ABSTRACT

IF I HAD A PUPPY

by Marci Adair Kacsir

This manuscript is focused on poetry that combines the musicality of language with a limited space specifically so that the attention to language is heightened. I hope to get the readers involved in the poems through this kind of hyper-awareness and, at times, direct address. Directly speaking to my audience allows me to involve the readers in contemporary conversations in a way that less direct approaches often do not. Also, smaller, compressed forms offer a dimension of pressure on the line, call attention to the music in the language, and lend themselves to social commentary in a way I find particularly interesting. These poems are also influenced by the lyric tradition, especially the colloquial quality in the ballads. I see brevity not as a challenge but as an opportunity to leave something lingering with the audience long after the poem as been read.
IF I HAD A PUPPY

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
Department of English

by

Marci Adair Kacsir

Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2006

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Keith Tuma

Reader _____________________________
Christopher Cheek

Reader _____________________________
Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Keith Tuma, for the swift boot. Without it I may never have started walking down such a curious and interesting path.

To Jen Stockdale, for hours and hours of eyes and ears. It’s amazing how a good belly laugh can translate into poetry.
THEFT
This poem is being lifted and carted off as you read, maybe even cartoned, sold for parts in India, China, and Sinai.

It will be refurbished, outfitted in a new frame (cheap steel), then shipped back. The imported version, newly American, will reek of cumin but last longer, and taste spicy as hell.
Fingers

Shove it, Sticky, straight into your pocket.

It’ll burn a hole in your thigh, penance for theft even though it’s just a bit of candy, tiny piece, but deliciously gooey and pocket-warm. Chocolate rubbed mustache and thick prints, evidence both, will rat you out. Never mind that burning smell.

Hell doesn’t mind it either.
PETTY THEFT

I’m a corn eater brat
deeply mischievous
but not overtly so

for instance, instead of listening
to you blah blah blah,
I am writing this poem.
LOGORRHEA

I wish I could just stop talking sometimes, kick my nervous habit, pick up a new one, nail bite, light stutter, another collection of tiny figurines, or drip Visine, drum fingers, buy sneakers, whistle bits of show tunes. Anything to plug the hole in the blank look on your face.
MY VIEW OF THINGS

I look left, down, right, forward, askew, cross-eyed, closely, narrow, peripheral, big, sly, with a crinkle in my eye, just to get a sense, a smell, a taste.

I dilate my pupils, widen the iris, like I’m proud of my mood colored eyes. Brown, I’m angry, or hungry, or constipated. Blue, I’m happy, tired, or curious, or full.

But green is mischievous, horny, mean, like I cried a long time, for a while, or looked too long at the sidewalk and considered the callus that scratches my cornea.
ON COMING UP WITH A TITLE FOR THIS POEM

Screw it.

There’s lint
in my navel
to tend to.
ENNUI

Holmes had cocaine.
What have you got when
the juice runs out?
SILK SCARVES AND FEATHERS
*I’d Rather Be Having Sex*

It may surprise you that I am not a feminist or really care much about the whole ‘movement’. I have a hard time saying c-nt and cl-t though I can say vagina, maybe even too loudly and normally when you’re well within earshot.

RUSTED

Fuck off
my simile is
like my metaphor
the bullet wounding
this poem
and it doesn’t
care that it was
used yesterday
your poem’s
blood mixed
with this
LONELY BOULDERS
RAP ON REPEAT AT 6AM

Rubbing eyes with the back of my fists, groaning
black threats under my breath
at the neighbor, short temper,
late sleeper, light dreamer
I wish I kept a gun in the apartment.

This is the fourth time, fifth for this song, a long dirty show
of knuckles and balls, bitches in rides, almost naked, and all
stabbing my eyes with stilettos, my thin skin, thin membrane.

Next time her cat gets out
I won’t know what happened to Fluffy.
IT’S SUPPOSED TO BE SPRING

It’s spit cold
not warm, my walk stopped.
I plant my ass
in the easy chair. Who needs
spit in the eye?
HAUNTED HOUSE

Slaughterhouse is haunted
by men and women
who wonder how well combed were
the bloody baroness and black winged
ghoul for honest bombs,
real pistols under noise makers
and fake chainsaws,
and whether the clinking suitcase
of throat-slit Sam isn’t
ticking.
WIND FARM

Fast winds on flat lands
the fat man bends down
a lonely boulder barring the path
the clap and clip of wind.

On a tip, a shift of
breeze slips silky, sneaky,
nips his buns, lifts his
shirt, tickles, teases.

A promise of a whiff,
a nose-full of bean leaves
lingers. He wheezes, falls
and eats dirty tubers instead.
LOSING THE ROLLER DERBY

She’s missing a stopper,  
left foot left wobbly,  
a whole lot of leg  
left turning still when  
the right foot scrapes pavement.  
She can only turn right,  
trips to the left, skips  
foot over foot and lags  
behind the others, four wheeled  
wizards, double stopped  
not hopping, no stutter step  
off-putting, uncoordinated,  
unsynchronized. Teeth  
chipped, chin cleft, dubbed  
Dragon (for breath), her weight’s  
only good for the second  
round—when they pass, she  
leans, slams and down goes  
that smiley skinny bitch,  
chin strap first and frilly  
panties last. In the locker room,  
she smiles with a new whistle gap,  
a hole in her sock, torn  
toenail, and bloody.  
Body John, her sideline hubby,  
plans a romantic bath reward.  
At least the lipstick isn’t smudged.
EARTHEN POT

Why are you under glass?
Empty, waiting, bored.

Did you hold hot beans
and squat near the feet
of a guy in the dirt?

Did you serve wine
on a marble table?

Were you found, filled
with gold and clothes
in your maker’s tomb?

Oh no, it was your maker’s boss.
Your maker’s maker.

How insensitive of me.
Were you traded and sold,
sent from Spain to Syria
or dropped into the Mediterranean
on a stormy day?

Is that how you got that chip?
Pity.

Or are you shaped like
ovaries for a reason?
JUST IN CASE

he got ‘em snipped
but didn’t tell
anyone about
the surgery, the
pain killers,
the out-patient bit,
the drive home
or that he should’ve
had someone to
look after him
for a day or two
while the soreness
subsided. At 53,
you never know,
he could start
dating again
and he didn’t
want any surprises.
SMELLY

They kicked him,
all the little girls,
in the ribs, back,
butt, legs, feet, and one
hesitant kick to the head
then re-stationed themselves
buzzing on the swings
with their stabbing,
stinging feet.
DAY ON REWIND
SCAB

She’s got to make some noise
shake the room. Shake the
faces. Make them look.
Pearl and peach,
the childish girl
she picks the scab
below her hem
from her thigh.
She smiles.
and flicks it bloody
at the man who asks
how it happened,
in a fall, a fight,
in a dark and shadowy
place, when really she
would have nicked it,
flung it, flicked it.
She would have picked it
anyway.
MAY REBELS

keeps her beauty under
wraps of black, jaws
square, taut. Her cheeky
blush is blanched
by talcum powder,
her disfigure highlighted
with plum lipstick,
dumb tones.
She heads straight for
gray granny panties, and
soon enough, coffin
mold and maggots.

Cemeteries are sexy.
ACCIDENTS

A boot tip
toe dunk
searching for
a rock
*kerplunk*
to chuck
in the creek
and bed it
with the
*plock*
crawdaddies
one drawl
at a time
one summer
leaf per
*bloosh*
breezy whiff
one boy
one day
*kerplunk*
jumped in
with his
low-flung
hunk of
*plock*
geode sack and
fell first
flailed last
and burbled
*bloosh*
under water.
IN A DARK HALLWAY

“Are you drunk too?”
Too hopeful,
red nose,
too full.
Glass eye swivel,
not lazy, but
slow. It would
be calming if
it weren’t for
the astringent
sting in your veins.
CHAW

She could eat death, that one,
death in a piece of cud
juicing itself all over her
fat bottom lip.

Her nose would gnarl up,
no doubt the fumes
burnt her hairs
acidic and foul,

then the lip would go,
Elvis style, but ugly
without the quiver.
One crease bent her

forehead, deeper each
go ‘round. Death beat
her, pummeled her
insides, stomach, intestines,

bladder. Eventually
her stomach bruised
too much to digest its
acrid mud.
THE REGULAR DIRTY LAUNDRY

If I hadn’t been
lemur leaping, paws
out clawless, perhaps
my jeans would be clean.
BONFIRE SONG

Pops and wheezes
in the ash, in the ash
in the burning, seething ash
they screech and wail
scratch fingers
in the ash
on the bonfire
branches

Neon flakes
fingernail full,
and hollowed out voices
clashing melodies
the squeal of soul and ash,
frenzied, sweating ash
that rains in my ears
stains my skin, my scalp
a dirty dandruff.

The taste of ash
a chalky glue, tongue
depressor attitude
licks higher in the sinus.
Eat it, the ash
the dying smear of ash,
and swallow the burning song.
PANTOUM FOR USELESSNESS IN MUSEUMS

Glass cases full of baskets, pots
sit waiting on glances and fingers
while visitors wander, aimless, hot,
hardly breathing or feeling tingles.

Sit waiting on glances and fingers.
Don’t move, child. You’ll break those pots
Hardly breathe. Don’t mind those tingles.
The bathroom doors are locked.

Don’t move, child. You’ll break those pots.
Watch the dust settle under the glass.
The bathroom doors are locked.
These earthen pots ask for class.

Watch dust settle under the glass.
Hardly breathe. Don’t mind the tingles.
These earthen pots were made with class
and wait on glances and fingers.
DAD’S HAT ON A STRANGER’S HEAD

A smear of cow hide interrupted
by faces, insects turned toward me,
is ground enough in the auditorium to
calm my nerves and toes.
WASHED UP

I bend, and snap, and curl
then flip and twist and fall
unfurling ribbon thin
to move from short to tall
each bone pops hollow, fierce
they hobble awkward steps
from heel to toe to toe to toe
put pressure on my hips
SANDPAPER SLEEP

Day on rewind
find I walk
wardback jaw
slack shoulders
slouched mind
rain and still pictures.

Sticky pillow
face lined with
talking sleep stalking
the ceiling knocks
over night-stand
jots and ink.

Nightly tap-tapping
blue illumined
pale baggy face
cat in lap lapping
sandpaper sleep
and gritted teeth.
SHAKEN LIKE A SNOWGLOBE
AMERICAN WHIPTAIL LIZARDS

I.
have no male species.
The girls, lesbians of course,
simulate sex in the Arizona desert
to stimulate egg development.

II.
lay eggs as virgins.
Virgin birth! Not
to mention the cloning—
no sheepishness here.

III.
are a precursor. Our men
suffer from a shrinking
Y chromosome. Oh,
poor boys...

IV.
still know how to have fun.
SEA MONKEYS

two days and still
no sign of the buggers.
It was genocide, I tell you.
Genocide.

four days and one
shimmies along,
cursing my adult
inabilities.

five days and
finally his eve appears,
sex in the castle,
eggs on the plastic.

shaken like a
snow globe, eggs
on the keyboard.

Genocide again.
EVOLUTION

God told me I could play, so I slopped a glob of clay on the table—my shark was a sniffer, electric.

I blinked once, a sudden slip, and left hammerheads half-formed waiting for the shaving grace of my scalpel.
BEAUTY

You sand snake, have an overbite, silly, but it keeps the ground out when you swim through the desert. That rabbit never saw you coming.
MAGNIFYING GLASS

You, scab, look like tiny brown ants, a line of legless bodies, hungry and unwanted.
DUNG BEETLE

If anyone could
one-up Sisyphus,
it would be you.
FAST BREAK

Looking like a ripened little piggy tail, he flexes his belly walls, coils his feet, and tumbles. His aim is messy, but his skin is taut and rock repellent leaving him dizzy, shaken and bumped. At least he’s made it to the road in time to be squashed by an 18-wheeler. Have you ever seen a California salamander roll?
CAPTAIN PISTOL SHRIMP

Claw snap
bubble bullet
shrimp goes down
stunned from Kelvin
level sun blasts
from his pistol
shrimp brother.

I know you’re
jealous of his
cocked claw.
I DON’T ENVY ROAD RUNNERS

My solar panel tail
is hidden in my skin.
That’s why I sleep during the day.
FEVER

Claws catch, prick and stick, pull, snap back, again, again.

She wants to rip the window screen, slip through whiskers first, and run. Punctuate her gait with purrs, coos, cat calls.

Across the lot
A still silhouette, prim Egyptian sits watching. A low growl, slow mouthed, pools and drips.
BATHING IN PUBLIC

Curled back
cat lick, fur
slied down,
she bathes, belly
up, feet splayed
toes spread,

whiskers spread,
she glances back
a lazy display
of tongue and fur,
tail and belly
fuzzy, soft as down.

Dipping down
her whiskers spread
toward her belly.
I scratch her back
she licks my hand, fur
forgotten, matted, splayed.

Her tail displays
its softest down
she gives the softest purr
its spread
the echo back
from deep in her belly.

She mocks my belly,
it's shaky splay,
with the sleek black
all down
her back. A purr lingers
in the scruff fur.

I offer
her belly
a scratch, her head
just stays
low down
ears back.

She nips back, bathes her fur
down one leg, over her belly
all splayed, matted and spread.
A HISTORY OF HERE
GENDERING

The neighbors are on the porch in hot dispute. He says, “Guys need to feel sexy, too,” and she mumbles, “What do you want from me?” I think of a drawn bath, silky bubbles stuck in his chest hair, his foot propped on the tub’s edge, a massage under tea light heat, one slender finger drawn lightly over his straight hip then curved away to the downy dip of his lower back. Perhaps he’ll curl his knees, one just over the other, arch his back and open his collar bone to her—then wait for her to move into his body, inside his sex. I keep hoping they’ll move to the bedroom, or at least inside but they remain staunchly on the porch until I nod off to sleep.
THINKING ABOUT MARRIAGE

We bump and bruise, 
bonk and batter each other 
just trying to hug and hold on.

Somehow an elbow 
stabs your eye, a rib, a cheek, 
and I get a heel on my big toe.

Why not set up 
the ring, gloves off, 
and throw fist after fist,

bloody the mat but 
not our faces, our knuckles. 
Let’s go for the ribcage.
KNOTTY AND GNARLED

We’ve been acquainted
twelve years
now swollen now
smallish now bursting
under my blade, a marble
shooter stuck
between bones,
glassy permanent,
mirror to you and yours.

Question is, who’ll
do the thumbing and who’ll
do the palming and which
one will tumble or which
one will end up with
a smoother shoulder blade
than the face of that marble?
Which will keep the shooter,
glass scraping bone,
bone biting flesh, and a callus
for old time’s sake?
BALANCE

If I had a puppy
I’d name him Bitch
and you'd call him Mister
SWAGGER

He preferred the flare of the match
to the gas of the lighter,
a sexy contrast to his stiff suit,
crisp tie, and an homage
to the bowler hat.
COURAGE

You shake your head like a turtle.
You mean yes, but you still have a shell
and a thin little neck.
JEALOUSY

Why not stand in the middle of a kudzu field and let the vines grapple with my ankles?
IN THE MEANTIME

He does more to
dismantle the hitch
bit by bit
than fix it, his
boat full of leaves.

The bass are blowing
raspberries.
YOUR HAIR

is spring-loaded,
a tiny trap clasp nests
between curls. My fingers
bumble and snout around
but my thumbs are
clunky in comparison.

All I want is to unplug
the transistor—it’s stuck
and the gears might rust
between temples. I unsheathe
a finger bone, twist
into lock and unscrew the
hatch from your skull.

With one push and
a finger redressing, nothing
a bandage won’t fix,
metal dissolves and I’m left
to flick coils from your scalp.
A NICE, LONG BATH

If only I had gills
I’d stay under all night
listening to the faucet
rush teasing gently
but pressure enough
to curl my toes, busy fingers
tangled at my temples,
drawn from sternum
to belly button,
submerged briefly

near the small
of my back arching,
flexing, twisting,
sweating, almost hurting
then just a deep breath
to calm a nervous twitch
and smooth the knots
tensing in my skin
each time I forget
to turn up the heat.
WRITING

Rock on each line
back then forth
back then forth
again

doorboard creaks
up then down
with the stanza
feverish clammy

cold sweat bet
on a fresh word
pulled from under
the soft white nightgown

clinking coins
bladder trigger
lash across the back
stinging welts that

trickle down the leg
up the chest flushing
through cheeks in a
warm sticky orgasm.
A HISTORY OF HERE

Here, I stood & fought & fell. I leapt & landed.

Here I pissed on the lawn, drank vodka. I kissed.

Here, I flashed teeth & shook hands. I learned a part.

Here was a book, a line. Here gave a reading, gave a breath.


Here was an aneurism, a shaved head, & no mother.

Here failed to mention, said too much, & garbled what came out.

Here was a lesson, here an answer key, here a sky.

Here printed a correction, ran the apology. I bitched. I thanked.

Here was a baptism, here the jokes, here a salted glass.

Here was my father, my competition, & my backbone.

Here were muddy feet & broken toenails & heating pads.

Here was a sinus infection & vertigo. Here was fear.

Here was a ribbon of sweat, here a chronicle, a future.

Here were teammates & friends. Here I walked away.
Here formed a past, placed
a scar, raised the scar.

Here was spit & ankles & tongues.
Here I slipped.

Here, I came running back. I cried
& clutched & wrote & slept.

Here shaved the scar on
a thin skin and thickened it.

Here was love. Here was a man.
Here offered itself.

Here was a home, is a home
& will be. Here I stand.

Here rubbed a scar with salve.