ABSTRACT

SMALL GODS & ORBITAL BODIES: A THESIS

by Anthony F. Ramstetter, Jr.

This manuscript is my Master thesis, which I have compiled to fulfill the requirements of a creative writing examination in poetry. It collects diverse thematic pathways into professional and publishable form. The first section includes rough reflections on spirituality, which create worlds within their own respective compass. The second section includes humorous, incidental poems that play with the linkage of the ampersand. The third section meditates on personal relationships and various intimacies.
SMALL GODS & ORBITAL BODIES: A THESIS

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Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
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Master of Arts
Department of English
by
Anthony F. Ramstetter, Jr.
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
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Advisor ________________________________

cris cheek

Reader ________________________________

David Schloss

Reader ________________________________

Keith Tuma
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Dedications

To my parents,
Tony and Cathy Ramstetter,
who believe in me so I can believe in myself
and make myself proud every day,
to poets to come
and to

Frank O’Hara (1926 – 1966)
Mina Loy (1882 – 1966)
Charles Bukowski (1920 – 1994)
Robert Creeley (1926 – 2005)

Paul Philip Ramstetter, Sr.
my paternal grandfather
(1927 – 1986)
Acknowledgments

The ending of “Unusual Milieu” is adapted from the ending of a poem by Charles Simic, “Privilege” uses the same format as Evie Shockley’s poem “You Can’t Deny It” and the first three lines of “Schnauzer Love” are excerpted from The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon. The two erasures in this collection are taken from Jericho Brown’s “Track 5: Summertime” and from Interpreter of Maladies by Jhumpa Lahiri, respectively.

Thank you to all my poetry colleagues who have commented on and encouraged my work, and to the Miami University poetry faculty of cris cheek, David Schloss, Keith Tuma and Cathy Wagner for their influence on these poems and for their time and support as I created this thesis. Also, thank you to Nicolyn Woodcock who helped me copyedit these poems.
[Small Gods]
ARS POETICA?

*Show me how to do like you show me how to do it. —Stevie Wonder, 'Do Like You'*

So here I am—a poet—in the tonic paradox of Oxford, Ohio
dancing through the pretentious dreamscapade I call *poetics*
in deepening devotion to a god or Allah or someone like her
and maybe loving myself for my unappreciated razzle-dazzle.

It’s wonderful to admire myself in the morning in the odd daze
of yawning and scratching my belly before breathing wet smoke
and mocking whatever’s left of the sunrise and then I am off!
squinting in hope for that most exquisite moment of a long day
when I might awaken from the very roots of my hair—upward
outward onward—upon writing a brilliant life-changing poem
to be celebrated forever more than anything else in the world

and like a piercing glance, this epiphany doesn’t kill me entirely
but parts of me die realizing that I’ll never write anymore poetry
without sitting at a desk, divinely uninspired, stealing thoughtfully
from a world not entirely expressible in human terms, dancing
around the edges of this vocabulary kaleidoscope before flying
on gossamer wings like some communal miracle, weeping for things
I once knew simply to keep the very best part of me floating on air.
FOURSQUARE: METAPOETICS

My favorite poets have always been the ones who hate the Man, shoot down all who devalue poetry as valuable art and survive the circus of the academe. These poets are the ones who play God most beautifully. I am one of these poets: an abstract objectivist neo-avant-garde new formalist postlanguage schmuck living off iced chai, hyphenated beer & fragmentary whiskey, with lemon twists of surrealism juxtaposed with verbatim mojitos. As a poet I firmly believe my sufferings might be sacred places where we all might meet.

Tony, dear: one of these squares is a lovely summary of your suffering, born from an indifference of having suffered greatly, you might say. But all my sufferings lie in my anxieties, which lie in my frustrations with my life’s impracticalities—the ebbs & flows & fluxes of my social world, one in which I feel vulnerable & so afraid. It’s funny: I’m a nice guy, but a large portion of my poetry is completely vulgar, totally immoral & wildly inappropriate, lines like oh shit my owl died & lightning struck my dick. I have had these two dreams where:

1) I take a bunch of lightning bolts & zap the shit out of every poetry hater in the world like I’m Zeus; & 2) I am this tiny fucking pulsating sun colliding in outer space with twenty million celestial words, burning infinitely hot before dying out forever in a kind of star-explosive poetry apocalypse. But fantastical as my dreams sound, my poetry is, at its base, romantic. See. A kiss is never just a kiss. I can attest that I have a social relationship with this poem as much as its readers have a material relationship with it. And it’s true,

Exposure is the fusion of the Social & the Material. How do I think this? For one, social artistry cannot be removed from poetry and, in turn, performance; the social materiality of poetry results in its exposure. Nakedness. Anything naked has its greatest agency when it is approaching disappearance; in Genesis 3:7, Adam & Eve hid their nakedness. So what does nakedness mean in terms of this poem? And as this poem rapidly approaches disappearance, where do you think this poem exposed its true meaning to you?
SOMETIMES I FEEL AS IF I MUST INJURE MYSELF OR SOMEONE ELSE

The poet’s role is not to oppose evil, but to imagine it. [...] It is a disease of our generation to offer symptoms and diagnoses of what we are instead of imaginations and creations of what we are. —ROBERT DUNCAN to Denise Levertov, October 1971

I’m a chainsaw

manicure. I

ain’t sweet, nothing nice about

me. I

hit like lightning, leave bruises.

I don’t think God likes me.

likes me. My voice hacks at you.

I tear your throat. I try so hard to sound jagged.

I get high and say one thing so many times

like Willie Baker.
and the living lashed, Mama said I should be Thankful, that the town's worse to coloreds than they are to me, that I'd grow out of my acne. God must love Willie Baker—

A please that sounds like music. See. I wouldn't know a sparrow from a mockingbird. The band plays. I just belt out, Please. This tune ain't half the blues, I should be thankful.

I get high and moan like a lawn mower.

I try to scream like a man. I turn my face to God. I wish I could pour oil on everything green in Port Arthur.
BIRDS OF THE HOLY LANDS

One day, while making love,*
I startled an unkindness of ravens†
that screamed in a sort of sacred fear,
flailing their wings & flying blindly‡
into the blue§ pollen haziness
of night, or morning maybe.
I wonder who this makes me.
I might be St. Francis of Assisi**
as my moans are those of an animal:
neigh-neigh, oink-oink,†† moo-moo.

---

*I can’t see anything wrong with sex between consenting anybodies. I think we make far too much of it. After all, one’s genitals are just one important part of the magnificent human body. [...] I contend that SEX IS SEX and LOVE IS LOVE. When combined, they work well together, if two people are of about the same mind. But they are really two discrete needs and should be treated as such.
—MARVIN GAYE, liner notes in Let's Get It On (1973)

† I ride my bicycle all the time. —RAY LEWIS, former Baltimore Ravens linebacker

‡ If you can see, look. If you can look, observe. —JOSÉ SARAMAGO, Blindness

§ You ain’t been blue—no, no, no—you ain’t been blue till you’ve had that mood indigo: that feelin’ goes stealin’ down to my shoes while I sit and sigh, “Go ’long blues.” —IRVING MILLS, ‘Mood Indigo’

** Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words. —ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

†† Culture, culture, culture, oink, this is not prigametical, this oinkos can’t withstand centrifugal, shagged, yea or neigh-eigh-eigh, oink you for shopping here. —JUDITH GOLDMAN, I.b.; or, cantenaries
WHY ARE YOU NOT NOT CHRISTIAN?

YOU JUST ASKED AN
   A NALYTICAL QUESTION
I’M NOT AT ALL
   HOPING
   FOR A
HOCUS-POCUS SÉANCE HERE,
   YOU JERKFACE

   FIRST OF ALL, MY INTEREST
   IN RELIGION
BEGINNS PALMS DOWN,
   NEVER ENDINGLY
   COMING
   INTO MY OWN SPIRITUAL
CONCLUSION S, YOU SEE,

I AM JUST WORSHIPPING,
AFTER ALL, SO I CAN SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE
UNUSUAL MILIEU

Whenever you experience your sexuality being questioned
somewhere a drag queen dies an emancipatory death for you
as she floats delicately footed through society’s velvet underground
and its charred black hole before reaching her divine cabaret refuge
where she exalts à la Ella Fitzgerald, “Bees are kneeling into blossoms!”

and suddenly, you, a world-weary cabaret patron, freeze in captivation
as your eyes gaze in hazy delight, and you disintegrate like language
amidst a fog machine, contemplating the mysterious profundity
of this social experience involving you and this drag queen,
knowing in some vague way about her,
and think of her as God,
as Devil.
PRIVILEGE

cast of characters

speaker a heterosexual white congressman

you a heterosexual white congressman → roster of taboos

ellen degeneres
christian fanaticism
puzzlement
sexuality revolution
defensiveness
compromise

setting: gay child’s dream, 1960s

selected bibliography: bible, god
plessy vs. ferguson
dee of eye, jefferson

beer: pabst blue ribbon, $4/six-pack

[marriage]

LGBTQ sexuality defines → † you

[divorce]

[enter roster of taboos, variously and all at once.]

roster of taboos: [at/on capital.] historical allusions

1. heaven
2. reefer madness
3. a.i.d.s.
4. vogue
5. etc.

the end ______________

a. same old story
b. the bottom of it
c. fuck?, what
d. possibilities for new developments should be nurtured between speaker and you
e. hey!, say/ gay/valentine’s day/ okay/spiritual bouquet

(to be acted [upon])
I want certain words more than a thousand kisses
or convolutions of this hypertetradimensional life
this likely commentary on promotional sharing
insulating me who knows what from whom on
an (anti)social mix-tape interface. Privacy ahoy!
Let’s flash our fictions to all on that blue sky and
write our selves down in a style of leaves growing:
“Oh my wrought up heart oh this oh that oh well
let’s tick this floral interclock towards available light.”
Why privilege any one status update or busted link?
Our wilding menu of links moves all feasts to violet.
Something’s gotta give in this you/me status operandi.

How bourgeoisie me and my kibbutz of permanent motions
towards an inanimate mouse devouring my forever clicks.
STUTTERING

is anxiously spoken
discourse, vocabulary
kaleidoscope
with words too wide
for easy passage

a short voice sabbatical
in breath-
less syllable syncopation
and unwanted
emphasis while

people watch hard-eyed
and wait
wait
wait
as I s-st-st
utter.

Syllables lie
smashed and scarred
but this feeling
hurts more than
any crowded word.

—after Louise Heite
Savoring the warm breeze’s saline in my mouth, innocuous tides of verticality crinkle my toes at the Tohoku shoreline, though I do not know why flocks of birds are now flying away.

The seagulls swoop in and out and gossip with themselves to quiet the briny tide. Listen carefully to the abandoned buildings: how do they calm these hypnotizing seawater waves?

They echo the hollow voices of the rainbow-colored splinters of populace that crowd Japan’s not unmoving beaches with the persistence of seven billion ants on dead bodies.
BEE STING MEDITATION

like summertime bees
buzzing to their deaths
i too break off & burn
& crumple downward
with a white swollen face

before my slow succumbing
to tingle-throb dissipation into
orange pomegranate sunlight
while exulting in worship,
“jesus wasn’t built in a day!”
kissing my stings all over
tears melting everywhere into rain

& in this epiphany-decease
my madness is what kills me:
my melancholy face, you see,
was stung by this bee & that bee
so i giggle & die uncontrollably.
HAIL, HOLY QUEEN: We Catholic poets prayed this rosary
so we may erase daily myths in favor of love and spirituality
relishing in the presence of the Merciful Divine Intellectuality
even as you, Mother of Mercy, exist everywhere, our poetry
exists in language and in language only. O sweet Virgin Mary
we are spiraling down to the music of an enjambment collectivity
calmly placed within God’s grace but filthy as we are deep
deep and disillusioned by our deepening juxtaposed sociality.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that poets may be made worthy
of the promises of St. Francis de Sales and of Christ, Hallelujah, Amen!
LUNAR ECLIPSE

—for Brandon Kelley

This wheel of cheddar cheese
reminds me of the moon.
But no, I will not record mileage
exploring the potential of the moon.
I’d rather the rivers and the oceans take that rightful place.
What do we do with undreamers like me
who are more moved by the waves of the world
than the moon that moves the ocean itself?
It’s true that maybe none of us really know
but I think that the thrill of life is found
in facing this world for what it is
because none of us can simply hang onto the river—
we, too, moving together downstream,
burned as glass—without debris from our past:
those floating particles of dirt and lost thoughts
following behind us like screaming children
hanging from the skirt of an overscheduled mother
whose talent for fortunetelling is just as unlikely.
[&]
young baristas
mix decaf hologram joe
for gen X junkies
&
the new york high rise
& queen city sweatshop
weren’t built today
&
i would like to know
why i’m never permitted
to speak my damn mind
&
you know what I think?
well, i think america
wants us to be poor
&
what have I done now?!
i just sold a pound of crack
for twenty-six bucks!!
&
as villages burn,
we watch this planet
kill all our ego
&
are we machines?
what new sequence are we now?
what processed data?
REINTERPRETING INTERGALATIC FACEBOOK STARDUST

Yes
indeed,
sometimes
some friends yell
& they whoop & holler
& call each other names
& generally bicker & quarrel,
so I run away, crying liquid-hot magma
& by miniaturizing the politics inside me,
become metal, but more polished than dreams
since I don’t believe in dreams, I just believe in me
wishy-washy as my poetic play may be, living out a sonnet
in misty-snoozèd awakening to our silly, insignificant smallness as
meanwhile, in outer space, aliens laugh at us & eat their funky jambalaya.
CONCEIT FOR A WOOFING PICKUP TRUCK DRIVER

Esteemed woofie: You are the divine image of interiority clanging onwards in your rusty, cowardly castle. Can this be human nature, this most horrible perversion of right to animalia? & how can “Truck Man,” now surprising, yappy “Dog,” endowed with reason, bark himself into commission of such gigantic smallness, such inveterate cruelest cruelty, as exceeds all the acts of even the most innocent of intentions, woof-woofing his canine chorus to total strangers who cannot possibly woof-woof back? Performing gender this estrayed couldn’t be less doggy.
ADIEU TO CINERGY FIELD, BONJOUR TO GREAT AMERICAN BALLPARK

Cinergy Field, I'll remember you with true bittersweetness,
since how unequivocally distant, to spite my mitt,
every one of Barry Larkin's foul balls landed in the stands

behind my shallow-deep first base seat as I smelled smells
now forever encoded into my naïve & confusing youth

& indeterminacy, my own lack of post-Freudian
rational capacity, crying while witnessing Cinergy Field/
Riverfront Stadium implode in a messily circular fashion.

I have never been back to Cinergy Field, oh no! It's long gone,
blown inside, its concrete guts splayed to bits by explosives

emitting dying waves of sound & songs still ringing in my head:
“Reds Take NL Pennant!” & “Oakland Can’t Touch Rijo, 1-0”

*Boom*, goes the dynamite! That's all folks!
SLANTED & ENCHANTED

With no pot to smoke in sight, Zurich—a city dwelling at a precipitating edge of perspicacity, delta-stripped—screams healthy living. Although I quit months ago, my sweetheart no doubt waits for me in our conduit for sale with a plastic-tipped joint, mixing a cocktail of gluhwien & sticks of cinnamon with some goetta for lunch. Ah lunch! What a selfless gift to a struggling artiste such as myself! I always talk about getting past my own brain & I've finally done it (so I think), I found out what the human language is trying to do to me when I smoke up. After all these thoughts & as syntactically gratifying as “becoming a lifetime pothead” sounds, shit, it just doesn’t have the same ring as it used to.
CROOKED RAIN, CROOKED RAIN

Lace shadows appear on my sweetheart’s kitchen door as we move on from Europe & explore our new love season together in Los Angeles—a city at the end of the innocence in sweltering gang violence & all that blood dancing & dancing so. I press my finger to my thumb, just to feel the blood pulsing. Loss of trust, loss of faith, oh my God, why is the measure of the stupid thing we call love loss? Why am I still not getting past my mind—hopeless, demiurgic, realist—with lights in windows becoming subjects of endless interpretation? I stare & stare, stoned out of my skull, into my view from my sweetheart’s kitchen window of the sacred L.A. Desert Origins of the Profound Thing We Call ‘Life,’ something so indescribable that it is enough to make me hold my breath so long I choke & a little pee comes out.
WOWEE ZOWEE

We all need healing, even if it’s with hair of the dog that bit me—the old me & weed are so 1994. If you couldn’t tell by now, I want to get knocked on my butt immediately & the smog from Shanghai desperately clinging to the air in front of my face is not helping me find a nice bar close to my Shanghai apartment. Thanks to the booze, my wife left me to go to the grocery store to pick up organic salad & hummus & soy milk & of course more booze. “It is all about balances, honey,” she insists. By the way, did you know my sweetheart was Miss Jamaica back in 2004? It’s a small, small, small, small world.
IT’S TRICKLING DOWN, ALRIGHT

One rainy day, Nancy met Ronald at her mother’s funeral, & joy penetrated every darkness. For years, Nancy had screamed to her heart, *Mush, heart, mush! Feel something, please!* Meanwhile, while Nancy berated her soul, a black-hearted sled dog must have been smiling. *My heart is, I believe, unbroken now,* Nancy thought, *but will this new acquaintance be worth these darkish, wet clothes & possible pregnancy?*

Nancy’s mother died by decapitation from a super-sharp Slinky & the overcast funeral made Nancy think about her retroverted uterus. After all, she never wanted children until meeting Ronald: the way he ambulated around the coffin wearing that skinny tie, that slight curvature of his spine, that air of competency missing in her previous partners, & the chicken pox scars beside his tear-filled right eye. Light flickered somewhere deep in her brain. The two soon went out for coffee & laughed adoringly with one another. Ronald left three dollars for a tip.
LADY GAGA

Miss Sista Resista swaying our poise:
“You saw the forest, now come inside, boys”

&

THE BEAST

My favorite Disney princess is Belle;
SEXLOVE can’t be spelled without XL

&

JACKIE WILSON

2%-Reduced-Fat-Cottage-Cheese Rock & Roll!
Electromagnetic waistbands gyrating out of control!

&

KE$HA

“When the sun comes up, put your Jack Daniel’s in my cup;
when the sun goes down, fucking let’s go fucking paint this fucking town”

&

JIMI HENDRIX

This Para trooping American Flag
is no Paramount Picture

&

ANDY WARHOL

“Fifteen minutes of fame,” he said,
vomiting something magniloquent
CELEBRATORY HALLOWEEN PARTY

*Forever the best quality of the poem epigraph lies in that great, liberatory agency: that legislative power vested in poets of which a poet contributes an arbitrary artifact of speech performance & ascribes this very quotation to anyone they so choose.*

—GEORGE WASHINGTON

*I firmly believe life is a huge party on a neon-colored thingamajig planet A.K.A. Earth & the party don’t stop ‘til you’re in a box underground A.K.A. The After Party.*

—MARTHA STEWART

Eric Carle is a caterpillar:  
“Hear me fuzz!”

Jimi Hendrix is a purple bee.  
“What a haze, what a buzz!”

Elton John is a butterfly:  
“Ooooo weeeeee.”

Jim Henson is a blue monster shaped like a kiwi.

Lady Gaga is a golden abracadabra.  
“La-La-La-La-La.”

Noah is a magician:  
“Presto chango! An ark!”

Al Gore is a tree that has lost all its bark.

Janis Joplin is a turtle set loose in the suburbs.

George Carlin is high & consequently was unable to attend.
MARILYN MONROE'S BUCKET LIST

—after Polyclinic Hospital, New York City, July 1961

lest America applaud my mounting lack of sex-icon discretion

✓ Shut up the sparkly, incessant white noise on my television set

✓ So, Frank & me. Please let me explain him to myself. He’s a sexy uncertainty of general nicety I’m anxiously aligning against with my naked, naked body, our fucking an ever-fixèd mark, indiscreet, ever-soul playfully scratched across vinyl records pressed especially for making babies, skipping while playing inside a jazz lounge where I’m sitting Franklessly lovestoned & daydreaming about Frank—my one & only charming crooner—his voice spinning me around as if I’m mounted upon a hormonal turntable of sorts. Please, I want him to kiss me into the Oblivion spliced somewhere over the rainbow. I’d be polite about it though. Gimme.

✓ Crinkle at the corners of my cornflower-blue eyes

✓ Set up an appointment with my speech therapist between shoots for The Misfits

✓ Arrange a fake location for myself at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, West Hollywood, California, July 1961, to avoid paparazzi & so I may get the fuck out of my rehabilitation in peace

Daydream sexy ways to youthfully, happily die

Meditate into my vanity mirror upon the curvature of my eyebrows

Brain-fart no longer, I rescind my ambitious blondeness

✓ Indulge in a White Castle slider, with added sprinklings of sugar to taste

Take sex with me on my travels with Frank

Brush back my hair with grandiloquence

✓ “Between the two of us, we’ve told no one about one another” – sob this mantra misty eyed to all lovers
On that note, next time, save an awkward moment, shut the powder room door

Find Tom Kelly, he’s still around town, I hope

Take barbiturates & watch the traffic light outside of my penthouse get pooped on

Speaking of said experiences, there are imaginary swimming pools, I’ve seen them in the desert, Nome, Alaska, 1959, Nome, Alaska

Oh John, you stubbornly ill-advised Latvian kitten whisperer: “nau nau”

Feel like I am in Korea just to see what happens

Eat caviar all damn day because I am a sexual creature so why not?

Meet people on their knees, hold onto mine over a sewer grate

Why will not my life stop moving, this joke may be something I’m not allowed to understand
THE TIMES THEY ARE A-SCURRILOUS

Yippee! I'm a poet, & I know it. Hope I don't blow it. —BOB DYLAN

Damn ya to hell, Bob Dylan.

Your music is Kohl's Winter Clearance.

Ya smell like a skanky bong donated to Goodwill.

You're a stupid shit left unclaimed under a boulder
eglier than a can of beans

& as tasty as a thousand-year-old pickle.

Look at ya now, ya old fart, The Bum of America

singing your saccharine hate for her cocaine eyes
like some Jesus Christ in a piggy die casting.
MOSES

Let my people go. —Exodus 9:1

So one day I walk into a bar, sit down next to Moses as he drinks his Eucharistic wine & pray to him: Moses, how can I be a good Christian?

I wait for what seems like many Ages. He just sits there, as if to toy with me, pondering to himself. Suddenly, he stands up & swallows what’s left in his chalice.

Then, looking at me dead in the eye, Moses hums back, “Shit, there ain’t no way. It is what it is” before making a clean exodus.
BOURGEOISIE

Associates & Lovers! I have simply zero desire for caviar & escargots. Shall we attempt this spirited indulgence of “making out,” in the style of the People, just to see if we enjoy it?

&

SHUT UP TONY,

all those sorority mothers
who dance with you at clubs
during Moms’ Weekends
are doing it ironically

&

DJ

You, you cheerlead musicians,
you spark things short of interpretation

&

IKEA SHOPPING

Sparks at the tongue

&

I SHOT MYSELF WITH A STAPLE GUN

& it was quite the experience
[Orbital Bodies]
INNER MONOLOGUE ON A DATE

Enough of this bake-sale bullshit

in this crowded French café, watermelon juice and backlit brick with light for wispy plants giving them something to wake up to, dear, coming

FULLCircle to Walden Pond days of poisonous plants and talk into me like

The text below the picture on the café wall reads: Description of perennials are happy from showers drooping slightly from such.

"if I stole the salami, they'd yell Check please.

Maybe this HIV will go away with a dry shower?

The HIV façade fading with the funk of the salami and our lonely sex and it was made together and how you don't quite trust yourself haha no not yet and how I have an ordinary name mishmash-y trust and distress is gone and I believe my name will live up to ten thousand times less infamous than Hawthorne and Emerson and at least I care and if you believe in love, let's get it on.

Am I supposed to be impressed?

You make me feel like: a Stale Popcorn Man entertaining in basements; Babysitting wigless in Arizona swelter Being so hungry I'm scared and poisonous treadmill, or lawn mower, or walking with moon weight eventually removed from my esophagus.

I get choked up. Smile at you.
It was early enough to hold him before the process of grieving asleep to the world.

His skin was more red than brown. He had black hair on his head. He weighed almost five pounds. His fingers were curled shut, just like yours in the night.

A woman out of a magazine had got drunk in the middle of the day, against his chest in a darkened room. He held
Shukumas stood up and stacked his plate on top of hers. He carried the plates to the sink, but instead of running the tap he looked out the window. Outside the evening was still warm, and the Bradfords were walking arm in arm. Shoba came & sat down, and after a moment Shukumar joined her. They wept together, for the things they now knew.
FOURSQUARE: ESP

You may have no knowledge of musical things, but... —THE SUPREMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I involved myself in a wildly promiscuous situation that was terribly, terribly confusing. This doesn’t surprise. I have a tendency to get involved with impossible women or as cris cheek calls them, “beautifully complicated lovelies of loneliness, delightful &amp; disorderly.”</th>
<th>What? I inhaled this poetic musing, exhaled a fake smile, yet was deeply troubled by this revelation. Would tracing a treble clef on her back, I thought, spark interior music in her, transcend misunderstood affection? Possibly. I tried flirting with her in ESP for the first time.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But that night, I wanted her to know my thoughts. It was her need to be theatrical—no less dramatic—after we had sex one night when she out-speculated the law of my own sexuality, whispering softly to me, “Straight men never show affection like you do, honey.”</td>
<td>I wrote music on her back, transmitted my sexy songs as we flipped through old dirty photographs. Afterwards, we smoked weed &amp; then she let me kiss her all over &amp; then we went to sleep. I still don’t know if ESP exists, but she never questioned my sexuality again.</td>
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36
SCHNAUZER LOVE

It was seven minutes after midnight. Our dog was lying on the grass in the middle of the lawn in front of our small apartment. Its eyes were closed. “I HATE TED BERRIGAN!” you screamed playfully, insulting his poetry for who knows what reason, the dying sounds of your voice and laughter like gravity’s rainbow screaming across the late Ohio sky. “Baby, that’s the truest thing I’ve ever heard you say,” I lied.

Don’t—for heaven’s sake—be afraid of screaming nonsense like this to me, but you must pay attention to your nonsense when it turns me on, like joking that you’ll leave me if I don’t stop calling you “baby.” What an incredibly sexy thing to say.

I then recalled Joe Brainard’s line: I remember the beautiful—the beautiful what?! The dog that looks up to its gods, whose relationship is exploding in love on its lawn? As I kissed you, our dog was looking up at us, a disturbing sensation if you’re aroused. We laughed and went inside and you spent the night insulting my taste in poetry, speaking in human frequencies while our dog slept, snoring, that love of ours outlasting it.
Once upon a time, Speedy was my first pet—a white hamster with a supernatural penchant for getting the ball rolling quickly. Damn, was he ever fast! Hamsters typically live three years but my Speedy lived for four. I knew he would die one particular night but I didn’t see it actually happen. Gerbils were used in WWII as messengers, stuffing their cheeks with classified information for communication between troops.
ever desiring a standard dog breed, I had a pet peek-a-poo puppy named Maggie once and she had a white paw but other than that was jet black. She had a litter of puppies with Rhett Butler, a cocker spaniel, also jet black. God rest her gentle soul! She died of senility and arthritis and boredom doggone it. Gerbils were used in WWII as messengers, stuffing their cheeks with classified information for communication between troops.
Like all young men, though, I really did always want a pet snake, though the thought of owning one made me squeamish. However, while on a trip to Mammoth Cave in 2004 I found a newt, picked it up, and its tail promptly fell off and began wriggling violently—a built-in defense mechanism, I later learned. Disembodiment to the max! Gerbils were used in WWII as messengers, stuffing their cheeks with classified information for communication between troops.
Youth is a wandering troubadour sailing the singing breeze. I'm no different. I'll admit it right now: I am deathly allergic to but love cats, always gravitating towards the felines moving their whiskers most flamboyantly like true bourgeois aristocats. Gerbils were used in WWII as messengers, stuffing their cheeks with classified information for communication between troops.
My current pets include a poison dart frog who has an unhealthy attraction toward ostriches and my pencils that eat their weight in doodles. Gerbils were used in WWII as messengers, stuffing their cheeks with classified information for communication between troops.
Every one of my pets decided to head to Vegas for a weekend the year before Maggie died. Things went *terribly* wrong! Maggie embarrassed all of my pets by being a total floozy, making out with five different cats in one night. Meanwhile, Speedy’s 20 great-great-great-grandhamsters were all arrested at Caesars Palace for getting inside the slot machines. And that tailless newt got stuck in a blender at Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville and was mistakenly blended into a piña colada.

And they all lived happily ever after...

The End.
I HAVE HAD VERY PECULIAR AND STRANGE EXPERIENCES

—for Nicolyn

Lying on the grass, we giggle together and turn skyward
imagining the clouds above our heads as royal platypuses
reigning as poets laureate in some upside down Atlantis
in a skyfallen world as the sparkling breeze washes our eyes.

“What better thing could my destiny grant me than this feeling
of such smallness and collective solitude?” she asks, smile glistening.
“Where does one find poetry in the clouds?” I ask, dumbfounded.

She pauses then explains to me, “It’s somewhere only we know
between heaven and our existence, these poetry platypuses
breathing poetry into us in this valley of purified ashes.”
This is something I can’t understand, but I don’t say a word.
Although my partner and I share drinks in Miami Beach, I can’t stand it—when you are just drunk enough to realize how incredibly fucked up everything is—the hairdryer the bare room the street this city. Even so, I pretend to enjoy myself as a jazz artist sings a sad improvisation, and several make-believe celebrities flaunt their money up at the bar, their cigarette smoke burning in my lungs, and now the server comes over to us: “Would you like a martini?” “Yes I would!” I choke out. My partner smirks as I confess to him, “I just left my wife of ten years because I’m gay. Isn’t that something?” We have a good laugh and he kisses me, but I am deeply troubled, thinking, What is life truly worth beyond this alcohol-injected epiphany and this myriad of hotel lobbies and sexual curiosity? I realize I hurt on my inside parts as I recall all of my past lovers, and here I am, on this empty night, the sweat sparkling on the wood floor, saddened to sit there with a lover who I can’t love in a situation indeterminately lost. I only want to say to him, Please, never again mention this vacant night here at Fountainebleau with your face on top of mine like this.
on Cincinnati’s Westside with wet stars coming
inside us (please touch me on my inside parts)
we opened into flaming blossoms of some-
thing inside Jacob’s Bar, where some ginormous crashing
80s synths & sparkle, “My God, can you feel their buoyance?!”
bounced us along, beat after beat, my sweat squinting
my vision like a backwards telescope & my smiling
façade painted on by the glance of a drag queen
whose lip-synching contrasted my drunken singing:

“The evening was long!
My guesses were true!
You saw me see you!
That something you said!
The timing was right!
The pleasure was mine!”

& as I kissed you there & then, we were always realizing
in the pit of our little tummies, trading saliva & beer,
No, we are not each other’s demiurges & I’m not stuck on you.

—for Carrie
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SAMANTHA

Your pupils refused to close on your eighteenth birthday
during a house rave you threw for your drug-addicted friends

while your parents were in France. You drew a redhead
man in the margin of a blue notebook while you were rolling

before coming downstairs, sweat pouring, requesting desperately,
“Will you give me a lightshow?!?” Around me, unidentified bodies

lay around lazy like bits of confetti, holding blunts like burning trophies
into nothing but deep cold winter. I gave you the best damn lightshow

of my entire life as we both listened to a cacophony of blaring techno music
and you firmly gripped your bedpost. I waged an internal war of guilt while

a dream of butterflies flew in your drug-filled belly. I looked at you and smiled,
your aluminous eyes sparkled bright, killing the moonlight, but I simply said

“goodnight” and left you there. Some nights, I can still hear your techno music
blasting into the night sky, like the riot-weeping of an old screaming swan.
FOR NICKY AND AULD LANG SYNE

Hey, it's New Year’s Eve,
your pots and wooden ladles
bang together with noisy knowledge
of the solar system above our heads.

After the ball drops, we smoke weed
inside the long red tool shed; enchanted,
she lets me squeeze her sequined dress,
the miraculous void of her young Catholic breasts.

“I'm quite charmed. Go inside of me,”
so I do. We moan and moan along
to the melody of Auld Lang Syne,
to wolves singing in jubilee.

We exhale in sweet release, gazing in erotic wonder,
and I whisper while we lie on the wooden floor,
“You’re dazzled, sure,
but guilt like this is always my fault.”
LETTER TO ALICIA

Unrequited love's a bore
and I've got it pretty bad
but for someone you adore
it's a pleasure to be sad.

—LORENZ HART, ‘Glad To Be Unhappy’

Ms. Femme Fatale: Grab me and let me speak into your ear how it feels
to never be truly yours, a silly gag gift desiring your cosmopolitanism
as you laugh at this awkward, stuttering man you slept with one night.

The sex felt great, but what to do with all of our fictitious chemistry?
Are dysfunctions still pleasurable if they're primarily self-infidelities?
You act as if we fucked, end of story, leaving my heart invisibly in repair

but our fucking never left its scars, any visual memories, for this young poet
who now remembers our indiscretions, watching the sands of his hourglass
and drinking this seasonal beer brewed for contemplation before an open fire,

longing for you beyond my impotent memorials to sex just being sex and love
being love and left to revel forever in our divine if momentary sexual cosmos as
two blue pomegranate stars bursting in sweet release, dying young, happily afraid.
LOVESICK BLUES

In one last lovesick swoon on Sweetest Day
I gave to you cigarettes trimmed with ribbons
around their filters because I did not know
how to wrap them. Then the smoky haziness

from your gifted cigarette become Buddha who
beckoned us into the vast nothingness outside.

You sprouted flowers up and down your arms;
suddenly, I sprouted little insect wings, buzzing,

your blossoms then grew into a tulip poplar tree,
I become a bumblebee, and I died inside of you.
FOURSQUARE: ANONYMOUS LOVER

The sounds began first at five years old as clocks in my head, ringing brokenly between the jamming shadows of thought, hanging in my mind’s middle distance forever, like bits of a sonic kaleidoscope—no, more blue than that—like glimmers from an intergalactic traffic light. Time’s musicality greatly excites me, its schizoaffective rhythms of sensual splendor create wrinkles in my mind as Time singsongs my life through Time’s sharpest point until I’m threadbare. But the tick-tocks don’t congest you from my mind, sweet and soulful lover. You are far more electrifying to me than any Time, pulchritudinous, electrifying and infinite.

I am an object of increased positive charge! I shout to you. What do you think? I think I’m positively unafraid to get love-drunk and silly and drink deep into a dream of you: my every make-believe moment, twisting yourself in my ripened fruit tree even as you, you lovely little love-lime, you expect me to love you unmercifully.

Although I ripened much too soon, you are engraved on my heart-rind for all time. Don’t you see? We have enough energy and brightness for all of Las Vegas and its collectivity of lights. Yes, our journey of a thousand sexy times begins with the flip of a single, adult, forbidden-city-of-love, luminous lightswitch, dear.
to all of you, miss
melancholy & miss
eversoul & miss
broken skin & miss
mercury rising:
i feel like i want to be
inside of you all;
i am a sexual emperor
of my own devising.
35 WAYS OF MAKING LOVE

*I can get more women than a passenger train can haul.* —**JIMMIE RODGERS,** ‘Blue Yodel #1’

1. Yelling out prayers, or meditating, or chanting mantra, or yodeling
2. Moving furniture around your apartment
3. After a longish lunch at Golden Corral with your boss
4. After a stiff drink or two at your favorite bar with a nice lady named Rhonda, for whom you just re-floored her doublewide
5. Counting out loud – “one...two...”
6. To the song “Me and Mrs. Jones” and on a bed of rose petals, or to any song by Barry White or Marvin Gaye, avoiding Boyz II Men at all costs
7. Practicing Brazilian jiujitsu
8. Blinking at the moon, using your eyelids as highway exit signs
9. Using feng shui as an approach to undressing
10. During a “coming of age” moment
11. With your childhood best friend
12. Completing, via trapeze, a dazzling, show-stopping circus routine
13. Smoking chronic and getting your mind blown out of this world
14. Watching the beloved classic “The Wizard of Oz” during ‘Ding-Dong! The Witch is Dead’
15. To a person covered in Post-It Notes
16. Using only simple machines
17. On Halloween at midnight with an unidentified person dressed as the Ghost of Christmases Future
18. With a wise, old hermit
19. While watching the first MLB non-fielded triple play and wishing you never did
20. Interviewing for that next big promotion
21. On a lazy Sunday during a walk with your chiweenie
22. Ordering an intricately catered delivery of one thousand wings from Domino’s Pizza
23. The night before your wedding
24. With someone you divorced 18 months ago
25. Without being in love at all
26. Saying: “So, how was your day?” / “Fine, thank you. How was your day?” / “Oh, just fine”
27. Officiated by an NFL referee without whistles
28. Watching MTV’s *Jersey Shore* and fist pumping
29. On a prize-winning yacht near the Fiji Islands with Fabio of *I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter!* fame, though not on Fabio’s yacht exactly
30. Feeding grapes to twenty flappers in a Parisian bordello in 1928
31. In the middle of a paused movie
32. Not saying the words “I love you” at all costs, then saying those words gratuitously
33. After being sick in bed all day
34. Spinning around and around and around and around and around
35. Ripping off Miller Lite labels and discarding them on the side of the bed
UNDERNEATH THE STARS

—for Nicelyn

She and I stargazing in the dog park
5 whiskey and diets 1 beer I remember
only that she said, “Read me your poetry tonight
    call these grass leaves
green integers whose mathematical conciseness
is reshaped by the multiple languages of our bodies” and
    “Our skin is split by shards of grass.”

Grass can’t be passive-aggressive, I sniggered out in an 8-line stanza.

This poem is in the Surreal Confessional Tradition
    and I’m writing this to you in reverse.