

A
NEW
KIND
OF
FORMAL
POETRY

07 OF 13

JASON METZERS

JASON PETTUS

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

GAD Publishing Company Chicago USA

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 2007 EDITION

Since 1996 I have owned and operated a basement press in Chicago called GAD, dedicated mostly to the self-publishing of my own work (and with a brief detour in 2001, publishing a dozen books by my friends, before giving up the pursuit again for lack of community interest). As of 2004 GAD had ended up publishing over forty books, both full-length and miniature in nature, dealing with everything from poetry to prose, essays, interviews, science-fiction, erotica and travel. Being the sole employee of GAD, of course, especially while continuing to write new material on a regular basis, unfortunately meant that many of these books ended up being published on a less-than-professional basis, with dozens of typos and grammatical errors found in each. It was something that always slightly bothered me about the GAD catalog; as long as I was an active writer, though, this worry was always trumped by the stronger desire to keep writing new material, and to devote the majority of my energy to these new projects instead of cleaning up the old ones.

In late 2004, however, I made the decision to put this literary career on indefinite hold, in order to open and operate an arts center here in Chicago instead. Given the chance for the first time to take a detailed look at the existing GAD catalog, I decided at that point to dedicate the next few years of my life to going through these old books, giving each of them the thorough editing they deserved, and republishing them in electronic form, standard-

izing not only the look of each publication but also the options for downloading and viewing them. This was complicated enough when it came to the nonfiction and prose projects, but especially tricky in the case of my performance poetry and monologues, of which I had never attempted to publish a pervasive, chronological record. Since the 2007 edition of these poetry/monologue books makes certain older titles now obsolete, as well as introduces several new titles, I thought I'd take a moment and explain the entire process, for committed readers who wish to own the complete, definitive collection.

Prior to 2002, the vast majority of GAD poetry/monologue books available were of special projects, including: *Psycho Poets* (1997), a collection of poems about women I slept with in 1997, when I was a member of the Chicago poetry-slam team; *Jasonettes* (1998), *The Heatseeker* (1999), *Notes From My Grandmother's Funeral* (2000) and *Celibate* (2001), all of them written transcripts of special half-hour themed performances I gave over the years, all of them for the old "Mental Graffiti" poetry show here in Chicago; *[Andi.]* (1999), a collection of poetry about a specific ex-girlfriend; and *The Tao of Now* (2000), a literary experiment of sorts, combining the length and structure of traditional short stories with the language and rhythm of slam poetry. The only exceptions were GAD's oldest two books, *The Sweet Alice Sessions* and *Kathie Lee Gifford Likes to Fuck!*, both from 1996, both collecting not special themed

work but merely the general pieces I was writing and performing for the open mics that year. In addition there was a “greatest hits” collection also available, called *The Jason Pettus Portable Reader* (2001) and consisting of around twenty of my audience’s absolute favorite pieces over the years, published exclusively to sell at live shows. These ten books reprinted approximately 100 of the poems and monologues I had written over the years; the vast majority of the 300 others I had written were simply unavailable in published form, save for those found on individual HTML pages at my website.

In 2002, the first year after “retiring” from the poetry community, I decided to make my first attempt at publishing a comprehensive series of these pieces; the result was the four-book series *Chicago Stories 1997-2000*, as well as a new “greatest hits” book, *More Poems about Blowjob*s, collecting my favorite sexually-explicit poems and monologues from over the years. These five new books went a long way towards getting more of my old performance work out to the public, but with still a number of inconsistencies: for example, technically the contents of both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* should’ve been included in the “Chicago Stories” series, not as their own stand-alone books; the series was still missing the poems I wrote in 2001 and 2002, important for posterity’s sake but not a large enough collection to publish as their own book; and of course even the current “Chicago Stories” series was missing several pieces that had become audience favorites over the years.

For this 2007 edition, therefore, I have declared both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* as “out-of-print” titles, neither of which will ever be printed in their original forms again; instead, they have been consolidated and are now known collectively as *Chicago Stories 1996*, fitting better into the overall theme of the entire series. I’ve also compiled a short *Chicago Stories 2001-2004* book, including the smattering of poems I wrote after retiring from the

literary community. The new six-book “Chicago Stories” collection (including expanded editions of the four volumes that had previously existed) now reprints all of the general work from my years as an active performer; the seven special themed books already mentioned have also been reedited and republished, meaning that owning this thirteen-book series now gives you access to nearly every poem and monologue I wrote between 1996 and 2004. The two “greatest hits” compilations have also been republished, along with two new ones; one’s called *Love Blender*, a collection of pieces about relationships, compiled originally as a feature for the electronic magazine *LoveBlender.com*, and the other’s simply entitled *Personal Favorites*, along with a new introduction concerning why they are. And finally, a new omnibus edition has been published for 2007 as well, called *Complete Performance Work 1996-2004*, collecting the content of all thirteen previously-mentioned books into one volume (and in fact, owning that volume makes owning the thirteen individual books unnecessary).

Those who enjoyed this book may also want to check out the following related volumes, all currently available through GAD: *How to Win a Poetry Slam* (2000), a half-humorous, half-critical look at this unique literary genre; *Smells Like Sweat* (1997), a memoir of the 1997 National Poetry Slam, written entirely as a series of haikus (from an original concept by Jerry Quickley); and *The Tunnel Rat Sessions* (2002), a collection of long-form interviews with other slam poets that I originally conducted for the Chicago-based poetry newsletter *Tunnel Rat* in the mid-1990s. Of course, I also encourage you to check out the other books in the GAD catalog; as of this writing there are 55 books altogether, with more being added each year, covering almost every literary genre and style imaginable. As always, I urge you to drop me a line if you wish to discuss these pieces further; my latest contact information can always be found at my website, itself found at jasonpettus.com.

HOW TO WRITE A JASONETTE

The “Jasonette” is a type of formal poetry I invented in 1998. To write your own, start by writing a two-line rhyming “mini-poem” about the subject of the larger poem. For example, concerning a poem about my ex-girlfriend:

Monika left, she left today
The grass was green and the sky was grey

Rewrite the mini-poem down the page vertically, so that there is only one letter per line:

m
o
n
i
k
a
l
e
etc.

Each line of the Jasonette must now start with a word that starts with that letter.

Next, take the numbers from your birthdate (in my case, March 5, 1969 [3569]), and from a date you consider of great personal importance to your life (in my case, the date I moved to Chicago: August 4, 1994 [8494]), and string them together, removing any zeroes or ones:

3 5 6 9 8 4 9 4

and write them vertically next to each letter, repeating the numerical sequence until you reach the end:

m3
o5
n6
i9
k8
a4
l9
e4
etc.

Each line of the Jasonette must now contain exactly those number of words.

Stanzas can be any length and may be bracketed with blank lines arbitrarily. The Jasonette is required to be the exact length of the letters comprising the original rhyming mini-poem. The five in this book were written as a long-form performance project, in March 1998, for the Chicago literary event “Mental Graffiti.” It was held at the Wicker Park danceclub Madbar.

THE NIGHT I KILLED MYSELF

Blasphemous blastings born

late and around the room
all cats go to heaven so
chilly, my dear, my dead loveless mistress mocking me
kwickly kutting kute tendons sliced like sharp karp
is underneath my ribcage

So you wanna be a rock star dear boy

Buffoons to the balloons

Lessez faire to

an economy of pain and aint
cheatin' hearts shot these days I
knew I heard somewhere they shoot dead horses nowa-

days

All I know is what I'm told and THC

never got no soul

Death floating above me whooshing through extended open fingers

Redux got me high

Ergo my eggo

Don't give up the basket

I'll drive it to the line

Sure I will put the apple in your eye

red sourpuss in your throat and turn on
eke out and tune
a Mexican sitcom though the fillings in my teeth

Never more you said

Damn you're good

Where do my fantasies fly

held in check with lead weights

Ignorey mine eyes which hath seen the gory of

termside fanatics and sidewalk peddlers with no bones
egging and awhing their

isonomic cardboard signs sliced through my throat like

glass

Sandwich boards razor sharp

who cut me

Heehaw the ringside seats and

I will tell you a story

that will be my baby screaming and shitting and

egging its way inside straight to your bones

agog anonymous awash away

never to come back to my white-washed bones

Damn I'm cold and

deadhead dye in

eye, blood on my sheets,

answer me, behave, good little girl

death's for your plucking if you weren't so cheap

Is that what it really is I ask

silently to no one

Death came for me tonight but still I walk

Esta bien, me gusto

All sucked in

Dots swimming in mine eyes

REAFFIRMING MY FAITH

In the world
 under the world just above
 somewhere we like to call home
 each of us grapple with our own death wish
Down into the earth we all dig with
 tiny plastic children's shovels
Or attempt to plunge straight in, headfirst, much as
 the ostrich contemplates life
Here is where
 ink turns miraculously into blood
Night lingers throughout the entire day
Killings somehow twist themselves into suicides, and we somehow
 tow the line between optimistic cynicism and despondency
How, I don't know

And some tell me that their god helps them
 to present a happy
 grin to me
 over this persistent wish to
 die screaming and clawing their throat

Water fills my hole even as I shovel furiously
 and I drown even as I am buried
Suffocating in my private
 deep underworld which they will never see, never touch

Everyone but you thinks
 atheism is trite

Deep rumblings from confused teens
Nihilistic empty threats from hipster artists

Others believe they stand in my kiddie-shoveled underworld
 when they read my blood-soaked ink ramblings

I know the truth.

The world just under the world where we live
 holds countless crimes and
I know the
 nighttime atrocities I have committed
Kitchen knives I have plunged into
 hearts, fingers wrapped around windpipes and squeezed
so tightly
Each sin perpetrated consciously, maliciously, with no guilt
Sometimes even to you

Just gods have no place in our secret worlds
 until I'm ready to
 say that it's
 time to let you creep
 into my hole, to drown together

No one's glimpsed my pitch black underworld except you
Because, I discovered, you'd been there all along
Even now you're there
Denying god, forgiving my sins yourself, awaiting my return

SWIMMING SHARKS

Sharks swim soundlessly
here in our dark waters
each ready to bite in and
hold on for dear needed life, not realizing that
every shiny tooth gouged into our flesh forces
love to bleed away

'Die?' You laughed when I suggested it cautiously, warningly.
Mere promises of retribution
yearn to be
handholds to a saner life

Attacks never to be perpetrated again
nor to your children, nor to your very soul

Death is something for television movies, you said
While all the while
harm was coming your way on a daily basis

I saw the bruises
loaded with makeup

Empty look in your eyes
I remembered your buttery skin but
never could convince you of the threat before you
testing your sense of decency, your very humanity

He intimately knows your
every curve with the force of his flying fists

He intimately knows that
all the screams

you utter from the dark
bastions of a faraway land
utterly do no good when home's so far away

Tests the sharks give us can teach us
or kill us and
Hell, I wish I'd done more before you placed
tiny toes in their
honorable but dangerous
eastbound direction that you did

Perhaps it will all work out
Rosey family Christmases around foreign fireplaces in December,
but
I'm worried the next time we kiss, a
casket will be home
Earth soon to be shoveled to keep you warm
I'm worried about touching
warm sexy skin
at a military hospital bedside

Sharks swim menacingly in our waters
They don't reveal themselves until it's way too late
or way too big to change (we think)

Put down your ticket
and come running to my arms, because I love
you. I love you.

THE ECHOES WE REFUSE TO ADMIT

Monday I woke
out of a nightmare where
numb knees lock in impotent silence
I had a silent scream locked in my throat
killed by the sudden revelation that you were
absolutely never coming back

Lips, loose or tight depending on how much liquor
Etched tattoos on me
forever – even now,
twice a half a decade
since you left, I still feel
hot prickly saliva afterglows from your loose tight lips
even as I forget what you look like

Lunches – this I remember
Eggs cooked on a street they call High, this
forgotten until I force
to remember the
tiny concrete crawlspace we lost
our virginities together in a splash

Deepening ripples spreading across the surface of our lives
and you refusing to admit the ripples underwater

You still anger me
though hardly at all anymore, only when I remember
hot purple sunglasses forever
egging me on
goading me to commit sins
Ripping of clothes, violation of flesh

and each time, sweat drying on each other, you'd
say, "You should probably go. You can't stay."

See, in the real
world of our perpetual pond, the ripples spread forever
and touch us with
senseless sense of
geography or time or space
Ripples tenderly wash across me today
Each delicate echo bringing memories I've tried to forget
Each memory in reality lurking under the surface
never completely leaving us

And this is what you never understood, what you'll
never understand – that the
death of sex
teems with the maggots of
hurt longing love anger jealousy melancholy
eagerly awaiting the moment, years later, when the waves
spread when you're least expecting it, crippling you
Killing you so softly

You were in Germany, last I heard, maybe married.
When do you hurt?
Ask what happened?
Swans and shit both float
God laughs at us both daily
Ripples wash across your shore – maybe now you understand
Early mornings, maybe now you finally understand what
you could never admit

YO LA TENGO

In my Missouri
kitchen I listened to the
insane sounds of the music blaring
So how would I know I would meet you
seven years after that epiphanous moment and how
each time we kissed
Dim memories of champagne and orange juice would come
haunting back into memory?

Every poetic line
read by me now is
wondrously filled with hidden metaphors, each
hidden until you squeezed them out between the cracks

I wonder what our metaphor might possibly be.

Loud guitar screeching silently
Esoteric art school dropout rambling lyrics on scratchy vinyl
Two-toned CD cases
Heat from your
economic thighs now burning fuel
V12 engine no one would guess
inside the wood-paneled chassis you call temporary home
Never quite admitting that home might be home
Yet never quite denying

Lust is a four-letter word you've reintroduced by

spinning minty fresh platters
Piling way up
on the world-weary stereo
Neat clutters alongside cataloging your life
in order of genre, in order of artist, label
When you wish your life stacked so nicely

Order is something I
never assume I can have again but can only
dream of getting back

Every shiny disk
rolled into black plastic shelf
wears me out a little more
Hearts can only be worn on sleeves so long
and then they're stabbed so often they stop
Tweeters can only tweet
Ink can only purloin so much before I simply
just fuck you silly
under the watchful
Sebadoh eyes of past mistakes

The fingers of my hands tremble
because the necks of the guitars tremble also and
Each failed garage band we love is a
grand metaphor for the
underground indie love we may or may not have
Never sure, nevermind

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

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THE JASON PETTUS PORTABLE READER: audience favorites
MORE POEMS ABOUT BLOWJOBS: best erotic stories and poems
LOVE BLENDER: best romantic stories and poems
JASON PETTUS: FAVORITE PERFORMANCE WORK
COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK, 1996-2004

For the first time ever, a comprehensive and chronological set of books is now available from GAD, publishing nearly all of the 400 slam poems, monologues and dialogues Jason Pettus wrote between 1996 and 2004. This new collection starts with the six-book series **Chicago Stories 1996-2004**, gathering all the unthemed work Pettus performed at open mics and special events in those years, now with an expanded series of notes concerning not only each piece, but what was happening in the Chicago arts in that period to influence the work. Move on to the four reprints of special commissioned **half-hour performance projects** Pettus created over the years; and then to the three other **special themed books** he wrote during his time as a performer as well (*Psycho Poets*, about various real Chicago female artists; *[Andi.]*, stories about an ex-girlfriend; and *The Tao of Now*, an attempt at combining the rhythm and energy of slam poetry with longer, more narrative stories).

For those interested in just a sampling of Pettus' old performance work, **four compilations** are also available: *The Jason Pettus Portable Reader*, audience favorites; *More Poems About Blowjobs*, the best of the erotic stories and poems; *Love Blender*, the best romantic stories from over the years; and *Favorite Performance Work*, compiled by the author from a variety of sources, with a new introduction. And finally, for the truly dedicated, the entire collection of work can be found in a **800-page single download edition** as well, entitled *Complete Performance Work, 1996-2004*.