

Ames Hawkins

## Rhyme Without to Reason Within

### Say, say oh playmate

#### Come out and play with me

Completely alert, the young goalkeeper reaches down and pulls her socks high above her knees, working to cover any exposed skin below the skirt of her uniform. She resents not being able to wear pants like the boys. She watches as the ball makes its way toward her. A lucky punch pass and the sphere skids past the defenders. She alone faces the opposing forward.

As he dribbles toward her, she begins to shout, "Hey, you. You're gonna miss!" She runs directly toward him, knees bent, arms extended, focusing on nothing but the ball. Realizing that the angle is being cut off, the forward takes a shot. With a soft thump the ball takes flight about two feet off the ground. Sliding head first, the girl dives and bats the ball away from the goal line. She jumps up, covers it, grabs it, and punts it down field to the boy without the sweater. As her teammates work to score, she busies herself by picking gravel out of the heel of her hand.

This game is played every day. Every day she plays soccer with the boys. She and her four best friends take on the rest of the class—the rest of the boys—every day. Almost every day her team wins.

Not every day, but frequently enough, they complain. The mothers call. They question the school, the principal, the teachers, the goalkeeper's mother. *Is this any way for a girl to act? Should she be allowed to play with the boys? What sort of message does this send? What are you trying to prove?*

The school calls the mother and asks if the girl can, just sometimes, play with the other girls. *It would make life easier for everyone*, they say. The mother tells the school her daughter can do as she pleases. The girl continues to play with the boys.

Every now and then the school calls. Every time, her mother says her daughter can play with whomever she likes. She likes to play with the boys.

### **And bring your dollies three**

#### **Climb up my apple tree**

1. An alcoholic tosses a bottle into the street without a thought. It shatters, creating many surfaces, many points of reflection. Edges are new and sharp, potential agents of pain. As tires drive over the glass, the larger pieces become shards, small bits. These bits are ground into the pavement, reduced to particles the size of sand. Pressure and force disarm the glass, facilitating decomposition. That which was a threat and a locus of potential harm is now impotent, benign.

2. A woman slides into a blood-red velvet dress. She runs her hand over her hips, enjoying the rich fabric, the heat and energy of her own body. She stares at herself

in the mirror and turns sideways, placing the palm of her right hand on her belly. It is smooth and knowing; completely sure of itself. She allows the energy of her body to be absorbed and translated by the fabric.

3. Two children play paper rock scissors. When paper covers rock, it wins. The children do not spend time trying to figure out why this would be the case even though it doesn't make a great deal of sense. How can the paper win if it does not hurt the rock? How can the rock lose to a piece of paper? The paper wins by covering the rock, obscuring its power, hiding its identity. The paper covers the rock and the rock disappears. The rock loses because it is no more.

4. This is the texture of childbirth.

### **Slide down my rain barrel**

#### **Into your cellar door**

They say it is about performing masculinity. But I don't feel like I am only performing when I get dressed, when I get my haircut, when I sit knees splayed, when I talk, or write, or cook, or golf, or drink, or eat, or jack off, or love my partner, or tuck my son in at night. Theorists theorize about the location of gender, about its relevance and power and purpose. I recognize myself in there, somewhere in those words and ideas. But, what does it mean to be a boy and a woman? A girl and a man? What does it mean to want to locate that manhood somewhere other than a penis? Is my man in my womb, pussy, clit, and cunt? Have I always been a girl with a dick?

My man was playing, I tell you what, when I lived in the sorority house, wearing long blonde hair and dresses, clothed in a kind of purity drag, transgressively stalking cultural acceptance. That young adolescent dude was there, in the bathroom, sitting on a stool, watching all those women get ready to go out: make-up and push-up bras, with curling irons and blow dryers, constantly overloading the circuits. He did their bidding, retrieved clothes, flipped breakers, held curlers, and provided compliments, all in exchange for the unbridled permission to watch them prepare for their own feminine theatrics.

And drag kings, too, showed me how to play with packing, with sideburns, with binding; how to woo an audience of queers and straights with winks and leers, thrust and mime. It was useful to experiment, to pretend, and to practice with all of those props. But they aren't my masculinity, my gender-play, either. My genderplay is in the word. And so, I rhyme without, to reason within:

I am my me, and your you, and my you, and your me.

I am he and she and whatever you see.

And to see, see,

is to be be,

in being and seeing

of the thing that we flee.

If there was ever a plea,

that I could make to thee,

that you would not reform whatever you see,

whenever it is you think that you see

something different in me,

from that her he or his she,

that made it easy for me  
to simply just be  
so that you could see  
whatever in me  
makes sense to you  
in your reality.

I play as I transcribe a collective past of gender warriors, transgender empathics, genderqueer magicians, and queer mystics, who position bodies and stories somewhere between girlhoods and dragdoms, between boyhoods and dreams. Between what we can see and what we need to be. And so a moral for thee on a knight's bended knee:

The play is the thing /that brings life to the man in the king.  
But the man who is king /is confident and true  
Only because/I am the best man for you.

**And we'll be jolly friends**

**For evermore.**

Change in any system requires a shift in the paradigmatic structure. Or, rather it is change which predicts, presupposes and precedes the shift. When shift occurs, there is never the glamorous guarantee that 'truth' has been discovered, that an end to the shifting has been reached. Remembering to maintain a space for negotiation becomes the most important priority. If we forget the space of negotiation and choose to focus on the 'truthfulness' of the product, rather than on the process of 'truth', meaning finds itself in a condition of permanence and allows itself to become

victim to deconstruction. Noting, however, that changing beliefs and paradigm shifts continually negotiate with each other provides for the possibility of a life of personal truths. Every day and every truth is as real as the one that precedes it; we accommodate truth as very real, within a structure-less structure.

Anything you say to me, I will hear with my heart. So, while I may or may not believe in any particular relative 'truth', I know in what, and in whom, it is that I believe.

## Author Bio

Ames Hawkins is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Columbia College Chicago. Ames has published work in *Q Review*, *Midway Journal*, *Fourth Genre*, and *The Broome Review*. Hawkins was a 2010 Lambda Literary Retreat Writer's Fellow, and 2007 Breadloaf Contributor.

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