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The Boys I Should Never Write About

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The Boys I Should Never Write About

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts
English

by
Ashley Rivers
May 2011

Submitted to:
Dr. Jillian Weise, Committee Chair
Dr. Kimberly Manganelli
Keith Morris

ABSTRACT

This creative thesis is made up of twenty-three poems written in various styles, though most fall into two different categories, the short, sparse, Eigner-like poems or the long narrative poems. The poems demonstrate the theme of how women's sexuality fits into society and how that sexuality affects their lives. This creative thesis also demonstrates the author's ability to understand poetry and literature in general through the ability to create.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my mother, who has always loved and encouraged me, and to the one person, who other than her I know will always be there, Graham Burch.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee for taking the time to work with me on this project and become a better writer. A special thank you to Dr. Jillian Wiese for being there step-by-step with this thesis, even beginning in her workshop class when I was unsure what I was going to choose as a topic for my thesis (or even that it was creative at that point). She spent much time reading over my poems and noticing things that even I did not notice were there. She also recommended readings, without which I would not have been able to put my thesis in context.

As well I would like to thank the professors that I had at Francis Marion, who taught me passion for literature and writing, especially Dr. Ken Autrey, who was my advisor and mentor while I was there. Without them, I would never have made it to Clemson or any graduate program for that matter.

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INTRODUCTION

The Function and Importance of Poetry

I started to dedicate this thesis to all the jerks who made this collection possible, but that did not feel right for me. I realized that was because writing poetry is about pleasure. I write poetry because I enjoy writing it as well as reading it. For me poetry comes from emotion. The act of writing a poem is cathartic. However it does not purge the writer of emotion. Rather the sum of the emotion is transferred to the poem, making it a place for emotion for both writer and reader. I write in hopes that others will identify with the emotions and enjoy the poem because poetry is about connecting the reader and writer for the length of the poem. I tend to write from personal experience, so it is easier for the reader to identify with my work. I want my readers to identify with the emotions, and I also want to shock them. This hopefully challenges what their idea of poetry is, which for most people is the small portion of the canon that they learned in high school. I want to challenge and shock my reader in their preconceptions of poetry and in the idea of female sexuality, especially expressed in poetry. Instead of repressing my sexuality, I try to express how women are stuck between being fully expressive about their sexuality and how society asks them to behave. Both my sparse, Eigner-like poems and more traditional free verse poems work together to help express how women can “own” their sexuality. In all these aspects, I seek to identify who I am through writing.

In every poem that I love, there is been an emotion that I connect with it, a set of lines that I derive an insight into emotion. Dana Gioia says, in his book *Can Poetry Matter?*(1992), “By successfully employing the word or image that triggers a particular set of associations, a poem can condense immense amounts of intellectual, sensual, and

emotional meaning into a single line or phrase” (245). The concise nature of a poem allows for such power of words that are remembered by the reader because they have the power to elicit or explain any experience that is faced in life.

I feel that I must defend poetry, most likely because the legitimacy of poetry has always been questioned. Famous poets from Horace to T.S. Eliot have reflected upon or defended their art to the world, to those who did not accept poetry. Horace expresses that poetry is either to entertain or instruct. For me poetry does both. In some ways, I want my reader to be entertained and want to draw the reader into the poem, whether this be through poetic device, word choice, or intriguing stories/characters/narrators. Instruction often takes the form of telling from (what seems like) experience or knowledge. For my poetry it does not instruct in the sense that it demands the reader to act a certain way; rather it compels the reader to feel. Readers are taught how to respond to a situation through emotions to which they relate or recognize feelings that they had not before admitted to having.

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot claims that poetry is an escape from emotion and personality (43). He writes, “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (43). I disagree with this because the culmination of the poet’s experience is based on emotion and personality. How is such an escape possible? Earlier in the essay he writes, “The poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together” (41). This contradicts the statement that he makes about poetry being an escape. The mind is not just a “receptacle” for poetic

material. Just by observing and obtaining this material, the poet has imprinted a part of himself onto them. When the poet writes, he or she does not relinquish this material only to the written page. It remains with the poet. Once on paper, a poem retains a part of the poet, so it is not an escape from personality.

When T.S. Eliot was writing, poetry was public; it was part of everyday life as reality TV and music are a part of ours. Currently poetry thrives mostly in the university/academia (Gioia). As thus it does not reach a wide audience because people do not read poetry like they watch TV or listen to music. Poets have to adapt to this small audience; poets have less of a chance to connect with the audience because there are less people that will even bother picking up a poet's work. In this aspect, poetry is not about consumption like pop fiction. There is no Stephen King or J.K. Rowling in contemporary poetry. A poet can write and remain true to the subject matter that they address and the form that they choose to use in their writing. Although it speaks to a smaller audience, poetry still speaks to an audience and on a certain level is not trying to be mainstream. I believe that in the years since Gioia wrote his essay, "Can Poetry Matter?", we have seen a growth in the interest of poetry, and I believe that is partly because the Internet allows freedom of publication and access to sharing. In writing, I strive to expand interest in contemporary poetry, if only to those that read my work because they are family or friends. If somehow that I can spark an interest either through a relation to my poetry or through relation to me, I have succeeded in my writing.

Forming Poetry around Identity

Poetry today is diversified. It can be in form or free verse, and it can look like a poem or prose. Rather than be defined by form, poets are often identified by the subject matter that they present. In terms of subject matter, I would consider myself as a poet that deals with identity, more specifically the sexual identity of women and the relationships that it creates and destroys. In *Coming After*, Alice Notley reflects on the woman's voice in poetry.

Poems are part of our being alive, to realize them, to say them, is completely natural to being alive: to say what we've done, how we feel, what we know in such a way that the poems we say are as much like the poems we walk among as possible. (Notley 168).

By saying "poems are a part of our being alive," Notley identifies that poetry reflects our lives, and to the poet, it is an essential part of life. Poems are not forced but a part of expression that is organic to a woman's expression of life. This contradicts Eliot's claims. Poetry for Eliot is separate from the life and the poet, but for Notley, as well as myself, poetry is intertwined with the life of the poet.

When striving to define my poetry, I did not want to identify with confessionalism because I have been taught to view it as offering something less than the poetry focused on language. This is possibly rooted in my education of the ideas that modernists like T.S. Eliot present. However, the presence of personal experience does not lessen the emotional power or the beauty of the language, unless the poet allows it to do so. In some ways the two types of poems, the shorter poems and the more narrative longer poems, that I have produced represent the hybridity of contemporary poetry, which is the

The more narrative poems, even in the third person, still seem to function in the vein of confessional poetry, even though I did not want to identify with it at first. By including these two types of poems, I use the short, sparse, image driven poems to contrast with the confessionalist and narrative driven poems.

Both forms of poems reflect a similar theme in my work. I try to reflect the feeling of being stuck in between what I feel and what I was taught to think. Women must walk the line between their sexual desire and the image that they have been taught is socially acceptable for them. It has been an on going battle for me, like a lot of other women who have grown up in the conservative south, to not identify sexuality and openness with guilt and shame.

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler states, “In a sense individual agency is bound up with social critique and social transformation. One only determines “one’s own” sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself”(7). Society and what is acceptable change your perspective on gender and sexuality. The OED lists many ways to use “own” as a verb; there are several that apply to this idea of claiming gender. They say that to own is “to have belonging to one, be the proprietor of, possess,” “To have control over or direction of,” and “to gain possession or control of; to appropriate, seize, win” (“own”). This idea of ownership over gender is to claim/possess your gender and have control over it, rather than allowing outside forces to define and control the actions that define your gender.

As well with sexuality, “individual agency is bound up with social critique” (Butler 7). Woman cannot “own” their sexuality because they are socially criticized for it. Though sexuality is present in the media, fashion, and everything else, an openly

sexual female is still criticized and questioned about her frankness. It seems that most people accept sexuality in the media but do not accept it in people. Many women still call other women, even their friends, derogatory terms such as slut or whore because a woman has had sex with what they consider a large number of men and/or for talking about it openly. I have not been able to fully own my sexuality in my poems because of a fear of being socially criticized.

In some ways, I seek to reveal this shame and shake it off through my poetry. In “The Rhetoric of a One Night Stand,” I describe the interaction between a man, whose voice is in italics, and a woman. This leads to the one night stand.

I start the poem with the woman being in power.

If I get rich, I'll marry you. *That's the sweetest thing.*

I end the poem with the woman being seduced by the man.

So I guess we won't go back up to my room. *We won't take a hot shower. I won't go down you. I won't bend you over the bed and spank you. We won't have sex.* Let's go. Don't forget your hat.

In this poem, the woman is in control by driving the man back to his room. She is then seduced by the man with words rather than sexual actions. She in the end makes the choice to have sex with him. There is a power struggle here that represents the struggle that I find many young women my age having between their ideas of power and control with men and women, as well as their ideas of sex, which have been influenced by men who still view a strong, sexual woman negatively.

In “A Longitudinal Study of Conversations With Parents About Sex and Dating During College” (2010), published in *Developmental Psychology*, psychologists Elizabeth Morgan, Avril Thorne and Eileen L. Zurbriggen suggest that conversations

with parents about sex and dating have an effect on the way adolescents view sex and their actions regarding it. These psychologists cite a 1999 study done by Jill Downie that includes 371 parents and adolescents and say, “messages to adolescent sons more often included information about sexual exploration and pleasure, whereas messages to adolescent daughters were more often restrictive, stressing protective issues and the negative consequences of sexual activity” (Morgan et al 140). Morgan, Thorne, and Zurbriggen studied 30 adolescents with the same conclusion in 2010. This study shows how women are more likely to think of sex as being less about pleasure and be focused on the consequences and negative aspects that can result from sex. This creates a tension between the two genders and makes women less able to accept their sexuality.

In terms of women “owning” their sexuality in poetry, gurlisque, a women’s movement in poetry as defined below by Arielle Greenburg, makes this attempt. I think my poetry takes root in similar ideas as gurlisque, but I do not believe that my poetry can be defined as gurlisque. My work expresses the uncertainty rather than exuding the extreme confidence of gurlisque. Greenburg describes the movement in the introduction to *Gurlisque*, a collection of poems that represent this style.

The Gurlisque was born of black organza witch costumes and the sliver worn sequins mashed between scratchy pink tutu netting and velvet unicorn paintings . . . and self mutilation and anorexia and bulimia and fight back . . . joy and ecstasy and abortion and The Pill and road kill and the punk shows and panties and incest and ice cream and rape . . .
(Glennum 1).

Glennum defines gurlisque as a mixture of the “typical” feminine and the rebellious punk scene. It is mixture of “joy and ecstasy” and the unpleasurable, “rape” and “abortion.”

This poetry is feminist and comes from women trying to empower themselves. These are women who take control of their image and sexuality by creating poems that are perverse

to societal norms. In all things, I wish to be released from this, but for me, and most of the women that I know personally, the battle still rages on. Gurlisque has its place of empowering women, but the reality of most women is a position somewhere between oppressed and complete sexual freedom. Even though these women freely express themselves, there is no social or political change that results from this movement in poetry.

As Glennum points out in her definition of Gurlisque, “Abortion” and “the Pill” make up gurlisque and are a representation of sexual freedom for women. These are a woman’s experience that has been talked about by poets like Anne Sexton and Gwendolyn Brooks. In “The Abortion,” Sexton talks about abortion indirectly by using the images of a trip in order to show the process of the abortion. The reader is aware that it is an abortion because of the title and the repeated line “Somebody who should have been born is gone” (Sexton 61). The ending of the poem is the most detailed or gruesome, if it can be called that, of the poem. She says, “This baby that I bleed” (62). Gwendolyn Brooks’s “The Mother” does not talk about the act of abortion, but rather the sense of loss after the abortion. My poem “This is Not Your Story,” is different in title from “The Mother” and “The Abortion”. Although it does not directly refer to abortion, it does bring readers into the poem with “you.” This makes the poem more personal to the reader and puts them closer to something that they might not be comfortable.

As for the subject matter, this poem takes abortion head-on from the perspective of the person having an abortion. The process is sterile and cold. The poem lacks the emotion towards the woman; it represents the lack of emotion that one must maintain in

order to get through an abortion. The lack of emotion is a dark reality that neither Sexton nor Brooks face in their poems.

Blue scrub nurse sent me to the bathroom
to shove a suppository drug in my vagina
and take 800 milligrams of Motrin.

I depict the starting action of the abortion with the image of the narrator inserting the medicine in order to start the abortion process. The language is direct and clear, making everything seem clinical and sterile. I describe the people by the clothing, the “Blue scrub nurse” and “two girls // in sorority sweatshirts.” The narrator seems distant until she says, “The next day I blacked out in the shower.” This stirs the idea that there is something wrong. The lack of emotional tone contributes to the shocking nature of the scene and hopefully elicits an emotional reaction from the reader. The repercussion of being raised to be ashamed of sexuality has its consequence in abortion and the loneliness felt. However, the first-person perspective keeps it from being too impersonal. Taking away the first-person voice would lead to a poem that lacked emotion, as Eliot would have it, and render it ineffective.

Again I focus on loneliness in the poem “I didn’t Try Pot ’til I was Twenty-one,” but in this case, loneliness and alienation felt by women who live their lives for men. In the poem, the young woman tries pot for her boyfriend. In the last scene her outward appearance begins to reflect her opinion of herself, her guilt and shame. In the first scene, Scott is teaching her how to smoke and her reaction at the end is uneasiness. “As she went to exhale, she began coughing, smoking trailing out her nose” and in the last line “[s]he shivered as the wind blew in.” In the second scene, she is more comfortable with smoking.

She hit it twice more, walked around the corner and grabbed
Scott as he was pouring Fat Tire from the tap in the living room.

Her confidence has risen, but she is still being encouraged and taught by males. By the last scene, she seems reliant on Scott. Also she seems like a drug addict because “She hadn’t bathed in three days.” Her reliance on men is equivalent to the drugs that she is using. However she is still lonely within this setting. She is meaningless if only simply for the fact that she is not given a name, where as both of the men are. This loneliness comes from her reliance on men. There is a feeling of ambivalence in the poem from her reliance on men and her unhappiness. She is lost in an identity given to her by men.

Without memory and observation, poetry wouldn’t exist. I draw from memory and from others’ lives in order to create poems that reflect a position that I feel stifles most women. People’s views influence women to be unable to fully accept their gender and sexuality. Societal conceptions of sexuality may seem like something that does not affect women, but I believe it most acutely affects their sexual lives and the relationships that surround them. I seek to indentify the sexual tensions that women experience to answer the question “How and where do I fit?”

The Boys I Should Never Write About

The Rhetoric of a One Night Stand

If I get rich, I'll marry you. *That's the sweetest thing.* There were four people in the raft with Huck. *The answer is always four.* I'll be sure to answer that way to my orals committee. I'll tell them Matthew said so. *Will you give me a ride back to the hotel?* Of course. I'm glad you are walking with me. I hate these frat guys. *Are my hands caressing your thighs distracting you?* No. I am good at being distracted and driving. *You wanna come upstairs and continue this.* I uhh I uh I would be all for it if I wasn't in a relationship. It's kind of on again off again thing. *Those allow us to have these little secrets.* Its just I really want to, but I shouldn't. So I guess *we won't go back up to my room.* *We won't take a hot shower.* *I won't go down you.* *I won't bend you over the bed and spank you.* *We won't have sex.* Let's go. Don't forget your hat.

Her smile

is what seemed

out of place,

her hands

tied above her head.

It was a picture smile

(the pictures of fiancés).

Her feet tied to

the feet of the bed.

With a

handful of her hair

you fucked her.

The Boys I Should Never Write About

There was the boy that told me we were going to see Ice Age. Instead we went to his empty house where he proceeded to undress me. There was the boy that my parents didn't approve of because of our "racial differences." I'd go for a walk, and he'd pick me up, and we'd sit at the soccer field and just talk til my parents called, worried I was gone too long, worried I might pop out a mixed baby, because really? that would be worse than getting drunk and doing drugs at fourteen.

There was the first boy who fingered me on the playset behind his synagogue.

There was the other boy—the FIRST boy—who before the football game, me in my cheer uniform and him in jeans and his #2 jersey, would not accept no, though I never physically fought. He was so small I didn't bleed.

There was boy who I fell in love with in Europe because he liked Moulin Rouge and was going to Governor's School, who I dry humped in his bed after two bottles of champagne. When I returned, I explained my raw knee with a fall up marble stairs. There was the boy who I left my fiancé for who just couldn't fall in love with me.

353 N

A headboard beats
the wall.

Ice cream concrete
dropped on
red mud and leaves.

a tennis ball bounces
between the lines.

I walk my dog
in rain boots and sweatpants.

This is Not Your Story

I walked out of my bathroom to my boyfriend,
lying on the bed in Michigan basketball shorts
and an American Eagle t-shirt watching ESPN.

I shook my head yes and he said,
“We’ll take care of it, love.” A week later,
we sat in the clinic, watching two girls

in sorority sweatshirts whisper
to the girl wedged between them.
He put his hand on my leg and the nurse

with the 2 pack-a-day voice called me
back to the counseling area with an office
the size of a closet and a 17-inch TV stuffed in the corner.

Blue scrub nurse sent me to the bathroom
to shove a suppository drug in my vagina
and take 800 milligrams of Motrin.

They led me to a private room.
Shivering, I struggled to fit
my entire body under the paper gown.

Someone screamed over the elevator music.
It smelled like vanilla air freshener.
The doctor came and shoved his hand

up my vagina. I squeezed the nurse's hand
as the doctor used the vacuum
to suck out the fetus. I sat in the waiting area

listening to a 54 year old nurse tell a girl,
who looked like the chunky brunette in my Spanish class,
about Nuva-Ring and tried to give my boyfriend

directions back to clinic, as he drove past the turn
five times before he made it to me.

The next day I blacked out in the shower.

Haven

On the beach,
 mute

A boat's light bobs
 lightning
the boat's shape.

 I want to ride out
 the storm on that boat.

The rains melts

sand sticks.
We run inside.

Wanted

A Kitchen Aide

time in which to use said Kitchen Aid

a new dress

a better body for said dress

better motivation to go to the gym for the better body for the new dress

a bottle of Lortab

a six pack of Pumpkin Ale

anything Pumpkin, really

the Moroccan Vegan Toms in black

a potential husband

the ability not to hate this potential husband

tan leather boots

all the books I want for free

legal free music downloads

the knowledge of how to be happy

without others

a good gourmet grocery store by my house

good sex

to know that the soul is not ephemeral

Belts make Good Restraining Devices

You tied my hands
behind my back
and I hung my head

only to laugh later
when you let go
of me and I fell face
first on the floor.

To Mary Shelley

Somehow I imagine
Percy's heart
in one of those large
metal desks
(But you didn't have
metal desks then,
did you?)
wrapped in "Adonais"
placed
on the white handkerchief
that you saved.

Perhaps My Favorite Word Other than Intoxicated

UN

DU

LATE

Try this:

roll (ie pollie),

surge (ing waves),

swell (That sure is swell buddy!),

ripple (s in the pound water).

And rise and fall

doesn't contain the cadence

to undulate off your tongue

like wind blowing wheat

or you and him.

How Not To Get Married

Emery swirled her wine
and made rings to veil
her discomfort from Devon.
He sat there cutting his steak,
into itsy-bitsy bite size pieces
and dipping it in A1 sauce.

He had ordered it well done.
Emery glanced down at her ring
And back to Devon shoveling
the dripping pieces of steak
into his mouth. Emery twirled
her pasta around her fork
and stabbed a scallop.

“How’s dinner?” said Devon.
“Fine.” She glanced again
at the princess-cut diamond.
“Look Devon. I just can’t do
this any more. We just don’t fit.”
She looked at the bag which
Contained her newly purchased
veil. Devon looked up from his plate.

Emery placed her ring on the table,
put on her sunglasses and braced herself
for her vibrating phone and his screaming pleas.

Are We Ever Really Crying About the Movie?

Legs in front of

Something's Gotta Give

The last gulp of wine

His shirt

a stale trailer

cigarettes and fried grease

and tears.

Shirtless

At Five

I heard the voice of a boy in my class
speaking to my mother while she was putting

groceries into her hunter green Grand Cherokee.

I slipped into the floor of the passenger seat

and wedged myself under the glove compartment.

I crouched twirling a penny in my fingers,

as the chunks of red clay got on my pink

OshKosh overalls. He and his mother

went inside Food Lion.

At Fifteen

I lay in a pair of blue striped shorts
and shirtless as he hovered over me.

Alone in my pre-civil war built house,

He sucked on my neck and breasts,

licking in between. I unbuttoned

his golf shirt, as he jammed

his tongue into my mouth.

His phone vibrated against

the hardwood floor. He answered.

As he hung up he said, "I need to go see

McArn. He's leavin' in a couple o days."

I clasped my bra back. He buttoned his shirt.

I have only been single for two weeks since then.

Rosemont Merlot

on my grandmother's breath

hints of blackberries

next to an electric fence.

A dead snake

under the Oak tree.

My father's

flicked cigarette.

My mother's red cheek.

Vanilla potpourri at night.

Against a Wall

I want a man who will walk my dog and fuck me
so I can stay warm in bed, while he does all the work.
I want a man who will push me against a wall.

I want him to not keep his hands off me
long enough for us to make it home and when we get there
I want that man to be willing to walk my dog and fuck me

again. I want him to offer to do the dishes
and do them anyway when I refuse. And when I get mad,
I want a man who will push against me and will not hang up

because I was being an ass about something like
whether he bought JIF or Peter Pan peanut butter,
later to walk up to me and apologize by fucking me.

I want him to throw me down on the bed and apologize
over and over again until I know he doesn't mean it.
I want that man to push me out and leave me there.

On the way to the hospital to see his dying grandmother,
I want him to not be able to keep his hands off me because
I want a man who will walk my dog and fuck me,
and I want a man who will push.

This Isn't forever

August humidity

 Your Hands

 my thighs

my red ribbon

 grazes your cheek.

a tree limb thumps

cold hands

 hardened nipples

Your cell phone vibrates.

I didn't Try Pot til I was 21

She and Scott sat on the edge of her bed, in their underwear. The window opened to the inside, so he sat a coke can on it and lit the joint. "I'm going to teach you how to smoke, considering you have only done this when you were drunk. You inhale. Deeply. Hold it and exhale. Here. Try." She inhaled slowly. As she went to exhale, she began coughing, smoke trailing out her nose. She held out the joint. "You take two hits before you pass it." Again, she coughed but only breathed smoke out of her mouth. He took two hits and ashed in the coke can. She shivered as the wind blew in.

Underneath a poster of Link, in Mike's kitchen filled with empty wine and beer bottles she laughed as Mike packed a bowl with weed from a Mason jar. "I love your Zelda poster. I never finished that game. Long story. But it was great" she said. Mike laughed, "Where's Scott?" He passed her the bowl. "He's talking to Chris. I really don't know how to do this." He held it for her, placing his finger over the hole. "Suck in." he moved his finger and replaced it. "Good." She hit it twice more, walked around the corner and grabbed Scott as he was pouring Fat Tire from the tap in the living room.

She hadn't bathed in three days and hadn't shaved in seven. Her brown hair was pulled up on the crown of her head. She was wearing dark skinny jeans and a Black Volcom shirt. Her hands slid along the back of Scott's neck, as he smoked a joint. Their feet dangled off the edge of balcony of the beach rental.

She looked down to see a man in red sneakers and a blue sweatshirt walking out to his Sienna minivan. He emerged with a diaper bag and bottle of brown liquor. She slipped her hands beneath Scott's blue RVCA shirt. As the man hustled back to his apartment, Scott giggled, "ya wanna take a hit?"

Creation

Make love to me
(don't just make love to me
Fuck me)

Make me come.

Make meaning

Out of

Nothing.

Make me yours.

Make everything

disappear.

Make ME.

Knowing

Her breasts stick
and slide against his back,
as her chest heaves.
Her leg perched on his hip.
She fiddles her foot against his.
Slowly she sneaks her arm
over his shoulder.
He snores
and rolls away.

In the Library Study Room Across from *Hansard*

I stand up, off the grey carpet
that rubs against my knees.

Unconditioned response

You push me into the corner,
(the chair propped against the door.)

Occurs naturally. Ex: Smell of food

facing the rows which contain
Beloved Infidel. Someone is loudly

Conditioned response is learned.

arguing about a misplaced book,
disguising my moan. You sit

Operant Conditioning

me in another chair with blue upholstery
and arms that rub against my thighs

Through rewards and punishment

and joints that creek.

You grab my ass

Positive and negative reinforcement

and pull me closer. A door slams
next door, and I jump.

increases the behavior

I pull down my skirt
as you pull up your pants.

positive and negative punishment

My shirt smells like sweat and your cologne.
I wrap myself in my jacket

decreases the behavior

and continue writing notes.
My hand shakes making

continuous reinforcement

a slightly crooked “s.”
You sit at your computer.

followed by Partial reinforcement

Punching Bag

I slammed my hand
into the door frame
three times.

Girls cry. They don't punch.

I cry, punch,
slam shit into the ground
and scream.

That's not healthy.

It's better than screaming
in your face,
punching you.

Yeah. Its going to bruise.

I'm Sorry's Only Sexy when It's Make Up Sex

I'm Sorry

Shut

Up

I love her,
more than anything,
you know.

Sex isn't going to make this
go
away.

You know we can't
have anything
more.

One Night Stand-ish

You are still unknown enough to me that I can fantasize about us being married, about cooking for you because I'm in academia and you work a real job. I can see us going out or you coming home to me grading with a glass of wine on the table. You telling me you love me; me liking it. I can still fantasize about sex on the kitchen counter or leaning over the bed.

I am sure I will grow to hate you. I'll learn to hate you for the jealousy or lack thereof, the way you say words like pants or counter or the way that your tone/accent changes when you talk to different people, the way you kiss, the way you sweat when we have sex, the way you hate my friends, and the way I love yours.

And I'll learn to hate the way you love me.

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