

## Strengthening Identities Through Spoken Word

I presented two spoken word poems in a group of eleven students led by Dr. Corkery. Like the other students, my poems were deeply personal. I wrote my poems out of personal experience with disabled and transgender identities. My poems are titled *Criptid* and *Network*.

The event was organized so that we did not have to read our poems back to back. Before the event, I decided with Dr. Corkery and my peers to read *Criptid* first, because I wanted my poems to have the greatest impact I could deliver to others. *Criptid* deals primarily with disability and my being a cane-user because of endometriosis; however, my disability is inseparable from my gender. Specifically, I reference having a uterus while being male.

### Creative Commentary

I wrote the poem in short sections, rearranging and inserting sections as I saw fit. The first part of the poem was originally intended to be a separate piece, but became part of the main work as an introduction. I do not stick to a rhyme scheme or pattern, but occasionally use devices such as rhyming and alliteration for emphasis. I wrote *Criptid* as a way to assert an identity that I made for myself as opposed to what able-bodied people thought I should be: meaning that I wasn't "gonna use your standards anymore." I named the poem *Criptid* as a play on words between "cripple," a derogatory term for a physically disabled person, and "cryptid," a word for creatures like Bigfoot that may or may not exist, because being disabled often feels invisible and unacknowledged. When I wrote this piece, I wanted almost every line to have a deeper story behind it or other important feature, and I did not want to linger on any specific tone for long. For instance, the lines: "And when the people needing charity aren't allowed in the door/Your loss, Red Cross, not wanting cripple blood" refers to when I was turned down from a blood drive because of disability, despite having no blood disease, when I only wanted to help out other sick or needy people in a way that I could. It also refers to how hard it is to get healthcare in the first place. After those lines, I switch to a completely different experience between individuals, and how I react when confronted with unsupportive people.

I wrote the second poem, *Network*, to show the strength and interconnectedness of the transgender community. In it, I create six fictional characters based on general stories within the transgender consciousness. Then, I intertwined these stories. To avoid confusion when having multiple narratives and to make each character have the same amount of presence, I chose to write each character's stanza using an 'AABBCCD' rhyme scheme and to link between the stanzas with a sort of repeating chorus.

The first character is an old man, who transitions later in life after being inspired by the second character - his story is the one of transgender elders who spent such a large portion of the life uncomfortable with themselves. The character that inspires him is a young girl, who becomes a news story when her school does not want to accept that she

is female. Being misgendered is a difficult experience for any transgender person, so with her character I wanted to explore how becoming a media sensation would affect an introverted child.

The third character, her therapist, enjoys helping people, but has a tragic past herself. She is based on the idea that many people feel a duty to the community and to support younger generations in ways that they did not have themselves. As a child, she was homeless along with a transgender boy, who died shortly after his parents abandoned him. As the most tragic character, his story acts as a moment of sobriety and as a weight that his friend, as well as the entire community, carries with them.

When the two friends were homeless, they stayed in a few shelters; someone who later decided that, after working with many transgender individuals, they would abandon the gender binary entirely ran one shelter. Their story is one of experimentation and blurred lines becoming a valid identity.

The sixth character is their godchild, who is young and is not ingrained with the societal expectations of what gender should be. Their character serves as a sign of an ambiguous future that could have many difficulties. Since they are given a flower by the first character, who is now happy and satisfied with life, I would like to believe that the child - as well as the entire transgender community - has a happy future. While *Network* does not involve me as personally as *Criptid* does, I find it empowering as a transgender person. I would like those hearing *Network* to appreciate the fight each character has with the transphobic world around them and to understand that the transgender community has a rich history.

### **Conclusion**

Both poems were originally written as a creative project in a class, but encouraged on to other venues such as Made in Millersville. I have developed them through working with poetry groups and participating in stand-up readings. I gather inspiration to keep writing by being present in the atmosphere of other spoken word artists and have written a few other poems since. I plan to keep listening, keep writing, and keep reading spoken word poetry, both to improve myself as a person and to spread my message to others.