OISE, University of Toronto

***Guest host: Fan Wu***

Hosts: Ben Gallagher & Ashleigh Allen

**Queer Poetics: Poetry Workshop**

**Workshop description**:

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop, guided by local Torontonian poet Fan Wu, looks at **Queer Poetics**.

In this workshop, Fan gives a very brief overview of three strands of queer poetics. He then takes up the two chapbooks from his *What Queer Reading* series (https://whatqueerreading.com) as inspo material for the workshop. We engage with solitary and collaborative writing.

The purpose of this workshop is to expose participants to different ways of reading and writing poetry as a community. We are grateful to be a part of a community that values engagement with writing and reading.

*(5 minutes)*

**Welcome participants & introductions & queerness as contested ground (reflected in poetry)**

* “Queer” and its etymology / Queer theory / Identity versus Becoming

*(10 minutes)*

**Discuss three threads of queer poetics:**

* queerness as social experience, as contradiction
* queer ecstasy: form of the sound produces a becoming-continuous with the world
* queer parataxis: inspired by surrealism: it doesn’t explain its world

*(15-20 minutes)*

**PRATHNA LOR – from *What Queer Reading* series**

**Read:** “Blue-dusted fag ring” (3), “I should have told you” (5), “prophetic shitface” (8) “morning blends a soft lock” (21), “Love Poem” (17)

- What did you make of these poems?

- Ashberyian lineage, but terser

- Two directions to try. One: stitched-together parataxis.

- Don’t think about connectivity. Let the language connect in its own weird ways

**Prantha Lor - Writing prompts:**

1. Phrases never before heard in the English language: “Seclusion making brats”

2. An object with its essential descriptor: “Blue-dusted fag ring,” “winedark sea”

3. A backhanded compliment or a forehanded insult: “prophetic shitface”

4. Repetition with significant difference: “Girl trash talk trash”

5. Something only possible in the virtual “the thought of clasped palms”

6. A command: “take ginger in the mouth and learn quiet”

7. A phrase that absents itself: “[placeholder for a name]

8. A motto for living: “Remember your epithets and tie up your tyrannies.”

- Think about these endless categories of speech and build them side-by-side instead of building on top, in a linear fashion

- Second direction: reinvent a genre by emptying it of content. Boil it down to its absurd minimum, à la “Love Poem”

- Examples of genres: aubade, sex poem, nature poem, the confessional

- Use only indeterminate pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions [refer to page 14 for a word bank], maximum one noun. Practice of dis-ignoring the parts of speech that get most shafted.

*(15-20 minutes)*

**CODY CAETANO – from *What Queer Reading* series**

**Read**: “Panoptipop,” “Courter’s Pitch,” “Offbobblings”

- For Cody's poems: they're better read aloud than talked about I think

- I'd place them in the lineage of queer ecstasy

- Tips on how to read: tanginess of the slang; lilt, a rap rhythm, let it carry you don't think too hard about it

**Cody – Writing Prompts**

- Pair up into teams of two

- Make a list of idioms, neologisms that have been important to you (3-5 per person)

- Think: localisms, regionalisms from your childhood or adolescence; think your dad or your hermit uncles or your no-holds-barred friend who goes treeplanting every year

examples in PANOPTIPOP

"hits him with a classic"

examples in COURTER'S PITCH

"brain pics" "stress test"

examples in OFFBOBBLINGS

"brain-jpegs" "back-in-five'd for half an hour" "Roosterville sesh house" "cut quartz"

"hair milk" "red-rovering hands" "Abe Lincolns"

- For every idiom, come up with one or two rhymes or assonant

e.g. "brain pics pretty as a pixel-eyed fly"

"Roosterville sesh house with no less than a few [dozen steps]"

- Let these idioms and their rhymes/assonances lead your poem. Try to slant rhymes instead of including them at the ends of sentences:

e.g. My thirst for hair milk BEGAN with this bone-deep wet dream that resets to red-rovering HANDS"

**Other suggestions/ Prompts:**

- Go back to a scene from your childhood but treat it like a reverie! as tho you were "baking yrself back to when you were a kitty". Get into the details of that scene "lifting sock fluff off cold junk"

- Snap back to the present suddenly with a short utterance: "But lo!"

- Include brand names that have imprinted themselves in your memory ("fruit gusher")

- Forget about sense; where it's possible to condense, condense ("Bloor racks" versus "Bloor shopping racks," cut articles especially where they're bloating up the line)

*(5-10 minutes)*

**Ideas for exit conversation:**

* Does any of this strike you as useful to reapply to a classroom context?
* Does the queer strike you as useful framework for thinking about poetry? Or identity?