

“On Rings amid Somersaults There”:

Poetry, Parody, Parenting

by J. Lorand Matory

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These words of the heart are dedicated to my beautiful, brilliant, generous and feisty wife 'Bunmi.

You inspire me to stretch language, because no words can encompass the breadth and depth of my love for you.

“The Honeycomb”
(2000)

For Adu.

Golden yellow,
Fine and mellow,
Its liquid love doth entice.

Seduction alive,
Born in a hive,
Bees tempt us to taste their sweet vice.

Badgers and bears,
Any creature who dares
To risk death by the stinger
Will openly linger
With combs that never combed hairs.

Still the bees make it sweet
And do not retreat.
Their sweetness, like love, is a snare.

“United Nature”
(2000)

Call me United Nations,
A multi-cultural body:

My pus is white,
My mucus yellow,
Except when I’m well, oh.

My feces are brown,
And my bleeding is red,
Except when it dries.
Then it’s black instead.

Call me United Nations,
A multi-cultural body.

Once my diversity disappears,
Wail a mourning cry for me,
Because you will know that I’m dead.

“Shhhhh”
(2000)

I considered not telling you,
It’s not a dream come true,
As many nightmares do.

“The Bones Keeping Time”
(April 2007)

These are the days of fear and joy,
The fear of the late-night phone call,
The joy in rewarded diligence,
The fear of the van, the fear of the hearse,
The joy of the flower’s new seed.

The fear that a trio of soldiers
Will unfold the black doors of the Ford
And march up the walk to the porch
where they’ve watched the mother’s legs
crumble beneath her.

These are the days of fear and joy.
Tomorrow’s not promised,
The risk must be borne,
To celebrate triumph, to overcome scorn,
To write the new novel, someday we will mourn,
To finish this symphony, we must end the next line
But life echoes da capo, the bones keeping time

“Right On, Baby”
(for Bunmi)

Right on, Baby.
Write on.

Write on paper,
Write on diskette,
Write on hard drive,
Or CD.

Write the right,
Write the wrong,
Whatever it might be.

Sharpen pencils,
Boot your Mac,
Follow your instincts and see.

You’ll uncover that story,
Win fame and glory,
Be the woman that you want to be.
Write the right,
Right the wrong,
Right on, baby, by strong.
Write--fire or flood--be free.

"The Ballad of Sweet Emily"
(23 June 2001)

It was many and many a year ago,
In the State of Tennessee,
That a maiden was born whom you all may know,
By the name of Sweet Emily;
And this maiden she grew to have no other thought
Than to love and be loved by he.

He was an Italian from Lenox, Mass.,
But a lover of Coltrane L.P.'s;
So he came out to Cambridge to sow his wild oats
With Gifford, George, Tom and me;
But no other could start John's Vescuvian heart
Like this love only gods could foresee.

She was then just a baby Nashvillean in arms,
A Bernard just as sweet as could be.
She knew nothing of boys; violins were her toys,
For a doctor's princess was she.
She would just rhapsodize about thick Creamy pies,
And dance the "Prep" with Ellie.

Then ran off to New Haven, where boys are quite craven—
Poor innocent flower was she!
But she got good advice from Sarah: "Think twice!
Yale boys are as dumb as trees!
Farther North, my sister, you'll find your true mister—
An Original Gangsta to please."

She cast eyes t'ward Harvard, that true mental vineyard,
And toiled for many days there.
While breaking the news on van Vechten and Hughes,
She got Jesse to do up her hair.
Yet the nights were long, and John's passions grew strong
For the raven-haired maid of our tale!

To him Cleopatra was she; her Mark Antony he'd surely be,
But good fortune awaits our dear couple of mates,
In their kingdom that bridges the sea.
On this great occasion, the Mediterranean looks just like a cradle to me.

North and South they invite, Yale and Harvard unite.
These seaworthy lovers now both have their druthers;
No more beauteous coupling could be.

So be it declared, all naysayers I dare:
Neither tidal wave nor how men misbehave,
Will part John and Sweet Emily.

--With a heartful of love!!!

“I’m in Love with an Ekiti Man”
For an old friend in love

(sung to the tune of “I’m in Love with Attila the Hun”)

When he calls on the phone, I stay cool as I can.
My Jacuzzi’s so grand,
My big closet’s been planned,
But I woke up six times
And I cry for that man,
I’m in love with an Ekiti man!

He can talk oyinbo like a beach-full of sand.
Our phone fests just can’t last,
His silence I can’t stand.
When God works his wonders, it’s no sleight of hand.
I’m in love with an Ekiti man!

I’ve lost weight, I can’t eat,
This diet can’t be beat,
My new towels are neat,
Rev’rend Samuels’s in retreat.
The kids think we’re nuts, but insanity’s sweet,
I’m in love with an Ekiti man!

Chorus:

I’m in love, I’m in love with an Ekiti man,
An Ekiti man, an Ekiti man.
We’ll go to the village and eat all the yams,
I’m in love with an Ekiti man!

He’s not from Ado, but I’ll take what I can,
With his plot of cocoa, we’ll grow fat on the land.
We’ll run o’er the hills and say “Ora, Yeye!”
I’m in love with an Ekiti man!

While we might not get clams, we’ll drink milk from big cans,
Down at First Baptist Church, won’t the wedding be grand?
Won’t their envy be fanned by my Ekiti man?
And they won’t have a choice but to kiss my be-hand.
I’m in love with an Ekiti man!

Chorus.

He grew up in Eko, my Dad’s born in Oyo,
It might get out of hand,

With my Ekiti man.
I do love him so, I'm impassioned, you know.
We'll make our love nest far from New England snow.
I'm in love with an Ekiti man.

My whole life is aglow, my new red hairs will grow.
If you don't get the point, then you're foolish, you know:
I'm in love with an Ekiti man.

Chorus.

“Tornado Ayo”
(2000)

Spinning like a top,
A vertiginous tornado.
My eyes keep looking back,
But they don’t know where I go.

A sudden sharp pain,
Right in the left toe,
But where it came from,
I simply don’t know.

“Geographical Dictionary”
(2006)

Sinj: forest fires in India.

Yu Nuck: an epidemic of impotency in the Arctic Circle

Bam: an Iranian earthquake

Splat: a Russian mudslide.

Ka Pau: a volcanic South Pacific island.

Splache: a French tidal wave.

Whirr: a Chinese tornado.

Kowloon: the Chinese variant of Mad-Cow Disease.

Guandong: Fecal contamination from the lizard farm.

Sushi: A lawsuit against the first female puffer fish chef when she made a mistake.

"Sometimes I Wonder"
(November 2006)

I sometimes wonder
If there's a parallel world
Where they live in a vertical house
And Tasheka momma still crazy
And the mom cooks egusi
And the dad does Thanksgiving dinner.

In that house,
Is the maid Brazilian?

And does the son like to tease
And the daughter snack on coffee and air-pop?

Is there a family where
A new Camry would have been worth the expense?
And they speak five languages?
And while the girls run,
do guys bike and swim?

I sometimes wonder if they make their own music
Late at night
And the dad beads and buys art
Lest beauty die tomorrow.

“bodies”
(2006)

the traffic arteries,
the lip of the cup,
the mouth of the river
the song of the whale.

the death of the liver,
the spine of the book,
the head of the oak,
the root of the matter.

the eye of the storm,
the branch of the river,
the head of the company’s
an asshole too.

the legs of the table,
the shoulder of the bass,
the butt of the rifle,
the neck of the violin.

the foot of the mountain,
the belly of the beast,
the heart of the palm,
the ribs of the schooner.

the wings of the White House,
the armpit of the world,
the guts to resist,
the waist of the guitar.

the tongue of the shoe,
a head of foam,
a wrinkle in time,
like the cross-hairs of the periscope.

the tailpipe,
the lap of my luxury,
the pit of my stomach,
the cap of my knee.

the windows of your soul,
your pearly whites,
your eye balls,

the trunk of you body.

your muffins,
the walls of the birth canal,
your sideburns,
your Adam's apple.

your platelets,
Charley Horse,
the bridge of his nose,
a shell of a man.

the pelvic basin,
a frog in her throat,
these crusty feet,
with scales and toe jam.

balance flakes of dandruff,
upon their ear drums,
past the tracks on their arms,
And their gravelly nail beds.

ball and socket,
shoulder blades,
tear ducts,
and the goody trail.

rosy cheeks
and a bloom of yeast.
making water
on the crown of the head.

heart valves,
knobby knees,
potbelly stove,
his crank.

love handles,
belly button, and
an elbow
joint.

“Eat over Your Plate”
(2000)

For Ayo

Wash the plates,
Sweep the floor,
Is this what my life is for?

Where is my leisure?
I’m having a seizure,
For all the work to be done.

If I had my druthers,
I’d leave it to others.
I’d buy a Rolls Royce
And leave them the choice
To wash up or call in their mothers.

I’m tired of busting these bubbles.
It’s the greatest of my many troubles.
Please spare me the labor
And do me the favor.
Eat over your plate on the double!

“Reign on the High Way”
(2006)

In the wake of the storm,
The sky falls silent.
Earth replies birdsong and echoes the rain
with the silvery splash of tires on lacquered blacktop.

While meringue mounts the hilltops of bristling lime-green

“The Pikachu Song”
(2003)

For Adu.

Early in the morning,
I haven't seen you all night,
But the sun is bright,
And when I open my eyes,
I wanna peek at you.

I want a Pikachu.
You wanna peek at me,
Cuz the sun is bright,
I haven't seen you all night
I want a Pikachu.

I am a Pokemon,
You are a Poke girl.
Oh, how I love you so,
In the morning glow,
I wanna peek at you.

Early in the morning,
Haven't seen you all night,
And with the sun arising
With my love's horizon
I wanna peek at you.

You wanna peek at me,
I wanna peek at you.
In the morning light,
It's such a delight,
I want a Pikachu.

We shouldn't fight each other,
Cuz you know we're brothers,
I wanna Pikachu.

Cuz you know I love you,
I wanna do what's right,
So in the early light,
It's such a delight
To have a Pikachu.

“Delight” (2000)

Right, might, out of sight,
Can anybody see the light?

Fight, bright, famous knight,
Could you, would you cure this blight?

Poems are my main delight.

“You too” (2000)

Today I will tell you a tale that is true:
Once it happened to others,
It could happen to you.

“Made by Daddy” (2000)

I went to the store in the freezing rain of March.
On the way down the street fell a great-big hulking larch.
I sat back to assess my own very scary luck,
Cuz I sure would have died if I hadn't thought to duck.

“Noah” (2004)

For Adu and his friend.

I know a boy without peer.
Ah, Noah boy!
Oh, boy, Noah.
I, Noah, boy without peer.
Ah, Noah boy, without peer.
Ah, his name is Noah.
I, Noah, he said, am not boy but great man.

“Ayo’s National Anthem”
(1991)

My name is Ayo;
I weigh ten kilos-plus.
My mommy loves me;
She eats amala.
I like acarajé,
Don’t mind hamburger.

My daddy loves me too;
He drives a Honda.

We live in Cambridge;
We teach at Harvard.
Though I’m a lucky girl,
They think that I’m a boy,
But I don’t mind at all.

Cuz I was born in 1991,
And I’m a post-modern girl.
Hey, hey, hey!
I was born in 1991,
And I’m a post-modern girl.

My name is Ayo;
I weigh ten-kilos-plus

“On the Eve of 13”
(5 November 2004)

For Ayo.

Original was she who began a new century
Of years beyond age thirteen,
A century of fire and water and gold,
Of righteousness fanning Joy’s flame.

She went barefoot for months,
‘Til her Grandmommy stumped
For shoes and bunny footwear.
But this toddler watched Dominique Dawes on the bar,
On rings amid somersaults there.

“No, I’ll not be earthbound,
Yes, my flights will astound.
From infant I’ve winged near and far,
From Salvador, Lagos and Paris I’ve jetted
To Rome, London, and Mom’s Ekiti.

“Yet I climb with my hands
When the chance comes along,
On rock wall, Sand dune,
And forever and soon
On ladders that lead me to greatness.

A queen since age three,
“I inspired the birth of an entourage—Sofia and Henry are two.
I defy the flawed ways of man.
A perfectionist like Daddy,
I hate mediocrity and bash it where no one else cares.

“Anjali, Signe, Charlotte and Poppy
All know me from long, long ago.
Alyssa and Jean too have both borne long witness.
I’m ‘A-yow’ to those I love deepest.
I am also ‘Lin Mei,’ the Golden Rose,
Who shines before teachers and friends.

Those who have taught me I honor:
È ʒe to my Mom, obrigado to Dad;
Ms. Davis, Ms. Groff, Mr. Weir, I hail thee.
Add Ms. Kalowski, Teresa and the whole I.S.P.,
Who’ve all lent a hand in my mighty command

Of microscope, bow, quill, and brush.”

How can it be—from car seat to college—
That Eve climbs so high and so fast?
Once ten kilos-plus, and now riding the bus,
She is stratosphere-bound as the world trembling waits
To witness the second of acts.

“Changsho was once my favorite spot.
Once liked dogs; guineas too lose their charms.
Now I’m more partial to family and kids:
The best C.I.T., tiny Lola’s role model,
And the best chef a family could have.

“But I discipline self.
It’s not pleasure but wealth—in gold and the mind—that matters.
Harvard awaits me, and then what I grasp
May be celluloid, stethoscope or gavel.

“Alone now I stand, violin in my hand,
Hoop earrings, scarves, whittled physique,
With a grand plan to master myself and no other.
And for power I’ve learned to withhold love;
I read character as deftly as books.”

In her scholarship steady and artistry ready,
With heartstrings pulled taut
And ambitions well wrought,
Eve rises to forge a bright century.

“Adu” (Anthem #1)
(2000)

Adu, A don't
Some days I just won't.
A don't, Adu,
But I'll always love you.

Sometimes Adu
Sometimes A don't.
Some days I really just won't.

Whatever I don't,
Whatever I do,
Adu, I'll always love you.

“Adu’ (Anthem #2)
(2000)

My name is Adu.
Before I’ve started you’re through.
I go forth and multiply.
There’s no equation I will not try.
My sister Ayo she is sho’ nuff fly.

I serenade on the violin,
And to the waltz I spin, spin, spin.
My favorite hobby is Pokemón,
But Pikachu’s no match for Digimon.

I know the capitals of the world.
Through my travels all their charms have unfurled.
Rome, Paris, London and Dakar.
I have had a super life so far.

I’m rare and shiny, I’m my Daddy’s pearl,
Black and burnished like bitumen,
Deep, dark and dangerous when I must defend
A man or woman who has no friend.

My pop’s from Chocolate City, U.S.A.,
My mom descends from uptown Igede,
And I read a book most ev’ryday.
My curiosity doth never end.

And that is why I’ve mad a lot of friends,
And like the mighty willow I do bend,
But the weak I’ll never fail to defend.
I will share with them all that I possess.
My middle name says “Honor-Never-Ends.”

Cuz my name is Adu.
Before I’ve started you’re through, through, through—
Through the doors of my great-big heart.
This has got to be my favorite part:

Cuz my name is Adu.
Before I’ve started you’re through, through, through.

Cuz my name Adu.
“Laiitan” proclaims honor to you.

Parenting and Paradox: How the War-Weary Laugh

What kind of drug helped the bull's wife to get around in old age?
Cow-cane.

What's the best kind of food for your eyes?
See-food.

What type of drug will stink the worst if we don't wipe it out?
Crack (or Mari-guano)

What do you call a girl named Poppy when she comes to your rescue?
Heroin.

What kind of drug really leaves you cookin'?
Pot.

Adu's joke: What drug did the runner take to go faster in the marathon?
Speed.

Adu's joke: What thing in the house do bacteria make when they jump into puddles?
Microwaves.

Where in the house did Simple Simon pray when he wanted success in the lottery?
The Win-dough.

Where in the house do the spirits of old shipwrecks go?
The sink.

Where in the house can even the most polite person not avoid looking?
Stairs.

What's the worst place to vacation if you have allergies?
Pollen-esia.

What did the smitten stamp say to the envelope?
I'm stuck on you.

Why did the centurion stab a hole in Jesus' side?
For cross-ventilation.

What happened when Jesus bled on the cross?
Cross-contamination.

What did the hot dog say to the hamburger?
I'm on a roll.

What kind of nut is crazy for boobies?

A chest-nut.

What kind of nut probably shouted about it all day long?

A hoarse chest-nut.

What kind of nut can make your bathroom smell on a hot day?

Pee can.

What kind of nut does a plasterer like best?

A walnut.

Where did the nutty professor hide his money when he left home without his pants on?

In his cash-shoe.

What kind of burger makes wise decisions?

Warren Burger.

What do your cells have in common with the strings of a violin?

Both have D 'n' A in the middle.

What seasonal change is a big waste of energy?

The Equinox. I don't know why it knocks twice a year. We already know it's coming in.

One pop-tart says to the other, "If we don't get out in time to buy Mom a birthday present, what are we going to do?" The other pop-tart replied, "Toaster."

What did van Gogh say when the puma claimed to be the world's most famous painter?

"You're lion."

What do you call wearing a scarf in Africa?

Scarfication.

Are there any female clergy in the Catholic Church?

Nun, really.

What did the urinal say on the eve of its retirement?

I think I should quit while I'm a head.

What do you call each piece in a Scrabble set for babies?

Infan-tile.

On which side of the village were Igbo twins born?

The infanti-side.

What problem did they discover in the galley of the Titanic?
Kitchen sink.

What do you call a woman who's sick of taking the wrinkles out of her clothes?
Ironing-bored.

What do you call a woman who still loves it?
Ironing broad.

What do you call a fish who's in a hurry to escape from Al-Qaeda?
Salmon Rushdie.

What did they call a pre-Columbian fire-fighter?
Fire Injun.

Where can Catholic women indulge their drinking habits with abandon?
Bar Nun.

What do you call the hutch were Ms. Rabbit keeps her wigs?
Hare dresser.

What do you call music censorship in small-town America?
Rock banned.

What is lemonade?
Helping an old lemon to cross the street.

What is limeade?
Encouraging the housekeeper to perjure herself.

What did the clam say to the scallop who refused to share his sandbed?
You're shelfish.

What do you call a doctor who really takes Poker to heart?
A Card-iologist.

Somebody asked Simple Simon, "Which came first—the chicken or the egg?"
Simon simply asked, "How do you make an egg come?"

This guy with a huge bulge in his pants tells this girl, "I've got a million dollars right here in my front pocket. What would you say if I promised to give it to you, and all you'd have to do is grab it?"
She replied, "Hummmm. That's a hard one."

What does a dog do when he outgrows his shorts?

He pants.

Is there any kind of Catholic Church official that altar boys needn't fear?

Nun.

What does a committed virgin do when a guy tries to talk her out of her clothes?

She skirts the issue.

What should you do if you're the kind of person who thinks everybody else is smaller than you?

See a shrink.

If a woman became the most powerful person in the world, would she exercise her power fairly?

She might.

Where do the most seductive co-eds go to school?

In universitease.

Why do photographers always focus on the negative?

Because too much light makes them shutter.

What did the overburdened cow say?

She lowed (load) heavily.

What do conservationists call the population of pumas in an area?

The cat-amount.

What did the medicine cabinet say to the linen closet?

You're full of sheets.

Is there any sexual partner that your average Catholic priest will never touch?

Nun.

What did the aspiring young cannibal say to his career counselor?

I just want to get a head in life.

What does a cannibal use to garnish his salad?

Hairdressing.

What do cannibals spread on their toast?

Toe jam.

What is the favorite appetizer at a cannibal party?

Finger food.

What does a cannibal melt to make fondue?
Head cheese.

Why did tropical storms use to be named after women?
Well, have you ever heard of a him-acane?

What did the leatherworker say to the dieter who needed to have ten inches cut off of her belt?
That's a waist.

How would it feel to live in a house made entirely of windows?
It would be pane-ful.