deadname
& he told me “I’ll never remind you”.

How I wished the flood to remake the world,
& on the Monkey’s Paw a finger curled.

Yet still, when the water receded
the olive tree grew
and we were everything we needed.

WHY I DATE OTHER TRANS PEOPLE

"Trans women are women" is a popular refrain, but it takes more to make a person feel genuinely seen as they are. It is one thing to use the proper pronouns for a person. It is another thing to understand them, and create a validating space. So often as trans people we are asked to justify ourselves in a world without justice.

I believe trans for trans relationships (romantic and platonic) in particular are **an opportunity to create a world where we are not othered.** As a friend of mine once said, it feels like there is a language barrier between us and most cis people. The relief of speaking in your 'first language' is intense and intimate.



ODE TO TRANS APHRODITE

Youngest son of a landlocked state
& just as flat.

She wrings out her hair
in a clawfoot tub.*

From her head to her head
she is leg stubble and salt bubble.

Her fingers spread
ceramic soap, skin acetate, &

hot wax, smooth lavender.
In the mirror I see her

wet on the bathmat,
each drop a consecrated concentrate.

The only girl on Earth
& just as desperate beautiful alive at least.

*If you have never bathed
in a clawfoot, DO IT, it
is a delight beyond
measure



YOUNGEST "SON" OF A LANDLOCKED STATE

I saw myself in the far-off ocean, which is a feminine presence, yes, but that does not mean it is soft, or submissive, or even always pretty. Indeed, the ocean is broad as my shoulders, deep as my voice, and full of strange, misunderstood creatures like the blobfish.

The blobfish is a deep sea fish found near Australia. When in its natural habitat at the bottom of the ocean, looks like a rather average fish, however, when the pressure of the entire ocean over its head is removed, the blobfish's body falls apart into a slimy, gelatinous ball with eyes. This is both the popular image and the namesake of the fish, despite the reality. It is no surprise that the misunderstood blobfish has become a symbol for outcasts of society— people like me, born into a hostile habitat. Oklahoma is not a place for a blobfish. That is, if you're looking at it from the surface waters, from the legislative perspective.

But this state has depth. This state has a thriving ecosystem of people that care for each other, artists that tap into the natural energy of the state— and I don't mean oil.

This is a land diverse in geography and culture. A land that bears heavy, old injustices. In that baggage, there is a potential energy— an opportunity and a desire to create a better world. A kinder world.

Mia-Jo Bella is a trans woman, a poet, and an Oklahoman. Through her work she advocates for the health and well-being of young people in her state and abroad.



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This zine was created as a part of Freedom Oklahoma's Youth Action Month (YAM). YAM is about celebrating the work young 2SLGBTQ+ Oklahomans have done and will do in the future; helping make Oklahoma a more equitable place for all Oklahomans.