

Antithetoasts

Poems in Honor of Dubious Occasions

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A Toast to That Perfect Someone

X., you're smart, stylish and funny. You're generous, selfless, self-effacing, with bottomless founts of patience and gratitude. I speak for everyone here when I say ... fuck you.

Your parents gave you unconditional love and support and never wanted anything in return. And you've only ever had generous and compatible lovers. Without shame, anxiety, apprehension or regrets, you delighted in one another's bodies. Fuck them.

You socialize with world leaders and won't share the tiniest inconsequential bit of gossip. You're well known for respecting cultural differences while appreciating our shared humanity. And you're an excellent amateur photographer. Fuck. You.

You have best-of-breed children. They're stylish, smart, and funny – just like you! What the fuck?

Here you are at the top of your game, in work, in love, in life. We follow your lead, but seriously, fuck you. Now, everyone please raise a glass and join me in toasting X.:

Let's be clear. To be here is
Well beneath your station.
Let's drink to the only thing you lack:
A profane imagination.

The Tale of Angel Voyeurs

New lovers celebrate the impossibility of emptying themselves to one another completely, thus achieving a milestone on the way to peak intimacy. The angels surveilling shake with crude jealousy, yet for the lovers they're also oh-so happy. They sing:

May your oysters always be shucked.
May your chickens always be plucked.
May the sun always rise
Between your damp thighs
After a mind-blowing fuck.

The Tale of a Concerned Mentor

Tonight your team goes out for a pour. Before then, a mentor takes you to her office and closes the door. You think she's a bore. All her advice? You've heard it before. Listen, she says. Be forewarned:

Over beers, your boss
Can be your friend, but you can
Never be their boss.

The Tale of a Backyard Party

Someone tells a story as if it's a homily. To a rapt audience he gives his commentary. A line of thirsty adults circle the steel barrel and watch it like a totem. From it they get their momentum. A thumb presses the plastic handle. The nozzle on the hose snorts and bubbles like a baby's nose. The last beer drops on their sandals. Fear not, says the host:

When the tap sputters, spits foam and gas,
We should toast ourselves on a job well done.
For when a keg is emptied at last,
It's time to tap a brand-new one.

A Toast to Celebrate the Pointer Finger

I rise now to give tribute to the pointer finger. Thank you for scooping hummus from the bowl. Thank you for bending tabs on cold beer cans. Thank you for tugging waistbands from a lover's hip. Thank you for receiving daubs of lotions on your pad. Thank you for leveling unpopular accusations and emphasizing points. Thank you for tapping simple beats on hard surfaces. Thank you for conducting invisible concerts. Thank you for all the triggers you refused to pull. Thank you for all the messages traced in foggy mirrors. Thank you, most of all, for the Fs and Us and other letters you press on keyboards to translate thoughts into words. This toast is for you:

You pick our noses, scratch our butts.
You're always there to help us come.
We like you a lot, almost as much
as middle, pinky, ring, and thumb.

Eight Ideas That Informed the Composition of This Book

1 - A toast recognizes, honors, and commemorates the importance of a person or event.

2 - A toast has an element of spontaneity (or the appearance of spontaneity).

3 - Toasts are a codified form of politeness.

4 - What it means to be polite is arbitrary and often masks social antagonisms. Toasts exemplify this principle at times when the assembled group is coerced to raise their glasses in a sign of feigned respect.

5 - Politeness is often invoked by the powerful to wield and maintain power. When the powerless transgress, they risk their livelihoods and their lives.

6 - Toasts illuminate the ways in which prevailing ideologies allow poetry to surface in mainstream culture.

7 - It was deeply pleasureable to write these poems as toasts that were determinedly polite but of varying degrees of sincerity.

8 - These toasts have a genealogical relationship to the haibun.

Andy Brown is a poet and freelance writer.
Antithetoasts is his first book.

