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THEM
POEMS

BY MASON WILLIAMS

Mason Williams is perhaps most widely known as a composer and musician. He has recorded more than a dozen albums, including the single "Classical Gas" which won three Grammys in 1968. Twenty years later a single, *Country Idyll*, from his album *Classical Gas* was nominated for a Grammy. The album went gold by selling over five hundred thousand copies. In addition to his pop concerts, his *Of Time & the River Flowing*, *Symphonic Bluegrass*, and Christmas concerts have been performed by more than 40 symphony orchestras. As a comedy writer, he was a prime creative force in CBS television's controversial *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and in 1980 he was the head comedy writer for NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. Mr. Williams has written over a dozen books of prose, poetry, and music including *The Mason Williams Reading Matter*.

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**THEM
POEMS**

BY MASON WILLIAMS

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in *Bicylists Dismount* © 1964 Mason Williams; *Reading Matter* © 1969
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FIRST EDITION

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgments · 7

Introduction · 9

Them Toad Suckers · 13

Them Moose Goosers · 14

Them Beaver Cleavers · 15

Them Lunch Toters · 16

Them Stamp Lickers · 17

Them Tummy Gummers · 18

Them Sticker Gitters · 19

Them Dog Kickers · 20

Them Sand-Pickers · 21

Them Banjo Pickers · 22

Them Duck Pluckers · 23

Them Hors D'oeuvres · 24

Them Hog Liver Likers · 25

Them Whisker Flickers · 26

Them Yodel Yellers · 27

Them Surf Serfs · 28

Them Doodle Dashers · 29

Dooitchyseff Them Poem · 30

Dedicated to *them* Ruschas:
Ed, Paul, and Mrs.

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Printings

Some of these poems appeared in print for the first time in *Bicyclists Dismount* (limited edition), 1964, published by the author. They also appeared in *The Mason Williams Reading Matter*, published by Doubleday & Company in 1969 and in *Flavors*, 1970, published by Doubleday & Company. Some of them also appeared in a handmade, miniature, limited-edition book in 1991 by Pat Baldwin of Pequeño Press.

Recordings

Mason Williams recorded the poems on the Vee-Jay record label in 1964 on the album (VJ-1103) *Them poems and things: Mason Williams recorded live at the Land of Odin* (a folk club in El Cajon, California). "Lunch Toters," "Stamp Lickers," and "Hors d'oeuvres" were recorded by The Kingston Trio on their 1964 *Back in Town* album (Capitol T2081) which was recorded live at the Hungry i in San Francisco. They recorded three more, "Sandpickers," "Dogkickers," and "Tummy Gummies," on their Decca album *Nick Bob John* (DL 4613). About the same time, "Sandpickers," "Lunch Toters," and "Sticker Gitters" were also recorded by country artists Richard Lockmiller and Jim Conners on their Capitol Records LP *Two Boys from Alabama* (T2287).

Performances

Mason has performed *them poems* in his musical performances over the years. He also performed "Them Toad Suckers" on national television. It aired on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, 12 January 1969. Glen Campbell and Teddy Neeley performed "Lunch Toters," "Sticker Gitters," and "Tummy Gummies" on *The Summer Brothers Smothers Show*. It aired June 30, 1968.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my folks and friends from Texas, Oklahoma and Oregon whose working man's take on talkin' is so rich and funny. What a great way to git the job done!

Thanks to Eddie, Paul and Mrs. Ruscha for a lifetime of experiences and a shared, unique sense of humor. For being great friends to hang out with back in Oklahoma City. You were like an extra family, making growing up in Oklahoma a double dip of good times. Thanks to "Edger" and "Parl" for transitioning out to LA and still being great friends to play to ever since.

Thanks to everybody out there who got a laugh or two out of these poems and passed them on. You created a widening circle of friends for me that is still growing, and especially thanks to everybody who decided to write a *them poem* or two for themselves & they friends. Thanks to Time for letting a lot of itself go by, between then & now; helping me to realize, in putting on my retrospecks, that it's what you guys wanted, so I just gave it to you. Whatever happens we can always blame each other.

Thanks to Warren Nelson, Mr. Big Top Chautauqua, who put the bug in Ken Frazier's ear to have the Parallel Press dust off these relics from another time and have them flash across the cosmos once again, and thanks to Tracy Honn for having a great bedside manner as the production editor in helping to put the book to bed.

INTRODUCTION

Writing Them

I wrote a lot of poetry in my youth, especially in college and also while I was in the Navy. I was stationed at the Amphibious Forces base in Coronado (San Diego), California. Since I lived only a couple of blocks from the ocean, it became a major source of inspiration. I would go down to the beach every evening after dinner in search of seashells, driftwood, or whatever else one might find. I always came back with at least some seashells and usually an idea for a poem or two as well. I once came across a barstool (upside down) with a dead harbor seal right next to it. I wrote a poem about what a wild party it must have been.

For a while I endeavored to inscribe my beach and ocean poems (with India ink) on the insides of seashells and, the next evening, take them back to the beach and throw them into the sea. I always hoped I would find one of these shells washed ashore again, but I never did. I often wondered if anyone ever found one.

My first *them poem* was written as part of this routine. On weekends I'd usually go down to the beach during the day. It was December 15, 1962, a Saturday. There was a buzz in the air that seemed to be affecting everyone. People were doing all those beach-y things they do on a beautiful, sunny California winter's day. In particular, lots of people (especially little kids) were digging furiously in the sand. The high-energy level of everyone pickin' away with shovels and sticks was infectious. It felt like being a part of a communal treasure hunt! So I sat on a rock and wrote, "Them Sand Pickers." I wrote "Them Banjo Pickers" the next day.

I didn't realize right away that I was working out a poetic form that could be used to explore other subjects. It was my friends Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode—L.A.-based artists and buddies from my high school days in Oklahoma City—who inspired

me by saying that they thought they were funny. I ended up writing approximately two dozen of them over a two-year period.

Performing Them

In the early '60s, before and after my stint in the Navy, I was a folksinger playing the Western folk club circuit. At a gig in Denver at a folk music club in the fall of 1963, I was billed with folksinger Martin Yarbrough. On our day off, he and his bass player, Turbo Attenborough, and I went for a ride up into the Colorado Mountains. Somewhere along the way I cracked them up by reciting a couple of *them poems*. They suggested I try them out on the audience the next night at the club. It was a big hit, so I started to do them as part of my act.

Later on I moved to L.A. to room with Ed Ruscha where I continued to make my living as a folksinger. I started writing more songs and playing clubs like the Ice House and the Troubadour on a regular basis. By then I even had a music publisher, Dave Hubert, who was very good at getting demos recorded and getting them out to people. He sent my *them poems* to The Kingston Trio. They ended up recording six of them and performing the poems at the club and concert dates. This was my foot-in-the-door commercially and, since they were comedic in nature, led me deeper into the realm of writing comedy material.

My ultimate performance of the poems came in June 1964 with my opportunity to record them on the Vee-Jay record label. I remember the producer, Steve Clark, a fun-loving Southerner, really got a big kick out of them. We invited a group of my friends to a recording studio in Hollywood, plied them with food and liquor, and did a live show in the studio that became the basis of the album. When I listen to it, I love to pick out the voices of my friends yelling and heckling me throughout the album.

Them Since Then

I guess the ultimate compliment is that a lot of folks think that *them poems* weren't written by anybody, that they are part of that great body of work that "anonymous" wrote. It's also a nice compliment to have created a poetic form that others seem to enjoy exploring, and one that makes them feel free to get silly and to have fun with the language.

Kids in school have gotten a lot of mileage out of them. Being fairly reliable for getting laughs, *them poems* are perfect when the assignment is to memorize and recite a poem for class. Kids, of course, love to push the envelope and *them poems* break over the borderline into what a literary critic might call *transgressive* subject matter—sex, violence, and socially unacceptable behavior. Over the years I've had many people send me copies of *them poems* that they have written. Teachers have regularly sent me *them poems* written by students in their classes. I've always tried to avoid the obvious subjects like "Them Nose Pickers," but boy, let me tell you, they didn't!

—Mason Williams



Them Toad Suckers

How about Them Toad Suckers,
Ain't they clods?
Sittin' there suckin'
Them green toady-frogs.

Suckin' them hop-toads,
Suckin' them chunkers,
Suckin' them leapy-types,
Suckin' them plunkers.

Look at Them Toad Suckers,
Ain't they snappy?
Suckin' them bog-frogs,
Sure makes 'em happy.

Them huggermugger Toad Suckers,
Way down south
Stickin' them sucky toads,
In they mouth.

How to be a Toad Sucker?
No way to duck it.
Gittchyseff a toad,
Rare back and suck it!



Them Moose Goosers

How about Them Moose Goosers,
Ain't they recluse?
Up in them boondocks,
Goosin' Them Moose.

Goosin' them huge moose,
Goosin' them tiny,
Goosin' them meadow-moose,
In they hiney.

Look at Them Moose Goosers,
Ain't they dumb?
Some use an umbrella,
Some use a thumb.

Them obtuse Moose Goosers,
Sneakin' through the woods,
Pokin' them snoozy moose,
In they goods.

How to be a Moose Gooser?
It'll turn ye puce.
Gitchy gooser loose and
Rouse a drowsy moose!



Them Beaver Cleavers

How about Them Beaver Cleavers,
Ain't they rank?
Cleavin' them beavers,
Down on the bank.

Cleavin' they heads in,
Cleavin' they spine,
Clompin' them beavers,
Ever one they find.

Look at Them Beaver Cleavers,
Ain't they a shock?
Some use a ball peen,
Some use a rock.

Them ever clever Beaver Cleavers,
Hidin' in the leaves,
Beaver comes by,
Gitsa few cleaves.

How to be a Beaver Cleaver?
Ain't much to it.
Jist coldcock a beaver,
Reckon that'll do it!



Them Lunch Toters

How about Them Lunch Toters,
Ain't they a bunch?
Goin' off to work,
A-totin' they lunch.

Totin' them vittles,
Totin' that chow,
Eatin' it later,
Totin' it now.

Look at Them Lunch Toters,
Ain't they funny?
Some use a paper sack,
Some use a gunny.

Them food-frugal Lunch Toters,
Ain't they wise?
Totin' they lunch,
Made by they wives.

How to be a Lunch Toter?
Iffa may emote it.
Gitchy wife to fixit,
Go to work and tote it!



Them Stamp Lickers

How about Them Stamp Lickers,
Ain't they champs?
Drool, slurp, slobber,
Lickin' them stamps.

Lickin' them Greenstamps,
Lickin' them Blue,
Lickin' that paper,
Eatin' that glue.

Look at Them Stamp Lickers,
Ain't they gung ho?
Lickin' them thrift stamps,
With they tongue-o.

Them lollygoggle Stamp Lickers,
Ain't they a rage?
Stickin' them licky-stamps,
On that page.

How to be a Stamp Licker?
Don't need a ticket.
Get a stamp or two,
Juice up and lick it!



Them Tummy Gummers

How about Them Tummy Gummers,
Ain't they dummies?
Havin' they fun,
Gummin' them tummies.

Gummin' them paunches,
Outta they mind,
Runnin' 'round shoutin',
"It's Tummy Gummin' time!"

Look at Them Tummy Gummers,
Lurkin' in the yard,
Waitin' for a jelly-belly,
Catch it off guard.

Them hawn-yawkin' Tummy Gummers,
Ain't they dumbox?
Runnin' through the neighborhood
Gummin' them stomachs.

How to be a Tummy Gummer?
No way to shun it.
Grab an abdomen,
Roar off and gum it!

 *Them Sticker Gitters*

How about Them Sticker Gitters,
Ain't they neat?
Gittin' them stickers,
In they feet.

Gittin' them goatheads,
Gittin' them briars,
Pickin' 'em out with,
Sticker pickin' pliar.

Look at Them Sticker Gitters,
Can't they cuss?
Soons get a sticker,
Raise a mighty huge fuss.

Them tender-footed Sticker Gitters,
How they squeal.
Stickers in they toes,
Stickers in they heel.

How to be a Sticker Gitter?
Don't need a ticket.
Stick a foot'n the weeds,
N'let the stickers git it!



Them Dog Kickers

How about Them Dog Kickers,
Ain't they crumbs?
Kickin' them doggies,
In they buns.

Kickin' them Afghans,
Kickin' them mutts,
Kickin' them puppy dogs,
Poor little butts.

Look at Them Dog Kickers,
Ain't they cute?
Some use a shower-shoe,
Some use a boot.

Them dadgum Dog Kickers,
Ain't they mean?
Run 'round kickin',
Ever dog what's seen.

How to be a Dog Kicker?
Don't need a ticket.
Find an old dog,
Haul off and kick it!



Them Sand Pickers

How about Them Sand Pickers,
Ain't they grand?
Sittin' on their haunches,
Pickin' in the sand.

Pickin' in the wet sand,
Pickin' in the dry.
Pickin' it fiercely,
Look at it fly!

Look at Them Sand Pickers,
Ain't they slick?
Some use they fingers,
Some use a stick.

Them seashore Sand Pickers,
Ain't they fine?
Sittin' in the sand,
Pickin' up time.

How to be a Sand Picker?
Don't need a ticket.
Find a bunch of sand,
Skootch down and pick it!



Them Banjo Pickers

Them Banjo Pickers,
Mighty funny ways,
Same damn song,
Three or four days.

Them Banjo Pickers,
All they know,
“Cumberland Gap,”
Do - si - do.

Them Banjo Pickers,
Talkin’ ‘bout strings,
Banjo pegs,
Other such things.

Them Banjo Pickers,
Poker face mugs,
Never do smile,
Just play Scruggs.

Them Banjo Pickers,
Never get sick,
Pickin’ them banjos,
Pick, pick, pick.



Them Duck Pluckers

How about Them Duck Pluckers,
Ain't they schmucks?
Pluckin' them feathers,
Offa them ducks.

Pluckin' them mallards,
Pluckin' them coots,
Pluckin' they duck-hairs,
Out by the roots.

Look at Them Duck Pluckers,
Ain't they thieves?
Some use tweezers,
Some use teefs.

Them feather filchin' Duck Pluckers,
Hidin' in the sticks,
Buggin' them plucky-ducks,
Gettin' they kicks.

How to be a Duck Plucker?
No wayda duck it.
Rustle up a duck,
Shoo-boy! Jist pluck it!



Them Hors d'oeuvres

How about Them Hors d'oeuvres,
Ain't they sweet?
Little piece a cheese,
Little piece a meat.



Them Hog Liver Likers

How about Them Hog Liver Likers,
Ain't they funny guys?
Eatin' hog liver soup,
Eatin' hog liver pies.

Eatin' them cooked,
Eatin' them raw,
Eatin' them hog livers,
Suits they craw.

Look at Them Hog Liver Likers,
Ain't that a disgrace?
Hog liver juice,
All over they face.

Them pig lickin', high-falootin', big
hunka
french fried Hog Liver Likers,
Ain't they a sight?
Serve 'em up a hog liver,
S'gonna get liked.

How to be a Hog Liver Liker?
Don't try to psyche it.
Eatchyseff a hog liver,
See if you like it!



Them Whisker Flickers

How about Them Whisker Flickers,
Ain't they weird?
Sittin' there thinkin',
And a-flickin' they beard.

Flickin' they goatee,
Flickin' they muff,
Flickin' it gently,
Flickin' it rough.

Look at Them Whisker Flickers,
Ain't they a twist?
Some use they finger,
Some use they fist.

Them itchy-faced Whisker Flickers,
Don't cause no trouble,
Sittin' there pensively,
Flickin' they stubble.

How to be a Whisker Flicker?
Don't need a ticket.
Gitchy face fuzzy,
Sit, think, and flick it!



Them Yodel Yellers

How about Them Yodel Yellers,
Can't they pierce?
Up in them mountains,
Hollerin' so fierce.

Shoutin' them "Hoo - Ha's,"
Screamin' them "Yea's,"
Singin' them yodel,
Leedle - lay - tee - ay's.

Look at Them Yodel Yellers,
Ain't they vogue?
Hittin' them high notes,
Yellin' that yode.

Them golden-throated Yodel Yellers,
Ain't they loud?
Rollin' they yodelin',
Up in them clouds.

How to be a Yodel Yeller?
Here's the sum and total.
Get upon a mountain,
Beller out a yodel!



Them Surf Serfs

How about Them Surf Serfs,
Ain't they dillies?
Bobbin' on the water,
Like frogs on lilies.

Ridin' them waves,
Racin' them winds,
Wipin' they outs,
Hangin' they tens.

Look at Them Surf Serfs,
Ain't they fair?
Sunburnt bodies,
Bright yellor hair.

Them sun-touched Surf Serfs,
Outta they gourd.
Down on the coastline,
Floatin' on a board.

How to be a Surf Serf?
If you think it's worth it.
Select a swirly surf,
Board a board and surf it!



Them Doodle Dashers

How about Them Doodle Dashers,
Ain't they jewels?
Jumpin' outta bushes,
Wavin' they tools.

Jumpin' outta palm trees,
Jumpin' outta shrubs,
Leapin' outta flowerbeds,
Wavin' they nubs.

Look at Them Doodle Dashers,
Ain't they queer?
Flaggin' they tallywacker,
Then disappear.

Them ever lovin' Doodle Dashers,
Ain't they pearls?
Wavin' they doodle-nobs,
At them girls.

How to be a doodle dasher?
Don't need a ticket.
Gitchy dandy doodle handy,
Jump from a thicket!



Dooitchyseff Them Poem

How about Them _____,
Ain't they _____?

_____ them _____,
_____ them _____.

_____ them _____,

_____ them _____,

_____ them _____,

_____ they _____.

Look at Them _____,

Ain't they _____?

_____ use a _____,

_____ use a _____.

Them _____,

Ain't they _____?

_____ them _____,

_____ they _____.

How to be a _____?

_____,

_____ chyseff a _____,

_____.



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