

Gender Quiz

*note: parenthetical examples are intended only to exemplify. Adherencies shift.*

Gender is maintained as a category to discuss poetry (by women) on the grounds that:

a. biology is destiny: because contemporary women (which in this case = female) poets inhabit female bodies, and so inhabit the spheres in which these bodies circulate, their poetic strategies are compared to those other women poets who inhabit(ed) the same. This yields up differences. Whereas precursors were restricted to their 'sphere,' contemporaries are interested in (instances of) boundary crossing. (Bradstreet v. Susan Howe.)

b. biology as history: same as (a) but the comparison extends historically so as to yield up samenesses: a genealogy of feminist—or female—poetic 'strategies.' Danger of developing haphazardly into essentializing arguments for 'women's language.' Might lapse into arguments for mimesis. (Rich's white spaces and gaps = silences or mastectomies.)

c. woman as other: female poets, because they are not male, have historically been excluded from male homo-social discourses, on the basis of (a) and (b). Relies on the Oedipal master narrative for differentiation. Women poets either instantiate this ideology or challenge it by refusing or ironizing her 'place' in the phallic economy. (H.D.)

d. social-constructivist: because gender is discursive and socially constructed, women poets construct their subjectivity in such a way as to challenge the sort of lineages constructed by (a) (b) and (c). In this way, the woman poet refuses to be 'other' by instead claiming the 'multiple,' 'indeterminate,' or non-phallic, non-objectifying, as her mode of subjectivity. (Stein.)

e. liberal-humanist: because men and women are equal, intellectually at least, under certain circumstances (myopic specificity), each have equal access to language, modes of dissemination, and reward systems. As long as she develops her voice, she can write about whatever she

wants to (as long as desire doesn't degrade into naming 'parts'). Gender is maintained as a category presumably because in a democratic society men and women are equal. Without it, poetry is otherwise often indistinguishable in terms of its deployment of various poetic strategies. (The exemplary blurs into the numerous.)

f. radical-optimist: Women are vastly outnumbered in poetic production, and have little control of the modes of dissemination and reward systems, but this situation has changed radically since WWII. Many have come around and realized that women can write poetry, and can run presses and edit magazines. There are some cool women poets who serve as 'mother' figures (Mayer, Notley, Waldrop, etc.) to encourage the often-daunting task of contributing to a discourse which offers no specific discouragement.

g. pessimist (or optimist, depending on whether the glass is half full or half empty): Gender isn't going away any time soon.

h. radical-realist: Because there is no such thing as a universal voice. And we have to remind ourselves of the particularities of poets (regardless of the particularities of the subjectivities they construct, or whether they choose to deconstruct subjectivity) in relation to the particularities of the poems they write. Gender is one such particularity. It is separable from other particularities only as a critical category, and as such it is used exclusively (to exclude), even detrimentally so in some cases.

i. I, I, I. I is a convention. Is there such a thing as voice? I tries to make particular texts read as though there were some one:to:one correlation between signifiers and signifieds. This isn't as dry as it sounds. It's possible that I doesn't intend to delude itself or its readers. I is a pedagogical tool. I know some I's personally. I used to be universal, but now I's ungendered.