

# Poem about My Rights

BY JUNE JORDAN

Even tonight and I need to take a walk and clear  
my head about this poem about why I can't  
go out without changing my clothes my shoes  
my body posture my gender identity my age  
my status as a woman alone in the evening/  
alone on the streets/alone not being the point/  
the point being that I can't do what I want  
to do with my own body because I am the wrong  
sex the wrong age the wrong skin and  
suppose it was not here in the city but down on the beach/  
or far into the woods and I wanted to go  
there by myself thinking about God/or thinking  
about children or thinking about the world/all of it  
disclosed by the stars and the silence:  
I could not go and I could not think and I could not  
stay there  
alone  
as I need to be  
alone because I can't do what I want to do with my own  
body and  
who in the hell set things up  
like this  
and in France they say if the guy penetrates  
but does not ejaculate then he did not rape me  
and if after stabbing him if after screams if  
after begging the bastard and if even after smashing  
a hammer to his head if even after that if he  
and his buddies fuck me after that  
then I consented and there was  
no rape because finally you understand finally  
they fucked me over because I was wrong I was  
wrong again to be me being me where I was/wrong  
to be who I am  
which is exactly like South Africa  
penetrating into Namibia penetrating into  
Angola and does that mean I mean how do you know if  
Pretoria ejaculates what will the evidence look like the  
proof of the monster jackboot ejaculation on Blackland  
and if  
after Namibia and if after Angola and if after Zimbabwe  
and if after all of my kinsmen and women resist even to  
self-immolation of the villages and if after that  
we lose nevertheless what will the big boys say will they

claim my consent:

Do You Follow Me: We are the wrong people of  
the wrong skin on the wrong continent and what  
in the hell is everybody being reasonable about  
and according to the *Times* this week  
back in 1966 the C.I.A. decided that they had this problem  
and the problem was a man named Nkrumah so they  
killed him and before that it was Patrice Lumumba  
and before that it was my father on the campus  
of my Ivy League school and my father afraid  
to walk into the cafeteria because he said he  
was wrong the wrong age the wrong skin the wrong  
gender identity and he was paying my tuition and  
before that

it was my father saying I was wrong saying that  
I should have been a boy because he wanted one/a  
boy and that I should have been lighter skinned and  
that I should have had straighter hair and that  
I should not be so boy crazy but instead I should  
just be one/a boy and before that

it was my mother pleading plastic surgery for  
my nose and braces for my teeth and telling me  
to let the books loose to let them loose in other  
words

I am very familiar with the problems of the C.I.A.  
and the problems of South Africa and the problems  
of Exxon Corporation and the problems of white  
America in general and the problems of the teachers  
and the preachers and the F.B.I. and the social  
workers and my particular Mom and Dad/I am very  
familiar with the problems because the problems  
turn out to be  
me

I am the history of rape

I am the history of the rejection of who I am

I am the history of the terrorized incarceration of  
myself

I am the history of battery assault and limitless  
armies against whatever I want to do with my mind  
and my body and my soul and

whether it's about walking out at night

or whether it's about the love that I feel or

whether it's about the sanctity of my vagina or  
the sanctity of my national boundaries

or the sanctity of my leaders or the sanctity  
of each and every desire

that I know from my personal and idiosyncratic  
and indisputably single and singular heart  
I have been raped  
be-  
cause I have been wrong the wrong sex the wrong age  
the wrong skin the wrong nose the wrong hair the  
wrong need the wrong dream the wrong geographic  
the wrong sartorial I  
I have been the meaning of rape  
I have been the problem everyone seeks to  
eliminate by forced  
penetration with or without the evidence of slime and/  
but let this be unmistakable this poem  
is not consent I do not consent  
to my mother to my father to the teachers to  
the F.B.I. to South Africa to Bedford-Stuy  
to Park Avenue to American Airlines to the hardon  
idlers on the corners to the sneaky creeps in  
cars  
*I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name*  
My name is my own my own my own  
and I can't tell you who the hell set things up like this  
but I can tell you that from now on my resistance  
my simple and daily and nightly self-determination  
may very well cost you your life

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