

## EXPOSITORY WRITING ON SOME KISSES

A woman wants to be kissed firmly and bristles at light pecks.

A woman wants to be kissed as if in an old movie: closed mouth, dipped.

A woman wants to be kissed only intermittently, as if she can't decide whether the kiss is a good idea.

She puts her hands on her breasts.

She pushes her against the wall.

She asks how she likes to be kissed.

"No, not like that. Imagine that I am a man, and kiss me again," one says.

"I don't want to imagine that you are a man. I would not kiss you, if you were a man, as you know," the other corrects.

"I'm sorry . . ."

"But I can lie and *tell* you that I'm imagining you're a man, if it pleases you."

"It does please me. Tell me how you would kiss me, if I were a man."

"I'd open my mouth wider, and I'd put your desire before mine."

"Do that, yes."

They do that.

She pulls back.

\*

A woman wants to be kissed as if in the oldest movie: slapped in the face.

A woman wants to be kissed as if she's the old movie's unsung editor: given unmanageable reels of kisses good and bad to use to make one solid kiss.

A woman wants to be kissed by the woman dressed as the man in the old movie, but wants to know that's what's happening, unlike the woman dressed as the woman in the movie.

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"Would you really not kiss me, if I were a man?"

"You know I'd kiss you no matter what."

"How have other women wanted to be kissed?" she asks.

"It depends."

"It's true that the women who mostly kiss men, when they kiss a woman, sometimes kiss bigger and with less patience, but then that's also not true, sometimes the women who kiss mostly women kiss entirely impatiently, you've just entered the house and kissed their cheek and they're already on their knees."

"I like to be kissed that way."

\*

Here's an old story:

You're kissing me against this wall & saying shit

like “here are the reasons I’m not going to kiss you” but  
I can’t hear you, my ears are only open  
to the sound of your gasp, you say  
“The final reason I’m not going to kiss you is that  
I don’t kiss those I’ve already kissed, I’m only  
interested in new kisses.” You repeat  
this. Your hand moves up my skirt, you’re  
a woman, a woman who says “it’s too bad  
I’m straight given how much I love kissing you”  
or “It’s too bad you’re straight  
given how much you love kissing me  
and how you just told me you’re not straight  
a moment ago, I love you, this is the real  
reason I’m not going to kiss you, I love you and  
you don’t love me you told me so you said  
‘I have a lot of love for all of my friends’  
I’m not an idiot I have some pride I can’t

kiss you, I'm a man, I have a woman, she isn't  
you she doesn't love me the way you love me  
but there are promises a man makes.”

\*

One says: “A woman told me she liked to be kissed wetly, like where the strings of spit connect your mouths when you pull away.”

The other responds: “I kissed a woman who likes to be kissed one kiss at a time; she needs to mark the end of each kiss.”

“You have to be patient to kiss that way.”

They describe more kisses, and they try each of them out.

This, of course, makes them fall in love.

The game takes years, and remains very fun.

One day, though, one realizes she hates to be kissed just after dinner. The other realizes she only wants to kiss right after dinner, they have a fight, it ends in kisses, one realizes she hates to kiss and make up, they have another fight, they kiss again.

This starts an awful, circular fight, one that gets in the way of their research.

They eat, one kisses, they fight over the timing, they make up, they kiss, they fight over the timing, they kiss, they repeat until bed.

Now they just have this one kiss: the make up kiss, which one of them hates.

But they're glad to be stuck in this loop, secretly.

It puts off one kiss they don't feel ready to try.

A woman wants to be kissed goodbye, for example.

## ATTEMPT TO BE ADEQUATE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF LOVING AN ANIMAL

*So, given the question, "did dogs have a Renaissance?" the answer is clearly no; dogs did not partake of the intellectual debates which define the period, nor did they have the concept of historical periodization.*

—Nigel Rothfels, *Representing Animals*

When I saw the small goat attempt to walk, but stumble, then find  
his footing, leaning his head against another goat,  
then turn his head back over his shoulder to look at me, then nuzzle  
an udder, then let his ears fall over his face, as if playing shy,

I wanted to be able to write.

I wanted to write a poem, even,

about the way people who love animals,  
including and perhaps especially me,  
including and perhaps especially goats, feel

when they didn't know they were going to see animals,  
but, suddenly, they do.

It feels, I tried to dictate into my phone, the way I imagine it feels  
when you, at once, believe in God and believe that She has blessed you.

But this is not sufficient.

The internet does a better job of documenting  
the way we feel when something soft, especially  
a mammal, is very cute, than poetry does.

Not just the internet:

- children do this better than poetry does  
(factoring in that children and poets are overlapping sets);
- children’s poetry, for example, knows that it should be about animals more often than adults’ poetry does,
- and maybe photographs do it better as well, although they can get a little too serious  
(the experience of seeing a goat doesn’t have much to do with framing, although lighting can make their fur pop);
- they document, at the very least, the fact that you were so moved by the animal that you wanted to share with someone else the way you felt when you saw it;
- non-human animals also do this better, as they respond to the appeals of other animals by smelling, fighting, pawing, kissing, hunting, singing, jumping, or otherwise letting response itself take priority over their ability to share this response with someone else, convincingly;
- even fiction documents animals better than poetry does, in that animals more often get to represent animals, rather than standing in for non-animal experiences or feelings,  
(even if, while serving as a narrative dog, the dog has a non-dog allegorical function).

It’s not true that I didn’t know I was going to see the goat, though.

I had walked down to the fence to see this specific kid, in fact, but instead, I found two big donkeys

there; when I had walked down yesterday the donkeys weren’t there; they must have been hiding from the rain.

So I was in fact heartbroken by the surprise of the donkeys.

They were not the baby goat, though  
they moved to reveal the goat

I had come looking for, which made me smile, and when I sat down to try to write, inside, I lied, I said I didn't know I would see a goat, because I had decided that, according to the poem, the feeling I had for the goat was predicated on not expecting to see one before it came into view, because that was the feeling I had had last night, the point at which I didn't know I would see one,

rather, the point when I first saw the goat—surprise came earlier.

I felt surprise when I read that the place I was headed had “farm animals,” and I hoped that among them were baby goats, but I thought January would be an inappropriate time for a goat to be a baby.

If you were wondering, January turns out to be a very likely time for baby goats:  
I have seen at least six.

I would have seen eight, but two of them were lost to the winter.

I insisted on feeding the mother who had lost two kids extra carrots, because I interpreted her lesser willingness to fight for baby carrots evidence she was mourning, although I do not know.

The unneeded milk hanging heavy from her udders is a certain kind of mourning.

A poem to capture the feeling of reading a pdf that informs you there's a chance you will soon see the absence of a baby goat in a field where its mother might or might not be aware of its absence.

I texted someone to ask them if they had any fave books/movies that were love letters to animals.

Either this could help me write the poem, I thought, or it could lead someone to try to impress me,

a feeling akin to love in the way  
reading about an animal is akin.

They said *Au hasard Balthazar*, a movie

I have texted them about a lot, which gave the impression they were avoiding the question

—and, I thought, it should be obvious to them I was thinking of this movie, since I was staring at two big donkeys when I texted,

—who, by the way, have very big mouths, lips so big you must get your fingers between them to make sure the baby carrots don't fall out, even though this risks getting your fingers between the teeth, which seem very strong,

—although they might not be strong, as another pdf informs me that “dental disease is second only to hoof problems as the most common medical condition of the donkey”

—“donkeys have a finite amount of tooth available”

and it is hard, after having seen this movie, to look at the hide of a donkey

—without seeing it as if through the lenses of love, torture, and/or Bresson's camera.

I was annoyed, but unfairly: I hadn't texted them a picture of the donkeys, but of the goats.

*[interlude in which a series of memes representing the cuteness of goats signals that this is about the use of memes in the poem and not about the goats themselves.]*

*[interlude in which I show Shiv a video of goats calmly balancing on a teeter totter and he insists they are CGI, revealing that neither of us can distinguish a real goat from a fake.]*

*[interlude in which an analysis of the material costs of Au hasard Balthazar's production attempts to measure what resources might be needed to write a love letter to the goats.]*